

Dance couple are strictly winners
– see back page for full story



Drivers have key role to play in reducing third party costs

COST OF ACCIDENT CLAIMS INCREASES

DRIVERS are being urged to play their part in the fight against the rising costs of accidents and personal injury claims.

The total cost of third party claims over the past 12 months stands at a staggering £6.4 million, compared with £2.8 million five years ago.

While all costs are going up, senior managers are becoming concerned about the increasing frequency of claimants hiring replacement cars through specialist companies.

Car hire costs last year were £780,000 as against £425,000 five years ago.

In one recent case the company faced a payout of £45,000 for what risk and safety manager Andrew Smith described as “no more than a minor scrape”.

The costs arose from a claim involving allegations of damage to a car and injuries to three of its occupants, including the driver. The claim also included a hire car, legal costs and repair bills.

Andrew appealed to drivers who are involved in an incident, however minor, to get full details of the other driver and vehicle as well as details of any witnesses. The information should then be given to a supervisor or manager as soon as possible.

Alarming

Andrew said accident management companies charge car hire at significantly higher rates than those which our claims handlers can obtain hire cars for.

Accident management companies might also offer assistance with personal injury claims and repairs to their clients' vehicles, all at costs that could be avoided if the company acted quickly.

Andrew said: “Over the past five years the company has expanded significantly, so we have to expect an increase in the cost of claims, but the magnitude of the increases is quite alarming.

“We are also seeing legal bills from claimants' solicitors out of all proportion to the claims. In one recent case a claim was settled for £1,200 but the claimant's solicitors' costs were £38,000.

“Basically, we are obviously asking for our drivers to drive safely and avoid accidents, but where an accident does occur, it is essential that full information is obtained and passed to the relevant manager as soon as possible.”



Happy in her job – Ana Cristina Sousa (centre) with, from left, Debra Thompson, controller Michael Webb and Ann Clark.

A woman's world as well!

IF EVER proof were needed that the bus industry was right for women, this is it ...

So happy was Ana Cristina Sousa with her decision to be a driver that less than six months after joining the company she wrote an unsolicited letter to say thanks.

Ana works at Sutton and this is her story:

“I saw the advertisement for more women drivers on the internet and thought I would like to have a go ...

“The interview was at Camberwell and at first I was scared because I was the only woman. But they made me feel very comfortable and at ease ...

“I went for my training with Mario Germani and could not ask for a better instructor. He was very easy to talk to and always made a big effort to encourage me not to give up. I passed my test first time,

I was really surprised.

“When I was allocated to Sutton, I walked in on my first day and all I saw were men. I realised later that there are other women drivers at the garage.

“I kept thinking the worst that they would make jokes about women drivers. But it never happened, they were so friendly and helped me out of my shyness. In one word they were friendly.

“Everyone was there to answer my questions and help. I love working at Sutton because it doesn't matter if you're a woman, you're part of the team and everyone is willing to help. It's a great place to work.”

Asked for his comment, operating manager Derek Barker said: “What more can I say? This is good for the industry and London General.”

Tender results success

LONDON General has retained four important high frequency routes operated by Putney and Waterside Way in the latest round of tender results.

They are the 14 / N14, which operates from Putney Heath to Warren Street, the 39, from Putney Bridge Station to Clapham Junction, the 74 / N74 from Baker Street Station to Putney garage / Roehampton and the 430, from Roehampton to South Kensington Station. Routes 14, 74 and 430 operate from Putney and the 39 from Waterside Way.

The routes combined use about 200 drivers and 85 buses, representing a large percentage of work for both garages.

Road manager Angeline Verrillo said: “We're really pleased with the results, we've had very good performance on all routes and this is down to real team spirit. Everyone has played their part, the engineers, controllers and drivers.”

The new contracts begin on November 21 and are based on existing vehicles, which will be refurbished.

Managing director John Trayner said: “The retention of these routes was critical for both Putney and Waterside Way. There was considerable competition and we were awarded these contracts based on the quality of our work, because we were not the cheapest.

