

Eco hero The green cabbie

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In 2006, when his fellow Bristol University graduates were chasing jobs with law firms and banks, Nicko Williamson, 26, took a job as a taxi driver to glean inside knowledge that would help him realise his dream of running the greenest taxi business possible. He launched Climatecars (climatecars.com) in London in June 2007. Turnover tripled within a year and the company now has more than 400 account holders. **Interview by Lucy Mayhew**

Motoring is in my blood. In 1908 my great-grandfather won the Isle of Man TT race.

I first learnt about global warming as part of my geography GCSE, and that's when I determined one day to have my own business – car-based, but environmentally friendly too.

The idea for a green taxi firm came while I was driving past a gas-conversion garage. I discussed the idea of converting a fleet of people carriers to gas, but the CO₂ savings didn't stack up. After much research I settled on the Toyota Prius; they emit 45-53 per cent less carbon dioxide than black cabs and people carriers. We run our Climatecars for 90,000 miles, then feed them into the second-hand car market so someone else will get at least another 100,000 low-pollution miles from them.

I don't agree with diehard greenies who decry the invention of the car. Sometimes people simply need them instead of trains, buses or bikes.

All transport needs to be less polluting but the diversity of our customers proves how many people care about 'greening' their private travel. Everyone from film crews to companies such as Agent Provocateur, Sky TV and Unilever use us. We even formed a convoy for a gay wedding.

Our aim is to be the first zero-emission cab company. All of our cars' emissions are offset via the Carbon Neutral Company (carbonneutral.com). But there's no point being green if your service isn't competitive. We'll take you from Notting Hill to Heathrow for less than a black cab.

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We are probably the most cycle-friendly cab firm around. All of our cars are equipped with bike racks, so if you lose the will to cycle we will deliver you and your bike to your destination safely.

Our consumer-obsessed society means that if most people see a Rolls-Royce they think, 'That's what I want when I get rich.' But there are some really dynamic, aspirational companies such as Tesla, which has created an electric roadster based on the Lotus Elise. I hope we'll soon reach the point where you'll see bankers commuting in vehicles like these, instead of Porsches, and charging them up as they sit at their desks.

Photograph by Brijesh Patel

Next week: the climate-change artist



Knowledge drives change. The environmentalist and author **Mark Lynas** (marklynas.org) balances his environmental web-posts with realistic hope. Through him I learnt about the Californian company **Better Place** (betterplace.com), which is dedicated to building renewable electric vehicle networks in 25 regions around the world. It is working on producing zero-emission vehicles and providing charge spots in homes, at work and on the streets. Watch the excellent film **The Age of Stupid** (ageofstupid.net) – just like Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, it's watchable and wakes and shakes you up. I don't like paying hefty premiums for less-polluting products. My girlfriend introduced me to Louise Galvin's **Natural Locks shampoo** (available at Tesco and Waitrose). It doesn't cost the earth environmentally or financially, and it works.

MY TIPS

ILLUSTRATION BY LUCY VIGRASS