

Taxi Cads And Their *Charges*

Anyone who thinks taxis to be a luxury is kidding themselves. Anyone who expects the same fare from the same driver for the same route taken a few days before is pulling the wool over their own brain. And anyone who takes a taxi and doesn't feel anxious about the final price, is dead! If you do not fix the price before you set off, then for gawd's sake, demand they put the clock on. And do check they haven't, *by mistake*, set it for the new year's eve tariff! Gits.

Now, my working life takes place at night, like a bat's. But a bat who runs quizzes, performs songs and drinks heavily. When I do eventually arrive home I continue to lucubrate until Morpheus beckons, demanding dreams with menaces. It is partly due to my nocturnal activities and moving further afield from the city centre that has contributed to this, the exposure of the 'taximen', and their grubby little practices, as the hour at which I finish my work often precludes me from making the last bus. I'm very often glad about this because if a fresher isn't vomiting where he sits, then there is always some top notch comedian who spots my ukulele case and says, 'I think your guitar's shrunk mate!' After riveting my sides back together I cosh them on the winkle.

There are some firms, or at least drivers, that do insist on you booking the car right in front of you through the official channel of their *office*. The office in question usually being a soiled, squalid, smoky, acrid little box of shame, where swarthy men lie limp and pie-eyed, playing cards without emotion. The man with the best people skills is generally thrust up front behind the filthy glass panels of demarcation, fag in gob, phone in ear (held in place by an ash covered shoulder). Behind him, his support group of backward seconds, stare blankly through a fug of boredom. Sometimes you don't need to go in. Sometimes the taximan allows you into his mobile ghetto where you call the office from within, quoting his ID number and in some cases, the era when you'd like to arrive home.

Prohibitively expensive they may be, but when you want to leave the stink of the city fast and far behind you, they are very often your only option. There is nothing like the room and silence of a black cab's interior, providing you have a virtual mute for a driver, that is. And do remember that you have hired them, so if you do have the 1998 All England talking competition semi-finalist at the helm, you are well within your rights to say, "I'd rather not talk thank you". Or, as I said once, "I can't do this", whilst shutting their little 'chat flap'. Loquacious torrents of oral effluvia, though, doesn't annoy me half as much as the following: slowing down at green lights. No driver in the World does this, except the taximan. When this occurs I immediately become animated and remonstrate until I'm puce in the mind! I've lost count of the spurious and indeed, specious reasons they give. There is no justification for this what so ever. And if they are charging by the mile and not by time, they're loonies. Answers on a postcard to *Now Then Magazine* as to why, other than to money grab, they do this.

Another activity to which I take issue is when you have more than one stop. Or, in mini cab parlance, a 'drop'. My brother and I very often share a taxi home after our quizzes. The route is virtually identical to the one I would take home anyway, but when I get out, the price very often doesn't reflect this. It is very often upwards of £3 more. Again, when challenged, there is illogical reasoning. If taximen and indeed taxiwomen could remember to drive as if they didn't have a fare in the back, there would be fewer arguments and more people hiring them. It's a complete false economy. And what's that bleedin' 'extras' light illuminated for?! If it's a tip they're after (something I'm more than willing to give), then I wish they'd charge me the correct fare and stop deliberately mishearing me when I say, "Next right, please", only to continue straight on where there is nowhere to turn round until we reach a lay-by on Oberon.

These problems, issues or terrible practices are becoming endemic. Until they become pandemic I will still have to take them. There are still saints out there. Yes, I've met them both. You must understand that this has been written exclusively on my experience on taking taxis in Manchester. I know there are many other stories out there. This one is mine. On the plus side however, compared to taxi drivers in Prague, Rome and Marrakech, you couldn't wish for a more balanced, fair-minded, honourable bunch of lads.