“My thanks to the entire team at Putney and Waterside Way for their sterling work.”

Routes retained

SISTER company London Central has retained four key routes in the latest tendering round.

New Cross has secured Routes 21 and 321 for another five years from October. Peckham has retained Routes 63 and 363 and the contracts begin in November. The contracts secure work for more than 200 drivers at both garages.

The garages' general manager Trevor Johnson said: “Competition is very tough these days and we won it because we got the price right and the teams at both garages did a good job on service quality and reliability.”

Face 2 Face



IN OUR Face 2 Face column we chat to Putney driver Getaneh Brhanu and ask him 10 light-hearted questions.

Q: Describe the perfect three-course meal.

A: For breakfast I like kippers with egg. I also enjoy spaghetti bolognese and jerk chicken with rice.

Q: What is the best book you have ever read?

A: Dreams from My Father. It was written by President Obama.

Q: If you had the opportunity to travel anywhere in the world, where would you most like to go?

A: Egypt.

Q: Who do you most admire?

A: Nelson Mandela.

Q: What is your favourite hobby?

A: I love going to the gym and playing football.

Q: How do you like to spend your Sundays?

A: With my wife, Amy, and our two beautiful children, Rebecca, who is 10 and Thomas, who is six. We might all go to the gym, have a family lunch and then go to the cinema.

Q: What do you most enjoy about your job?

A: Meeting different people. I work on Route 74, from Putney Station to Baker Street, and it attracts tourists from all over the world.

Q: Tell us something about yourself that your colleagues don't already know.

A: I have set up a charity back home in Ethiopia. I send back money as often as I can and this helps to pay for food, clothing and the education of local children. Four other members of my family who also live in other countries do the same.

Q: What would you do if you won £1 million?

A: I'd help my family out.

Q: Who would you most like to be stuck in a lift with?

A: My wife and my children.

Health-conscious employees get the fitness 'bug'

ENCOURAGING employees to keep a regular check on their health has been given an even higher priority at Putney garage.

Ten people have now signed up to a scheme called Fitbug, which is an online personal health and well-being coach.

Initially, health experts from Fitbug visited the garage to speak to employees about the three-month trial. The volunteers then had their blood pressure, body mass index, weight and resting heart rate assessed. Personalised programmes were then set and each person issued with a small gadget called the 'Bug'.

Similar to a pedometer, the Bug, which is placed in a person's pocket or clipped onto a belt, allows employees to keep track of every step taken, distance travelled and calories burned during each day.

The Bug can then be fitted to a computer via a USB cable so that



High-tech way to good health – Scott Gammell and Brian Gilbert with their Fitbugs.

the data can be uploaded and sent to Fitbug. Employees can also log their food intake.

Jen Spencer from Fitbug said: "Once the Fitbug lab has the information it can then motivate

the individual to achieve their goals by setting up weekly action plans. It's a fun way of getting people more active and healthy and is an alternative to pounding the treadmill!"

Employees have the option of receiving weekly emails or SMS text reports telling them how they are doing.

The Putney employees are already several weeks into the programme and have an added incentive to get in shape – there will be a £100 prize awarded to the top stepper at the end of the trial.

"The Government recommends 10,000 steps a day, but we know that the average person only does around 3,000 steps. Our aim is to help people gradually improve their fitness over time and motivate people to keep active," added Jen.

Driver Scott Gammell says he's finding the scheme helpful and has already lost a couple of pounds.

"My goal was to lose a bit of weight and eat healthier food. The Bug is also helping me to keep a track of the steps I've walked. I used to do about 6,000 steps a day, but I'm doing a lot more than that now. I've also cut out chips, potatoes and other fatty foods and I'm opting for more salad, fish and fruit."

Driver Brian Gilbert is also a supporter of the scheme and he said: "It's got me walking a lot more – I now get off the bus a stop earlier to ensure I cover more miles in the day – and my work shirt is definitely feeling looser. The Fitbug website is helpful, too, and offers some good hints and tips."

If the trial proves successful it may well be rolled out to other locations in the future.

