

PRIVATE HIRE NEWS



**The news magazine of the Licensed Private Hire Car Association
incorporating the London Private Hire Car Association**

Welcome to Edition 45 of Private Hire News.

Since we last published, just before Christmas, a lot has happened both inside and outside our sector. The economy has been turned on its head; a dire period of bad weather brought further bad news with unrest and uncertainty the order of the day - however life in our 24/7 world goes on.

The recession (now officially deemed to be with us and the rest of the world), and its immediate fallout, has landed on those amongst our membership who were unfortunate enough to be trading with some of the now collapsed banks.

Spare a thought for those who are suffering the double whammy of not only losing a big chunk of their corporate customer base but are also taking the further hit of the associated bad debt that will be an inevitable consequence of having done business with those banks.

This recession is clearly not the same as previous ones and the economic dynamics of this one are unique and unprecedented. The big recession in the early eighties affected corporate and cash business equally. Interest rates were in excess of 16% so both the cash consumer and the corporate clients were equally under the cosh.

This time around we have the corporate sector on its knees, particularly within the financial institutions, but we also have the peculiarity of interest rates at unprecedented lows. The pain being felt in the banking and corporate markets is clearly badly affecting account business, in particular in the chauffeur sector.

The cash side of business has not been so affected by the economy, in part due to the low interest rates. In Central London however there has been a demographic shift in vehicle availability.

If you visit the West End, theatres and restaurants remain busy with pubs and other social outlets also doing a brisk trade, however you will see a rare sight at eleven o'clock most evenings - hundreds of available Black Cabs in the West End! There are literally long queues of vehicles plying their trade when not so long ago there were few to be found. This is a direct consequence of the Black Cab Taxi resource moving from its once fertile feeding ground in the City to London's West End. It will be interesting to see how long too many Taxis chasing too few jobs can be sustained and what impact (if any) that will have on Private Hire and our pre-booked industry.

Several members have raised the issue of the 'Government Loan Guarantee Scheme'. We had received calls from some saying that they were being refused having been advised they are 'not in scope' and from others who had loans approved but not completed.

Platinum Member Ruskin Private Hire's Roger Lynch managed to speak on the BBC TV's Question Time program, which has moved their case forward. If any other member is having difficulties with the 'Government Loan Guarantee Scheme' please call the Association. Robin Hulf our Political Advisor is in touch with Government to ensure that member's applications are speedily and appropriately processed.

We have also been very active politically in other areas, with visits to the Department for Transport concerning illegal activity by Event Management and other unlicensed entities carrying out the transportation of passengers for reward.

The subject of touting and illegal activity in all its forms is very high on our agenda and we are delighted to have worked with the Mayor of London Boris Johnson, Transport for London's Commissioner Peter Hendy, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and many others

to stop in its tracks bizarre proposals to issue PCN style tickets for touting.

If this had been introduced as proposed all the hard work getting touting to be taken as a serious crime would have been devalued and we are very grateful to Jack Straw and Government for the sensible intervention that followed our lobbying campaign.

Closely following the arctic weather in London, the political heat was turned up very high in February with a Taxi Blockade Protest organised by the LTDA. The protest was a direct attack at the Public Carriage Office (PCO) and some of its directives, with additional rhetoric about alleged illegal ranks.

The media coverage was substantial and as one of our members became embroiled we felt the need to set the record straight at the time on the radio and in this edition of Private Hire News.

LPHCA members have always opted for a policy of non-protest and seeking dialogue as the right way to air any industry grievances. The Taxi protest was very untimely following the dreadful weather that week and it remains our policy to have dialogue rather than engage in militant action to secure our goals.

This policy of dialogue has led to yet another success - we quietly sought official ratification for access to the Royal Parks in London and a consultation is now out to facilitate official access for Licensed Private Hire.

Please note that the very successful Drive 09 Event has been moved from March to September, a timely decision considering the poor weather and current economic climate, and LPHCA will be fully supporting the re-scheduled event.

We are holding a Platinum Members Update Meeting on 2 April on the R.S. Hispaniola and our AGM is now officially scheduled for Thursday 8th October at the very popular London Marriott Heathrow venue.

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