

ED THOMPSON TALKS TO TAXI GLOBE

Fires, touts, pedicabs were all on the agenda when our reporter interviewed Taxi and Private Hire Director for the PCO Ed Thompson recently. He was the person along with Mary Dowdye whose signatures appeared on the PCO Notices regarding the TX4 fires. The Public Carriage Office made the decision to take the affected TX4s off the road as a matter of public safety, but the decision was not one arrived at lightly. There has been criticism from some taxi owners and drivers about the way in which the suspension was carried out particularly as they have been hit in the pocket. Some of those who were able to find cabs to rent temporarily until the work had been carried out on their TX4 found replacement rentals were expensive.

DRASTIC MEASURES

In a recent interview, our reporter asked Ed about the events which led to the decision. He said: “It was a difficult decision to suspend the licenses licences on these vehicles in the affected VIN range. Both the PCO and LTI Vehicles had independent companies working to find the root cause of the fires, with the PCO using Hawkins, a well respected company of forensic scientists. LTI worked hard on this too, and employed independent fire investigators, the leading engineering company Ricardo and VM Motori, the manufacturer of the TX4 engine to assist them in the examination into the cause of the under bonnet fires. The PCO have received the assurances they needed from LTI are re-assured that the recalls and associated current remedial works will enable the taxis to meet the required standards and get back to work. Now in place is the correct one. There have been no more fires since the affected cabs have been suspended. We took hundreds of calls from drivers and owners affected by this, and the vast majority were very sensible about it – if you remember about four London cabs had caught fire in the previous couple of weeks. At the PCO, we’re very glad that they are now getting back to work.” Work is continuing at M&O London to get the rest of the remedial work completed as soon as possible.

MID YEAR INSPECTIONS

Another question which was put to Ed was one relating to the mid year inspection. It has been widely reported that the Mayor Boris Johnson is determined to get the mid year inspection requirement taken away and a Consultation is due to be finalised shortly. The Mayor and the PCO would like to see increased harmonisation between taxi and private hire licensing, but there may have to be ‘horses for courses’ in the sense that some methods might suit one trade and not the other. Both trades have made their representations to the Consultation. Ed said: “Many owners keep their vehicles in good condition but many also don’t. More on-street inspections could give us a clearer picture of vehicle condition and encourage owners toward more regular maintenance. The Mayor has made his position clear and now we will see the replies to the Consultation document will help us formulate the new before finalising arrangements.”

PEDICAB CONCERNS

A major concern to the taxi trade is the number of pedicabs in London. Ed explained his point of view. “The PCO is sympathetic to the problems these pedicabs can cause taxi drivers, particularly late at night. But, at the current time, TfL and the PCO have no control over the pedicabs because they are not our licensees. A licensing scheme was outlined more than a year ago, but until the court judgement which we are waiting for is made, there is nothing that the PCO can do.” Whilst this may not be the answer that taxi drivers would like, the outcome of the pending court case is now holding matters up.



ONE STRIKE (FOR TOUTING) AND YOU'RE OUT

Finally Ed was asked about the problem of touting. He told us: “Since the ‘one strike and you’re out’ policy was introduced, a dozen private hire drivers have had their licenses licences revoked. This is good news – but we need to continue to work on this area. Clipboard operators working in the West End late at night are another concern; investigations are being made to determine whether they are breaching regulations. The PCO will continue to work to stop licensed drivers touting. In parallel, TfL’s Community Safety, Enforcement and Policing (CSEP) team will work with the TfL funded Transport Operational Command Unit (TOCU) within the Metropolitan Police to curb the activities of unlicensed touts.”

MAGICAL TAXI TOUR

As this interview with Ed Thompson took place, the ‘yard’ downstairs was full of taxis getting ready for the 15th annual Magical Taxi Tour. Ed went down into the ‘yard’ to see the drivers. Taxis had been coming and going all morning, bringing back memories of when the inspections were carried out there. This year the PCO had offered their facilities to the Magical Taxi Tour to check over the cabs going on the outing as well as having logos and signage applied. Ed, pictured with Richie Old, taxi driver and Committee member of the Disney Organising Committee, said: “We are delighted to support this great event which will hopefully bring a lot of joy to over 200 ill children. We have sponsored two taxis with PCO staff driving the children, their families and carers all the way to Paris. For some of these children it will have been their first time in a cab and their first time to go abroad.”

