



## THE STORY OF CLIMATE CARS

September 5th, 2007 by AE Team

Adventure Ecology meets Nicko Williamson, the brains behind London's new eco-friendly taxi service, Climate Cars



### When did you first have the idea for Climate Cars?

We opened on the 18th of June this year but I first thought of it a couple of years ago when I could see that people were looking for ways to reduce their environmental impact. I found out a bit about LPG and I then I had the idea for Climate Cars. I was initially going to convert some people carriers, so it would be quite like Addison Lee, and then I thought, hold on, what about using Priuses (Toyota hybrid cars)? And that was how Climate Cars began.

### What prior experience did you have of running a car service?

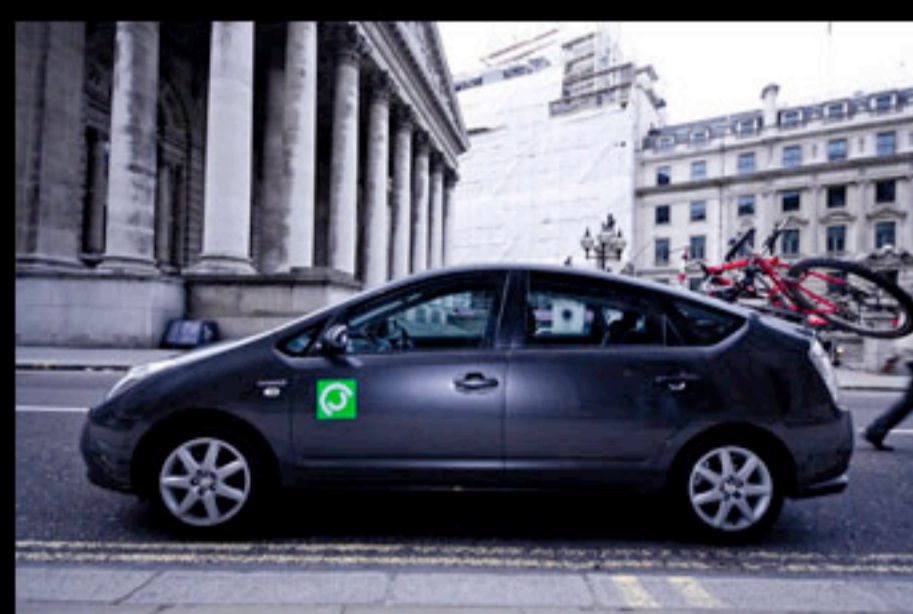
None, I finished my history degree at Bristol University last year and I literally started working on the idea for Climate Cars straight away. I went to work in a cab company to see how it all worked. I worked in the business and tried to understand what the challenges are and the realities of running a taxi service.

### How did you raise the money to start the business?

It was hard being a 23-year-old straight out of university, without a track record or any experience of note in this industry – but it happened eventually. Investors had to believe that I could do it and that there was a market for the product.

### How many cars did you start with?

We started with five, and we took delivery of number eight this week and number nine is coming next week. Things have suddenly started to take off, so I presume we'll get car number 10 the week after.



### Has the business grown steadily since June?

No, it was going quite nicely until August and then there was a lull. Our business is mainly corporate customers and they slowed down using us when people were on holiday, and now it seems to be building up again.

### Do the companies really care about having a green car service?

A lot of people are very genuine about it. And although some don't care, even they want to be seen to be caring. At the end of the day, people want to get from A to B in comfort and at the right price. So, they are looking for all the usual consumer boxes to tick, and the eco box is a nice one to add on, and people like to say they are doing it too. And at the end of the day, we reduce their emissions, so there really is a point to what we are doing.

### Can you describe the service?

All the cars have leather seats, plenty of legroom, air-con, newspapers, magazines, and a trained courteous driver who opens the door for you and offers you Belu water.

### How different are you from the other eco car services?

Green Tomatoes offer a good service, but are a very branded offering and some clients find this a bit much. We have found some clients saying they will use us because our cars are sleeker and more subtle. We do have a brand on the door, but it's very small.

### What is the ride like in a hybrid Prius?

It is often completely silent up to 29mph, because you are running on the battery, and it's a nice feeling because it's very tranquil. And then you hear the engine over 29mph, but it's a very quiet car. It's very smooth too because it's automatic and seamlessly transfers between electricity and petrol. We've had lots of compliments from customers. There is an energy monitor in the car, so you can see what you are running on, and people seem to be drawn to that.

### How do costs compare with other car companies?

We are 10 to 15% cheaper than Addison Lee, the market leader. Compared with a black cab, Climate Cars works out cheaper once the journey costs more than £9 or £10. Plus, our fares are worked out on mileage, so they are unaffected by bad traffic.

### How have you marketed Climate Cars?

A bit of online activity, so Dally Candy, Tree Hugger and all that kind of stuff. We have sent out some press releases, and have been in the Evening Standard and the London Paper. We have a Facebook group and a MySpace page, but word of mouth has been very good, so people have been calling us rather than us calling them.

### How quickly do you expect the business to grow?

I hope that we have 20 or 25 cars by Christmas. We need to be there to handle what we've got already and the way in which we are growing. To be more efficient, we need more cars, while servicing the needs of all our current customers.

### What do you think your biggest challenges are going to be?

We need to get more clients and more cars on the road. And we need to build the brand because it's a very copyable idea, so we need to keep ahead of the game. I am trying to look how we can come a bit greener. We are looking at alternative fuels, such as bio-ethanol and hydrogen technology, which I have been told will be available in the near future.

For more information, visit the [Climate Cars website](#)

Interview by Dave Coombs

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