Pre-service checks vital

A TIMELY reminder has been issued to drivers to carry out pre-service checks.

It follows a public inquiry that led to the traffic commissioner withdrawing 20 operator's licence discs from London Central with effect from March 31.

It means that out of a fleet of 638 buses the company is authorised to use 618.

The latest inquiry is the second in three years for Central – a record described by quality manager Roy Sayers as "concerning".

He added that a third appearance before the commissioner could spell disaster for the company should he "decide to throw the book at us".

Roy said the first inquiry resulted largely from defects found during roadside inspections by VOSA examiners. The second inquiry was called following a wheel loss incident in July last year.

The result is that over the past three years London Central has been issued with 40 prohibitions, four of which were 'S' marked, which means maintenance related.

Roy said: "We have significantly revised and improved our maintenance systems and the commissioner took this into account.

"But we cannot stress too strongly the importance of drivers' pre-service checks. Among the most common defects found by inspectors are leaks, body damage, loose seats and faulty seat frames, damaged tyres and defective wheelchair ramps.

"Generally speaking, most defects are apparent during the pre-service check and should be reported to engineers immediately."



Driver Aleksandra Zbrzezna carries out a pre-service check on her bus.

Roy added that virtually all bus companies have their fair share of prohibitions, but a consistently poor record has the potential of impacting on a company's ability to maintain services and win further work.

He said the results of the most recent VOSA inspection of 48 London Central vehicles was "quite good".

Why they are so important ...

THE Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) carries out random bus inspections, usually at stands. If a bus is found to be faulty, it is possible the inspector could issue a prohibition (PG9) on the spot.

This means the bus being withdrawn from service and a penalty on the company's operator's licence file held by the traffic commissioner.

If the bus has a safety-related

defect, which should have been found by the driver, it could be classed as a serious failure of the maintenance system. This could lead to prosecution for both the driver and the company.

In extreme cases it could mean a serious reduction of vehicles authorised for use on the company's operator's licence.

"We are asking drivers to carry out their pre-service

checks thoroughly and report defects to engineers immediately," said Roy Sayers. "In London Central, drivers are also asked to complete VCR cards.

"Among the most important of their pre-service checks is the wheelchair ramp. If there is a fault report it immediately to engineers. Failure to do so could incur a severe penalty from London Buses."

Many thanks for your kindness, say fundraisers

GENEROUS employees have been showing their support for colleagues by donating their hard-earned cash to two worthy causes.

The first beneficiary was the Walk the Walk charity, which raises money for breast cancer research and benefited from traffic audit manager Jill Sliney's fundraising efforts.

The second organisation is Cancer Research UK, which will receive a cash boost thanks to Sutton cleaner Rhonda Scott.

While most people were tucked up in bed on 16 May, Jill and her friend were taking part in the Playtex MoonWalk, which involved 17,000 bra-clad walkers striding through the capital at night.

Jill said: "It took us six and a half hours to walk the 26.2-mile course, but it was a great experience and the atmosphere was really good.

"Thanks to support from colleagues, I've raised more than £1,000."

Rhonda describes the generosity of Sutton staff as "absolutely amazing". She is running in Epsom's Race for Life on June 28 and had raised £700 for Cancer Research UK by the beginning of May.

"People have been so generous. The garage has been hit hard by cancer this year and I wanted to do something to help in the fight against this disease," said Rhonda.

Footballers pitch in for fundraising day

FOOTBALLERS and their supporters are aiming to raise more than £4,000 for charity from a company-wide, all-day tournament at Tooting and Mitcham's ground, The Hub.

Players from all over Go-Ahead London took part in a similar event last year and organisers are hoping to get sister company Metrobus involved for this year's extravaganza on August 31.

Organiser Scott Horney, a driver at Merton, said money raised would go to the neo-natal unit at St George's Hospital,

Tooting, the Peter Pan ward at Great Ormond Street Hospital and Macmillan Cancer Support.

