

GARY COSTEN RECEIVES HITCH AWARD

The Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers give The Hitch Award for Bravery to a taxi driver who has helped foil a crime or assisted someone in danger and consequently put their life at risk. This Award is rarely given and considered to be the most important Award the Company can give. The latest recipient is Gary Costen, a taxi driver from Radlett, Hertfordshire.

On 7th November 2007, Gary was driving his taxi along Clareville Grove SW7; it was around 7:20 in the evening. Due to the time of year the street was dark, with only moderate street lighting, but Gary noticed a lone woman walking in the opposite direction. Two men walking a short distance behind the young woman then caught his attention. As he passed the men, he noticed one of them suddenly start to run towards the woman, and in his rear-view mirror he saw the man take the woman in a headlock, while the other was at her side.

Gary immediately reversed his taxi towards the incident. At this point the two men heard his vehicle, and leaving the woman on the ground ran off in different directions; one running across the path of Gary Costen. This man then jumped into a car, already containing a third accomplice, and made off. Gary attempted to block the path of their car with his taxi, but they reversed off at speed; whereby Gary gave chase. Using his mobile phone Gary called the Police & kept them informed as to the car's location.

Due to his unselfish action, and with no thought for his own safety, the police were able to apprehend the men and bring them to justice. Later, in Court, the Judge commended

Gary Costen for his actions. It was with great pleasure and admiration that Alan Parker, Past Master of The Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers was able to present the Award to Gary. As he accepted the Award Gary told Alan how delighted he was to have received the Award.



MISSING LOST PROPERTY

In January 2008 a taxi driver who is on Dial-a-Cab found £345 in the back of his taxi. The driver concerned took the money to the West End Central Police Station. However, some weeks later when the driver made enquiries as to what had happened to the money and had it been claimed, the money had gone missing. The matter was reported and has been investigated by the Directorate of Professional Standards for the Met Police.

The driver has now received a letter telling him that they had encountered "many difficulties owing to the time which had elapsed since the property was last seen. This caused problems, the CCTV had been deleted and items which I would have expected to locate, I was unable to, as they had been removed. Such as the original Book 49 entry which recorded the fact that you had handed the property in."

An officer was interviewed who was on duty on the evening of the 10th January 2008, when the taxi driver had handed the money in. He explained that when he had come to check on the presence of the property, it was missing. The officer said he had conducted numerous checks to try and locate the money but was unable to. The Directorate said: "Without anything more I was unable to prove a case against him criminally. However, there were some aspects which were concerning in regards to his duties in the station office, which has lead to disciplinary action being taken. There does however, remain the small possibility that the money is misplaced and is not something which I have discounted.

"The situation which has occurred is completely unacceptable and one which causes embarrassment to the organisation. I am hopeful that the

steps we have undertaken provide you with some degree of assurance that this was a matter which we have taken very seriously, and have left no stone unturned to either recover the money or identify a person responsible."

The taxi driver concerned is far from happy with the outcome. He has written back to the Directorate. He said: "The fact is that I handed this money into their safekeeping, according to procedure, for onward transmission to the Lost Property Office. The fact that this has not been done has meant that had the owner approached the Lost Property Office he would have left empty handed and questioning the honesty of London taxi drivers. Not having received a reward by the last day of April I assumed that the wallet had not been claimed by the owner and had become legally mine.

"Although your investigations have not revealed whether this money has disappeared through human error, negligence or deception (which appears most likely as all the relevant records have also conveniently disappeared) the Metropolitan Police cannot just wipe their hands of the matter by claiming their records have gone missing. The fact remains that I hold a receipt for £345 and it is their responsibility to make good my loss for failing to strictly adhere to the procedure laid down.

"Had I not handed this money into a Metropolitan Police Station it would have been stealing, but how can I and my fellow taxi drivers be confident that this will not happen the next time that money is handed in to go to Lost Property and what incentive is there to be honest?" The driver asks: "Is it possible to ask the trade is this a one off, or does it happen that other property handed in never gets to Baker Street?"