

social eyes

Hail the guy who's weathering climate change with a fleet of eco-friendly cabs, says Richard Dennen

Socket to them!

Nicko Williamson may have disappointed his careers officer at Marlborough when he spoke of taxis – most of his classmates would have been talking of how they could easily afford them. But not Nicko. As his contemporaries headed to City banks and law firms, he was thinking of fares, journeys from EC1 to W11 and carbon emissions. He is now one of the school's most successful alumni and London's poshest cabbie.

His entrepreneurial streak was strong but his ventures didn't always fare well. 'I hatched a plan to throw a large party in a field, sell tickets and provide alcohol – a less-policed Feathers Ball! It was a disaster. The headmaster got wind of it and he was hauled in for a bollocking.

The obsession with taxis started after he drove past a gas-conversion factory close to the family pad near Shaftesbury and had a eureka moment. He was in the midst of handing in his dissertation on American slavery to Bristol University at the time but, instead of heading towards Goldman Sachs or somewhere similar, he went into a traditionally working-class occupation and got a job driving a cab.

First, he set himself up as a sort of industrial spy. Other cabbies were amazed that a kid who'd been to public school

wanted to join their ranks. 'They thought I was very unusual and were bemused by me. I had to badger them to give me a job.' Petrol, in a manner of speaking, was always in the blood – in 1908 his great-grandfather won the Isle of Man TT race.

But soon Nicko had the cabbie world down pat and was ready to storm it with Climatecars,



an eco-friendly outfit he runs like Jeff Tracy, the dad from *Thunderbirds*, out of Battersea Heliport. Toing and froing outside, his fleet of cars produces half the emissions of a black cab. 'Up to 30mph the car runs on battery and after that it flips between the two,' he says. 'So when you're on a motorway the petrol engine will kick in.'

Nicko goes the extra mile, as you can see from his *Tatler* shoot. To prove his point he stripped down, danced in the rain with a Burberry umbrella and wrapped up warm in a fabulous Gucci fur coat. Take one of his carbon-neutral cars and you'll be helping to save the planet, whatever the weather.

This green superhero – whose home is now in Chelsea, where his ex-ballerina girlfriend teaches at Garden House school, off Sloane Square – is fazed by nothing. After quitting school, he went skydiving, paragliding and white-water rafting all over the world. He even knocked around Paris as a chef for a while.

But now he's got a serious point to make. His taxis are cheap and chic, and you'll still get the good cabbie chat if you're sitting in the back of one. Recent celebrity fares include Jude Law, who was 'cool', according to one of the drivers. Annie Lennox was 'good as gold' and John Legend, who serenaded said driver, had a six-foot-four, 20-stone minder nicknamed House. 'I had to push the passenger seat right back – he was as big as a house, mate!' All in a day's work. □

To book an eco taxi, ring 020 7350 5960 or visit climatecars.com.