Apart from a feast of six-a-side football there will be lots of activities for children and families at the ground, including inflatables and face painting. As last year, there will be competitions and a buffet disco in the evening.

"The event was big last year," said Scott, "but this year we've got lots more attractions planned and we want to get women playing football as well. For every

goal a woman scores we're going to double the points their team gets."

Scott is being assisted in the organisation by Janette Lillington, Steve Powell, Andi Richards and Matt Thompson.

People interested in playing or helping out in any other way should contact Scott on 07989 109 169 or 020 8947 0134.

Both of Scott's children, Sophia and Millie, have been cared for by staff at St George's Hospital and Steve's daughter had an operation at Great Ormond Street.

Well set for tough times

NO business is completely immune to the economic downturn and that includes the passenger transport industry.

The current financial climate means that there are tough times ahead for all operators, including Go-Ahead London.

The directors are confident, however, that the team is in a good position to move forward in 2009 and the years beyond.

The passenger transport industry is faced with rising costs and fewer journeys, but the Go-Ahead London team is working hard to ensure the business can rise to the challenges now and in the future.

Impressed

Everyone must do their bit to ensure the company's costs are kept down (fuel efficient driving is just one way of combating rising costs) and that customers, including London Buses, are impressed with Go-Ahead's service.

Operations director David Cutts said: "These are difficult times particularly as the economic environment is deteriorating, but if we work together as a team this will help us to better tackle the challenges and move ahead in a stronger position."

Reminder about 'hi-vis' jackets



DRIVERS are being asked to refrain from wearing 'hi-vis' jackets while they are driving.

Training manager Eric Dale said: "It is one of the ways that London Buses is trying to raise the profile of bus driving as a professional job.

"As a company, Go-Ahead London asks our drivers to be smartly dressed in uniform when driving and to wear their 'hi-vis' jackets only for safety reasons as instructed, that is when they are walking in garages and bus stations."

Eric also pointed out that London Buses' mystery travellers penalise the company for drivers wearing 'hi-vis' jackets in service.

"Penalty points given against a driver count in the tendering process. I'm not saying that such an infringement would make the difference between winning and losing a contract, but it is all part of a cumulative points system.

"If the penalties mount up for whatever reason, then they could affect the company's prospects."

Eric added that the more drivers follow the instructions about wearing 'hi-vis' jackets, the more likely it is to become second nature.

Professional: Cesar Cardenas.

Knights of the road

What the travelling public says about the people who work for London General

PUTNEY

■ SCOTTY BRAHAM is commended by Beverley Hall from the TfL's head of surface transport communications on the way he dealt with two American tourists who wanted to go to Trafalgar Square. Scotty, who was driving a Route 14 bus, told them which stop to go to and three different buses they could catch for their onward journey. "This is a first class example of the level of customer service bus drivers in London should be giving to the travelling public."

■ ROUTE 22 driver Paul Davey was sent a box of chocolates by Miss F. Ahmed for his part in returning her mobile phone just 20 minutes after she accidentally dropped it. Two other drivers also helped.

STOCKWELL

■ LYNDA KEEN writes to praise Route 11 driver Roy Lambe. She describes Roy as an "excellent" bus driver and lists a number of points to support her claim that his customer service is second to none.

He opens and closes the doors with care, drives professionally and is "cheerful". He has an occasional joke with passengers and calls out the stops plus nearby tourist attractions.

"This driver did all the things bus drivers should do, but with extra thoughtfulness and kindness, providing a genuinely personal service to all his passengers."

■ MR G. ETHERIDGE praises Route 88 driver Mark Henry for being "extremely helpful, efficient and polite" to passengers.

■ ROUTE 24 driver Mark Nussey's work is described as "totally professional" by passenger Mrs C. Wraith-Williams. Mark gave information over the public address system at each stop and spoke to customers courteously when it was safe to do so.

SUTTON

■ ROUTE 213 driver Jennie Gillespie is complimented by passenger Patricia Allen for her standard of driving and friendliness towards her passengers.

"She is a natural when it comes to dealing with disabled and elderly people," writes Ms Allen.

