

TAXI
GLOBE



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Taxi Globe does not believe in the scare mongering doom and gloom that some trade newspapers have become famed for. Our editorial team tell it like it is and then allow drivers to make up their own minds, after all you are the ones out there. Taxi drivers are all small business owners and their overheads are escalating thanks to fuel costs. So far the protests to the government about the high cost of fuel have fallen on deaf ears. In the case of the present economic trends, all businesses are looking for ways to cut their costs. Some are giving more of their staff a chance to work from home whilst others are finding their expenses are being reduced. This obviously impacts on the taxi trade the more people that work from home the fewer riders in cabs. Thanks to the high value of the Euro tourists are still coming to London but not in the same numbers. When was the last time you picked an American tourist? Good old "retail therapy" is often the answer when times are depressing but with this credit crunch shoppers are not spending so much, so less bums on seats. Sir Philip Green is the boss of the Arcadia Group, which includes TopShop and TopMan, as well as BHS. He has warned that he thinks the worst of the credit crunch has yet to hit the high street. He said the "very tough" market conditions could worsen, as consumers face the fallout from the credit crunch.

MAYOR'S PLANS TO TACKLE TAXI TOUTS

Boris Johnson is asking Transport for London and the Metropolitan Police to press ahead with plans to crack down on illegal touts. On 12th June the Mayor went out on the streets of central London in a licensed taxi, together with Grant Davis, Chairman of the London Cab Drivers' Club, and Yvonne Trayner, Chief Executive of the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre in Croydon. They toured central London so the Mayor could see examples of illegal minicabs touting for business for himself.

The Mayor said: "There are taxi touts on the streets of the capital every night. They circle the hot spots of London to hunt their prey - innocent Londoners enjoying a good night out who may not be aware that these vehicles are not properly insured and pose a real danger to anyone tempted to use them. I was saddened to see these touts brazenly flouting



Operation Blur in the City last year tackling touting and illegal minicabs

their wares and I have asked my team to press ahead with our plans to tackle these tyrants.

"I am determined to ensure that every man and woman in this city can feel safe when they travel around London. From the moment they leave their home to the moment they return they should be able to travel in confidence. Removing touts from our streets will be another step in the right direction."

Plans to crack down on illegal cabs include:

- * Doubling the number of dedicated cab enforcement officers from 34 to 68
- * More high profile operations aimed at preventing touting.
- * A 'one strike' rule that would mean any licensed driver convicted of touting would immediately have their licence revoked.

The Mayor added: "If there is one message I want to get out there it is that women must never travel in an illegal minicab as there is always a better option. It is important that women pre-book their cabs from licensed firms and Transport for London has a marvellous text service called Cabwise. Just by texting HOME to 60835 you will receive the numbers for local 24 hour licensed operators - one taxi and two minicab firms. It is a number everybody should save onto their phone."

FACING THE CREDIT CRUNCH

by Sandie Goodwin and Bob Fisher

As the credit crunch begins to take a firm hold, taxi drivers across the country are not only facing the difficulties the crunch is causing but also that of soaring fuel costs. These costs seem to be increasing on a daily basis and some are predicting we could see fuel at £2 per litre by the end of this year. In London some drivers who would normally be cruising around looking for their next fare are joining the ever-lengthening ranks to help conserve the fuel usage and cut their fuel bill. The ranks are getting longer and longer as drivers give up looking for the next job once the morning and evening rushes are over.

During these difficult economic times, businesses have to consider the best ways to keep in profit. For taxi drivers, there are some variables, which they can look at. Most drivers know which filling stations they use regularly have the best price for diesel. Keeping their taxis in good mechanical order will also help save fuel; other measures include driving in an eco friendly manner. Drivers can also choose which hours they work with more drivers working longer hours. As the trade comes to the end of the period for becoming Euro III compliant, only a few taxis remain which have not been fitted with the emissions equipment. Some drivers opted to buy a pre-owned TXII in order to meet the Mayor's Emissions Strategy. Some purchased a TX4 in order to become compliant with the regulations and from the launch date the TX4 showed strong sales. These have naturally slowed down now, partly because of the emissions strategy and also partly because drivers are looking to keep their costs down. The credit crunch also means it is more difficult to get finance for some drivers. LTI Vehicles, like many other businesses, has to look at their costs during this period. Any business of a similar size with a good strong management team will be keeping a close eye on the economic position of their business during the crunch. Some have announced cutting staff and other measures to ensure that they stay in business. At the LTI Vehicles factory in Coventry, the MD, Peter Shillcock, has already begun a consultation with the employees to see where savings can be met. This is part of the long-term strategy of LTI Vehicles to ensure that taxis are built at the Coventry factory. Once everyone's views have been taken into account, the management at LTI Vehicles will be well placed to decide how to progress with the business until the economic situation in the UK, as well as elsewhere in the world, begins to improve again. Mr Shillcock has already reassured everyone involved that the company intends to keep on building the iconic taxi in Coventry and any measures taken as a result of the consultation with everyone involved will help to ensure this happens.

It may be an urban myth that you can tell the state of the economy by the number of orange lights looking for passengers on the streets of London but taxi drivers have faced hard times before and come through. These times may be painful but having studied the KoL, taxi drivers have proved their grit and determination. This credit crunch will come to an end. In the meantime as self employed small business owners, London's taxi drivers still have the freedom to decide when and where they want to work in order to make the money they need.