

## The Drivers Will Speak Last by Abe Mittleman

In 1970 I was 22 years old and a recent veteran of the US Army. After serving for two years in an establishment where you were told how to dress, when to eat, when to sleep, and every other aspect of how to run your life, driving a taxi appealed to me in a big way. I saw a business that I could be my own boss, have control of my environment, pick my own hours and work when I want. This is what attracted me to drive a taxi 37 years ago. It hasn't changed much in all those years. It is still what attracts me.

It wasn't long before I realized that driving a taxi was a great way to do therapy with yourself. I don't know of any other environment where you can do a job, be paid for it and have an atmosphere where you really didn't have to listen to anyone or give a lot of thought to what you were doing. For me it was easy from the first day. Having grown up in New York I already knew my way around. My mind was free to think about anything that was bothering me. I could concentrate on myself. The job took care of itself. All I needed was my experience of knowing my way around. I had that.

I remember the old beat up taxis that I first drove in 1970. The cars were very noisy. They rattled from every pothole they hit. The potholes were plentiful. Believe it or not, the streets of today are in far better shape than they were then.

It's funny but just as many people rode in these cars that broke down constantly as ride today. Every time you would go to work you would cross your fingers and hope that you made it through the shift. It's a good thing that the drivers in those days worked on commission. If your car broke down, you still had 49% of the money you had already booked. Your efforts wouldn't be a total loss.

None of the taxis came equipped with radios to help drown out the noise. So, we improvised. There were no I-Pods. There were no Walkmans. I remember buying portable radios that sometimes played and sometimes not. Much of it depended on how well you could extend the antennas and what part of the city you were in. Batteries had to be changed often. Portable radio batteries don't last more than a shift.

It's funny but the passengers never gave a hoot if there was music or any thing for entertainment. If you could sometimes talk a good conversation over the rattling of

the vehicle that was all the entertainment they needed. All they were really concerned about was getting to their destination in one piece for a reasonable fare. I don't think that's changed.

In the latter part of the 1970's I arranged to lease a vehicle for the first time. This was the infancy of what today is a major business in this industry. I was told that I owned the vehicle and was leasing the medallion. This wasn't really the truth. But the important thing was that for the first time I would be able to put a radio in the dash board of the car. I considered this a major improvement in my driving environment.

It has graduated through the years to where now I have an MP3 player in the dash board. I am able to play continuous commercial free music for entire shifts with one CD. MP3 CDs can carry more than 12 hours of audio.

I don't think many drivers are really that much different from me in these respects. They are attracted to this business because they can earn a living in a way no other job affords. Many like to be in control of the environment inside the taxi. But the question is if the conditions changed would the drivers stay?

The Service Enhancements that the TLC is forcing on us may have been thought out for its capabilities. I don't think the TLC has given too much thought to the ultimate reactions of the drivers that will have to live with them day after day.

Keeping in mind that a passenger's main concern is getting to the destination safely and accurately and drivers care about making money in an environment that is comfortable for them, it seems to me that neither of these important concerns will be satisfied with the TLC service enhancements. The unnecessary perks that passengers will be outfitted with not only be a non factor to their ultimate goals it will also make the driving environment very uncomfortable.

When drivers lose control of the entertainment in the taxi, it will certainly be very annoying. When drivers have to listen to the same annoying advertising messages that are going to be blasted at the passengers over and over it will be very annoying.

Passengers do not need a system that provides entertainment. The driver may or may not have entertainment available. This is not very important. When passengers start playing with the back of the taxi like it is some kind of Teenage

Juke Box, switching from Rock to Rap to whatever junk is going to be in the so called “entertainment” provisions, this is going to make the driver very uncomfortable, this even more so if the driver is trying to concentrate on what he or she is doing. It will also greatly interfere with any entertainment the driver may be providing for his or her self. Frankly it will turn the tranquillity that the drivers have enjoyed year after year into an atmosphere of annoyance.

When adopting these so-called Service Enhancements it seems that the TLC did not take into consideration the comfort of the driver. They did not consider that the driver is the most important part of the taxi. They did not consider that these Service Enhancements are going to lead to many drivers going elsewhere.

What will they say when the drivers start leaving slowly one at a time? What will they say when hundreds of taxis are sitting idly while thousands of potential passengers seek other means to get where they are going?

