

GLOBAL NEWS



New York: I say old chap, would you mind moving...!

You let an empty cab out of a side street, he thanks you and immediately picks up a fare leaving you uttering a few unmentionable curses! Perhaps he has done what we all do – a sudden u-turn, but without the customary care and knowledge of road traffic behaviour that we usually show and almost takes off the front wing of your cab?

We all know the words that we'd like to use in cases like that, but if we follow a recent New York lead then cabbies swearing at each other will not only be a thing of the past, but also against the law! In October of last year, a confrontation occurred in Manhattan between two cabbies – neither of whom had a passenger at the time. One driver, Malik Rizwan, honked his horn at fellow cabbie Zbigniew Sobczak after he pulled in front of him, prompting Mr Sobczak to jump out of his cab and repeatedly swear at Rizwan – who then called the police and accused Zbigniew of assault.

A city administrative law judge found Sobczak guilty of verbal harassment rather than assault and recommended a \$350 fine. However, Taxi and Limousine Commission Chairman, Matthew Daus in a ruling, increased the penalty to \$1,000 and a 30-day suspension. A 1982 legal decision was brought into the equation when in the case of the TLC vs. Baudin, it found that ... a driver's use of profanity during a fight with a pedestrian was not misconduct given cognisance to the realities of life in New York City.

But Matthew Daus, in a letter to Sobczak, said: "To the extent that decisions issued before my tenure (such as TLC vs. Baudin) may be read to overrule the penalty of license revocation for verbal harassment or abuse, I would override those decisions." In a radio interview following the decision, Mr Daus said: "The city has changed over the years, it has become more civil. The days when drivers can curse at each other are over in my opinion."

Cynthia Fischer, who represented Zbigniew Sobczak, said afterwards that the TLC decision was unduly harsh. She said the Commission was in reality asking cabbies to be inhuman and not react to things anyone would normally react to.

PLAYING THE RADIO IN FINLAND? DO YOU PAY ROYALTIES?

In a move that is closer to London than many realise, Finland's Supreme Court has ruled that taxi drivers must pay royalty fees if they play music in their cabs while a paying customer is in the back seat – and that applies to radio, tape or CD etc. The case was based on one driver's refusal to pay and is likely to set a precedent for the 10,000 cab drivers in the Nordic country.

Under the ruling, Finland's cabbies must now pay 22 euros annually for playing music while transporting a fare in the cab. "The sum is fairly small, but added to fuel increases, higher expenses result in higher prices for customers," a representative of the Finnish Taxi Association - the country's main taxi driver union – told us.

The issue of royalties arose when a cabby refused to pay a bill from the Finnish Copyright Society, Teosto, in 1997 and 1998. Teosto, which administers and redirects royalty payments to artists, argued that playing music for customers in a taxi is similar to playing music in a public setting, such as a restaurant or pub. "Almost all taxis play music, so we are now expecting to collect as many payments as there are taxis," said their spokesman. "Some drivers may decide to stop playing music altogether because of this and of course they are free to do so."

The Helsinki Taxi Driver's Association, told Global News that the ruling would probably force most drivers to keep their radios switched off when they had a passenger in the cab. Teosto said it would meet with the taxi union to work out how to enforce the ruling and collect the royalties. London's taxi drivers might smile, but the actors and entertainers union Equity would like a similar ruling for London.

One Ilford hairdressing salon was recently "visited" by an Equity official and told that if they continued to play music while clients were having their locks shorn, they could be liable for royalties. They switched off Capital Gold and replaced it with LBC. So the question is how long before a cab driving Capital Gold "swinger" is paid a similar visit...?

LOOKING AFTER BILLY!

A policeman stopped a minibus 'taxi' from South Africa's Transkei region recently when he noticed the door not closed properly and a goat's head was sticking out! He was stunned to find that the 10-seater vehicle was carrying 17 adults, six children, much baggage and a rather uncomfortable Billy the goat!

The Senior Transkei Provincial Traffic Inspector told Global News that a passenger was sitting on top of the luggage holding the goat, which had to have its head sticking out of the door to avoid breaking its neck!

The taxi was impounded and taken to a local testing station where it was found to be unroadworthy. No response was given to Global News' question as to whether the driver had added any 'extras' to the meter...

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