

GLOBAL NEWS



Beauty and the Spitter!

Bundaberg is the most southerly access point of Australia's Great Barrier Reef, a part of the world famed for its natural beauty - and also its rum. Sadly it's the second of those that sounds more relevant to this story.

Chris Blackburn hailed a cab in Bundaberg and before reaching his destination, told the driver that he didn't have enough money to pay him - so the cabbie pulled over and asked him to get out of the vehicle. Then, as he got out, he spat into the taxi. This was at around 9am and Blackburn sounded like he'd had a few drinks. The driver reported the incident to the police and Blackburn was traced after the taxi driver gave them the original address. He was then arrested and charged with wilful damage.

Police prosecutor Sergeant Barry Stevens said in court that he had spoken to Blackburn on March 20, but the defendant claimed he could not remember the incident. Defence barrister Simon Burgess said his client had battled drug and alcohol addiction and said that "...the demon drink has got the better of him." It probably would have at 9am...

Hearing that the defendant usually looked after his two children, Magistrate Jennifer Batts added: "I would've thought these were two very good reasons upon your release to be committing yourself to full rehabilitation."

The Magistrate sentenced Blackburn to one month in prison for spitting in the taxi. Hopefully when he comes out, he can concentrate more on the Great Barrier Reef than the rum...

CHEAP TAXIS FOR EPILEPTICS CALLED ABSURD!

Another Australian story fell onto the Global News desk recently, but this one made spitting in a taxi look fairly normal! A New South Wales government scheme offering cheap taxi fares to epileptics has been called absurd by neurologists, because it requires that epileptics suffer a minimum number of epileptic seizures before they qualify for the scheme - a number that according to a neurologist would probably mean they were almost dead.

According to the requirement to get the subsidised fares, sufferers must have seizures that last at least 30 minutes on 100 days a year, or one hour on 40 days. But according to Ernest Somerville, Director of epilepsy services at the Prince of Wales Hospital, the benchmark was ridiculous because the pattern of seizures required for eligibility for the vouchers was "incompatible with survival." He went onto add: "Seizures normally last just a few minutes. Anyone having an hour-long seizure would almost certainly not be needing a taxi!"

Roy Beran is also a neurologist and the author of several books on epilepsy. He also agreed, describing the criteria as "nonsense." He

said: "Anyone having a seizure lasting 30 minutes is in refractory status epilepticus, which has a 20 per cent mortality rate. If they went to hospital, they would be anaesthetised, incubated and rushed into an intensive care unit - never mind a taxi. It might be good politics to say you are offering taxi vouchers, but will anyone be alive long enough to use them?"

The scheme is run by NSW Department of Transport and Infrastructure and allows epileptics with what it calls severe and uncontrolled seizures to pay reduced taxi fares by using vouchers worth up to A\$30 a trip. However, when Global News looked at the department's website, it offered no definition of the criteria and as such, we have to bow to the experience of both Ernest Somerville and Roy Beran.

Perhaps the department could look at London radio circuit Dial-a-Cab's Westminster disabled Chargecard facility to see how a successful system is run?

'BIG BROTHER' WATCHING JAPANESE CABBIES!

Japanese taxi drivers are complaining that a new device fitted to their cab dashboard is akin to 1984's 'Big Brother' to a degree that they consider unacceptable. The onboard device monitors everything from stalling the cab to jerking to sudden stops. It also monitors swerving. It stems from one large insurance company offering taxi companies a service that lets them keep track of every move the driver makes behind the wheel of their cab. They are also offering it to all transport companies and to those who allow their workers to use a company car. The special monitoring device installed in the vehicle records all pertinent information that occurs while the vehicle is on the road. If the device registers possible dangerous driving, the company will send an instructor out to give the driver some pointers on safer driving techniques - for a fee!

The insurance service rates workers' driving abilities, gives instruction and offers suggestions on overall company safety management - supposedly a complete package designed to be the cutting edge in vehicle insurance products in a highly competitive market. The onboard monitoring device also records vehicle speed and acceleration rates for a month. The records are then screened for any potentially dangerous actions such as speeding, sudden braking or wild turns. The device also catches all mobile phone transmissions to see if the driver was on his mobile phone at any time while on duty.

One Japanese driver told Taxi Globe: "It is bad enough at home when my wife watches everything I do, now I have it in the taxi as well. I just hope they haven't yet arrived in my bathroom!" As an afterthought, the driver added: "It would be more interesting to see it installed in the famous London taxis!" Global News doesn't think that is too likely!

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