

KEEPING THE WHEELS OF LONDON TURNING

By Asher Moses, Chief Executive, Taxi Media

Regular readers will remember that Taxi Promotions UK recently acquired Clear Channel Outdoor UK's taxi advertising arm Taxi Media. The deal sees Taxi Promotions take over Taxi Media's fleet, creating a combined fleet of 4800 vehicles. The new entity is the UK's largest taxi advertising firm, with a turnover of £10million.

When I took over Taxi Media a few weeks ago, I was presented with a framed print of taxis through the years, from a 1950's Austin FX3 right up to the latest TX. I think it's beautiful, but I would because taxis have been, and always will be, my life. So imagine how proud I am that, for the first time, a former taxi driver has taken his place at the top table of the taxi media world. I understand drivers, fleet owners, distributors and advertisers, I've done the knowledge, run a fleet, sold the space and fitted the liveries. I even strip taxis for fun!

Looking at my framed print though, I realise how much the industry has changed over the years. It's just as well of course, as so many of us rely on a



strong taxi industry for our livelihood. Driving a taxi in London has never been easy. Yes, you're your own boss and decide when you work, but whilst unsociable hours can pay well, they do nothing for your private life. I remember looking for a fare, spotting the suitcase and thinking "Result, fare to the airport". I also remember thinking what a good week I'd had, only to get a puncture and have to lay out for a new tyre. There's always something.

Now we have an economic downturn. Normally I'd only be interested in London, but the global

recession means there are less tourists, less airport rides, less fares. It's hit us all and taxi drivers are suffering just like everyone else. But things will change. They always do, and the taxi industry must lead by example to make London great once again. After all, we have a great opportunity just over the horizon with the 2012 Olympics, but there is much work to be done before then. Life's a bit more complicated for me now I'm in the hot seat at the UK's leading taxi advertising operator. I recognise that part of my role is a responsibility to the wider taxi industry to keep up the pace of change. Taxis, taxi drivers and taxi advertising must remain strong through these tough times, and will flourish even more in the future. For that to happen, we need to keep making changes. You must trust me to work with the best interests of the industry at heart. Upgrading our fleets, exploring new technologies and developing new ad formats is part of my duty to keep our beloved industry moving, to keep the taxi wheels turning.

KENSINGTON *by Chris Docherty*

The history of Kensington is dominated by its royal connections, starting in 1688 when William of Orange became joint monarch of England, Scotland and Ireland with his wife Mary. William suffered from asthma and he and his wife disliked the damp and cold of Whitehall Palace. They acquired Nottingham House in Kensington, a Jacobean villa, and employed the best architect of the day, Sir Christopher Wren, to turn it into a palace. Mary took on the task of project manager and often turned up "to hasten the workmen". More haste, less speed, however, when a wall fell down and killed at least one of the men working there. Even so, the palace was ready to move into for Christmas 1689. Nobles and aristocrats of the court followed the King and Queen to Kensington and it soon became a fashionable area. Later monarchs used the Palace as their London home, the last being George II and his Queen, Caroline of Ansbach. She was a popular woman and almost certainly the power behind the throne, as a contemporary rhyme put it:

You may strut, Dapper George
But t'will be in vain,

We all know tis Caroline, not you, that reign.

Princess Victoria was born in the Palace in May 1819 and lived there, sharing a bedroom with her mother, the Duchess of York, until one month after her eighteenth birthday when she became Queen and moved to Buckingham Palace. "They think I'm a little girl", she said then, "but I'm going to show them I'm Queen". Victoria's son, Edward VII, gave the Borough of Kensington its Royal title in 1901 in her memory. It is one of only two London boroughs which have Royal in their names. The other one is Royal Kingston-upon-Thames, named Royal because of the seven Saxon kings who were said to have been crowned there.

Kensington Gardens were once the gardens of the Palace and were opened to the public by George II in 1754. The gardens were at first open on Saturdays only, no liveried servants were allowed and gentlemen "had to wear boots with their breeches". Later William IV opened the gardens every day of the week for anyone "respectably dressed". It was Queen Victoria who opened some of the rooms of Kensington Palace to the public, which by then had become "empty, bare, dreary and comfortless", but she got Parliament to pay for the restoration.

This part of Kensington is still one of the most desirable areas in London to live and statistics show that it is just as much a healthy place to live in the 21st Century as it was considered in the 17th by William and Mary. The Office

for National Statistics released data in 2004 showing that life expectancy at birth for females in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is the highest in the whole of the United Kingdom, a statistic borne out by the longevity of Alice, The Duchess of Gloucester, the longest living Royal, who died at Kensington Palace in 2004 at the age of 102.

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PASSENGER RECEIPTS

In PCO Notice 01/08 taxi drivers were asked not to issue receipts that display advertisements that may cause offence to passengers. But Mary Dowdye, Head of Standards & Regulations at the PCO reports that the PCO continues to receive complaints from passengers who have been issued with receipts that cause offence. In particular these complaints are from female passengers who have been given receipts that advertise lap dancing clubs and other similar establishments.

Mary Dowdye said: "When providing drivers with receipt pads the PCO asks promoters to apply the same standards used for approving advertising on taxis and the reverse of printed taxi receipts, which at present do not extend to hand

written receipts. These standards are detailed in Appendix B of the PCO publication 'Guidelines for Advertising on Licensed London Taxis' available at www.tfl.gov.uk/taxi/advertising_guidelines. These standards specifically state that 'advertisements should not be approved if they advertise lap-dancing, gentlemen's clubs, escort agencies, or massage parlours'."

Receipts are recognised as an effective means of advertising – on some occasions the PCO itself has used receipts pads to get their message across. But the PCO are reminding drivers that when they are issuing receipts they should bear in mind that some products or services on these receipts may cause offence to passengers.