

Cab Gab

by Abe Mittleman

Pointers On Driving a New York Taxicab

In the early morning hours of Oct 4 two young women pedestrians while crossing 14th street at First avenue in Manhattan had their lives ended when they were first struck by a medallion NYC taxicab and thrown into the path of a second NYC medallion taxicab.

We don't know who is at fault for this horrific accident. Nor, do we intend to lay blame on any of the drivers involved. We do know that driving a taxi in NYC safely is an art and a talent that is in itself different than ordinary driving.

Considering the TLC does not offer any training to drivers on the dos and don'ts of how to best be a safe NYC taxi driver, I would like to give some pointers from my years of experience of driving a NYC taxi. This article has been published in this paper before. I think it's time to publish it again. There are always new drivers who have never read this and older drivers who may need to think about these pointers from time to time.

Driving a taxi in New York City is very different from driving another car. When taxi drivers are inexperienced and do not understand the situations encountered on a daily basis, they can be dangerous to themselves, other motorists and pedestrians. Here are some pointers on how to drive a New York City taxicab safely.

Cruising for Fares

Most avenues in Manhattan have five lanes of traffic moving in the same direction. Passengers appear either on the right side of the avenue or on the left side of the avenue. Probably the biggest mistake inexperienced drivers make is to cruise in the three middle lanes. They think that they can go either way when they see a passenger's hail. Unfortunately, when this happens you have to enter and cut off other moving lanes of traffic, thus creating a dangerous situation. Other motorists, unaware of what you are doing, may collide with you. Even if no contact is made, an argument from one of these irate motorists is likely.

The best way to avoid these problems is to pick one side of the avenue or the other. Choose either the extreme right lane or the extreme left lane and cruise very

slowly. You should allow all traffic to pass you as you are cruising. Don't be in a hurry. It doesn't matter how slow you go because passengers are appearing at all intervals. Never worry that another taxi will pass you and find a fare first because another passenger will appear after that cab has passed the space in front of you. Never race other taxis to passengers. If the other taxi gets to the fare first, so be it. Racing for fares is very dangerous to you and everyone else around you, including the passenger waiting in the street. When you find your passenger, you should always do your best to position your taxi out of the traffic flow. This also holds true for when you are dropping off your passengers.

Getting to Your Destination

Okay, now your passenger is in the taxi and he or she gives you the destination. The passenger is going in the opposite direction from which you are facing and in the opposite direction of the side of the avenue on which you have picked them up. NEVER MAKE A KAMIKAZE TURN!! This is a turn across all lanes of traffic in order to go in the opposite direction. This is one of the most dangerous things that you can do. What you should do is position yourself just after the traffic light, then stop and wait for all other traffic to pass. After that is done, you will have a whole block to maneuver safely to the other side. Now you are in a safe position to make the next turn in the favored direction. After that is accomplished and you and your passenger are traveling on an avenue that you have chosen as your route to take up or down town, you may now travel in the three middle lanes and allow other empty taxis to use the outer lanes where they are looking for passengers. Your passenger may not always give you a specific address as their destination. More often they will just give you a street corner. If that is the case, then as you are approaching the location you should always ask (with plenty of time to maneuver) which side of the street they want. If you don't, they often will tell you too late--thus creating a situation where you have to cut across lanes of moving traffic, risking an accident.

As soon as your passenger gives you a destination, you should always think out the entire route that you will take. Consider all traffic situations that you may encounter. You must know in advance all the turns you will legally be able to make so that you do not find yourself in a situation where you have to violate the rules in order to accommodate your passenger.

If the route should take you on one of the city's highways (FDR Drive, Henry Hudson Parkway, etc.) always remember you are not in a contest to see how fast

you can drive. You will certainly encounter other motorists who think they are in a contest and are driving at dangerously fast speeds. You should always travel on their right and let them pass you. Your speed should never exceed the speed limit. If you do this, you will be able to stop should one of these motorists have an accident in front of you. These roads can be very dangerous when they are wet. People die on these roads every year. Don't let yourself or your passenger be one of them.

Never Speed on City Streets

Aside from being against the law, speeding on city streets is extremely dangerous. No matter how fast you go, you still have to stop for the next red light. It's idiotic. DON'T DO IT!

Exiting Passengers

Always watch for passengers who open doors on the moving traffic side. Very often they do not see traffic coming. They especially do not see bicycles on either side. Bicycles can and often do ride by on the curb side. Always insist that your passengers exit on the curb side and not on the traffic side.

Left Turns on Two-Way Streets with Islands

Park Avenue, Allen Street, Houston Street, Broadway (60th Street to 168th Street), and a few other streets are two way streets with traffic islands dividing them down the middle. When making a left turn through the island, in some places, signs are posted telling traffic to stop on red signals. Do so. Going through those signs is no different from going through a red light. When no sign is posted and you are making a left turn you must stop and be absolutely sure no traffic is coming in the other direction. In many places the view is obstructed by trees and plants so be very careful before proceeding.

Brake on Yellow

When a light turns yellow as you approach it, there is a temptation to hit the gas and beat the red light. Often you wind up going through the red. You must brake on yellow and stop in order to avoid this situation.

Don't try to beat the red light. Probably the most horrendous accidents with the most serious injuries and fatalities happen this way. Much too often, when attempting this you lose the game and the light will turn red before you reach it. Now it is too late, because you have built up too much momentum to stop. NEVER, EVER go through a red light that you just missed. Although you may get away with it again and again with nothing bad happening, sooner or later you will run into another car. This car will be traveling perpendicular to you, hitting the gas or riding the light sequence and catching the lights just as they are changing or in some cases before they change. That is when you will have a very bad accident . . . Which brings us to the next point.

Riding a Light Sequence

When riding a sequence of lights up an avenue the safest way to do so is to always stay at least one block back of the changing lights. You will get to your destination in the same amount of time, so don't be an idiot.

Never Let Passengers Drive from the Back Seat

Although we do not have the right to throw out passengers who unreasonably insist that we drive in an unsafe or reckless manner, we should have that right. Anyway, time and again, you are going to have passengers in the back seat who will insist that you speed or maneuver in and out of traffic. These people must be ignored at all costs. Besides, speeding or maneuvering in and out of traffic on a street with a sequence of lights will not get you to your destination any sooner. However fast you go, you must still stop for the next red light which is never more than a few blocks in front of you.

Condition of Car

The condition of the car you are driving is very important to driving safety. Tires, brakes, and all lights should be in working order and checked often.

Trip Entries

We now that we have electronic trip entries. This eliminates the distractions that trip cards had while driving. However, we still have to enter information into the electronic system. We should never take our eyes off the road to either log into the

~~system or make entries. Always wait till stopped at a light or pull over to do so.~~

Fatigue

Most taxi shifts last twelve hours. Although we think we can drive these hours without getting tired, we are only fooling ourselves. When we are tired, our senses become dulled and our perception levels are lowered.

The best way to combat fatigue is to take frequent breaks. At least fifteen minutes every three to four hours. While on these breaks coffee is not the only thing that will help you stay alert. You should exercise muscles that do not move while you are driving. If you become drowsy while you are driving you should stop driving immediately. Pull your taxi to a safe place and if necessary close your eyes and sleep off the drowsiness. Never try to fight sleep. You will surely lose.