Guide Dog Passengers Can’t Hitch a Ride!

Wednesday 8 May, 2019

So, I arrive home after a busy week working away, need a taxi to get home but as usual it’s not as simple as you may think.

I order an Uber, then send them a message saying I have a guide dog, they then decide to cancel the fare so I then approach a Hackney cab who informs me he is allergic to dogs but doesn’t have a medical certificate to prove this, we then argue about the law and he decides to take me, reluctantly. This was after I told him he could get a fine of up to £1,000 and lose his license, all of a sudden, he is now not allergic to dogs!

I sit in the car feeling very uncomfortable. Just another day as a guide dog owner in the United Kingdom.

Regular refusals

I travel a lot by taxi, backwards and forwards to work and all around the country so it’s my main form of travel, but I am frequently refused access, often before I’ve said a word. I’m not bad looking, quite a handsome chap in fact; I’m not scruffy, and I have a daily shower but still I get refused. Why?

It’s not me, it’s my companion. They don’t like him. They don’t want him in their cab. Unlike me, he doesn’t have to try to be good-looking, he’s a stunner. Also, unlike me, he has amazing intelligence. He is also very sure-footed. I bumble about, hoping I’m roughly walking in a reasonable straight line and need him to guide me.

There’s a law about that

Admittedly my vision is terrible, and that’s before I’ve touched a glass of alcohol, but I don’t see any reason why Zodiac, my faithful four-legged friend, is constantly told he can’t travel with me by taxi. It’s also breaking the law when he is refused access.

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is illegal for a private hire vehicle to refuse to take a disabled person because they are accompanied by an assistance dog. They also cannot charge more.

In a two-month period, I have been refused access to a taxi, because of my guide dog, *ten times*. Yet I am probably a taxi driver’s biggest customer. I can’t drive myself. I doubt there is anyone who would want to be on the road if I tried, and I can’t say I blame them. But it does mean I am happy to pay for a driver whose job it is to drive. And I come with an extra. My dog.

“You’ll need to pay more,” I’ve been told. Zodiac doesn’t even occupy a seat. He wouldn’t be eligible for Crufts agility, but he needs no help getting on or off.

Then there are the times when Zodiac is looking up at them with his soft, droopy brown eyes and the driver looks at him, then at me, and says, “I’m scared of dogs.”

Drivers also have brilliant acting skills. “It’s going to bite me!” It’s a guide dog, two years of training to be your most perfect fare of the day.

Sometimes, things get a bit woolly-headed: “I don’t want the car getting covered in dog hair,” they say.

“You will have to clean your car anyway, you provide a public service,” I respond. “you’ve probably had about 40 muddy feet, unhygienic passengers, food, drink, people with coughs and colds in your taxi in just one day.”

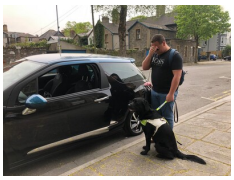
One man and his dog

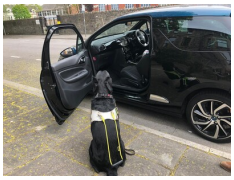
Many taxi drivers feel the need to say…

“I can’t have a dog near me before I pray.”

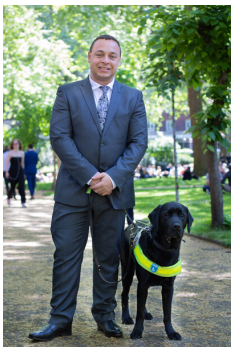
“It’s against my religion to have a dog in my car.”

Media:









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Scan Me:

“I’m afraid of dogs, I was once bitten now I’m twice shy”

It’s surprising, too, how many drivers will suddenly develop a nasty sneezing cough when we approach.

“I’m allergic,” – cough, splutter, sneeze – “to dogs.”

“Can you show me your medical exemption certificate please,” I ask.

The allergy has just started up that minute, they’ve lost the certificate, applied for a new one, waiting for it to arrive in the post or have left it at home or perhaps a dog has chewed it up?

Quite a few drivers haven’t a clue what a guide dog is for in the first place.

Have dog, will travel

To be fair, there are some great taxi drivers out there. They are friendly, helpful and make Zodiac and me feel welcome and we need more of these.

Guide Dogs, the charity, predicts that 75% of guide dog owners are refused access. Disability equality training must be compulsory for taxi drivers. It is stressful, tiring and very difficult when I know before I hail a taxi that I may have to speak to six drivers before one will agree to take me…and my dog.

What’s the Solution?

All organisations should be working in partnership to eliminate this discrimination that continues to happen on a daily basis.

To find out more about disability awareness training for your organisation, email daniel@visualisetrainingandconsultancy.co.uk or click on this link

https://www.visualisetrainingandconsultancy.com/training/disability-awareness-training/

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