■ PRAISE for Route 93 driver Paul Southby from Miss G. Swann. Paul waited for a "little old lady" to run for the bus. "She was at least 100 yards back down the road. Well done!"

WATERLOO

■ PASSENGER David Evans has commended employees at the garage for their honesty and helpfulness. David was reunited with his wallet, which he left inadvertently on a Route 521 bus.

He says: "I was most impressed by the sympathetic attention of garage staff and the efficient manner in which they put out an alert to drivers who were on their shifts."

Fond farewell to Winston

WINSTON COX left Barbados on January 9, 1962. Less than 24 hours later he'd started his training at Chiswick to be a bus conductor.

"It was a journey into the unknown for me and many other young West Indians who decided to start a new life with London Transport," said Winston.

He knew no-one in this country then, but over the past 47 years that's all changed and Winston is now a highly respected figure throughout the bus industry in London. He retires next month (July).

Winston's career began at Sutton as a conductor. He became a driver shortly afterwards and after a spell at Stockwell he was appointed to inspector.

That job led to a gold badge and the

position of chief inspector in 1983. He was later appointed operating manager at Sutton, a job he held successfully for 10 years. Since then, Winston has been a key member of the recruitment team based at Camberwell. He has a variety of roles and been involved in special projects.

An enthusiastic cricketer, he earned an impressive reputation as opening bat for Stockwell during his younger years. He enjoys watching cricket now.

Winston said: "I've made many good friends in the industry and will miss the excitement and variety of the job. It is a way of life and I suspect I might find it a little difficult to adjust for a while."

He has no firm plans for retirement, but is considering returning to Barbados to live.



Winston Cox.

Name our mag and win £200!

My suggestion for the new magazine is:

Name

Location

Telephone number

AN EXCITING, magazine-style publication is to be launched in August for all Go-Ahead employees in London and will replace the In General newspaper.

The new magazine will be produced more often – every two months instead of quarterly so there will be lots of opportunities for staff to be featured. You will be able to read news from all four Go-Ahead bus businesses in London in one handy publication.

Before we launch the new publication, however, a name is needed and this is where we are asking for your help.

We know how creative you can be so we want you to think of something short and snappy up to five words long that will make an appropriate

name for the new staff magazine.

The author of the winning entry will win £200 spending money and will be featured in the first issue. How's that just for coming up with a title?

Complete the entry form (left) and send it to: Go-Ahead London Name Competition, Ruxley Communications, 81 High Street, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, KT12 1DN. Or email your suggestion to go-ahead@ruxley.co.uk. Your entry should be with us by July 15. A panel of judges will decide the winning title and the author will be notified shortly afterwards.

Only Go-Ahead London employees are eligible to enter and the judges' decision is final. Correspondence will not be entered into.

Anyone for a game of 10-pin bowling?



Debbie Murray – looking for more teams.

THINK YOU'RE a hot shot when it comes to 10-pin bowling?

Perhaps you're just looking to get in some practise or socialise with your colleagues?

Either way, why not join in the fun every other Monday at City Limits Bowling in Purley Way, Croydon?

Sutton driver Debbie Murray and Merton employees Maxine Edwards and Andy Cooksey have been doing extremely well in the London Transport 10-pin bowling league and would love more of their colleagues to take part.

Debbie said: "The games used to be held in Lewisham, but the new venue is Purley, which is giving garages over our way a better chance of competing. The more teams we can get involved, the more chance the competition will stay at Purley."

Talented

All employees, their partners and their children are invited along – from novices right up to talented bowlers. Teams can consist of up to six players, but only three can bowl on the day. The event always starts at 10am, with three games before lunch and three games in the afternoon.

Debbie, who bowls for London General's Merton team, says even if you don't have enough players to form a team from your garage you can join up with people from other London General locations.

She said: "We're doing really well at the moment. I recently came second in the singles competition, Maxine and I came second in the doubles and with Andy we came second as a team."

"We're now looking forward to competing in the nationals later this summer."

If you'd like to find out more about the league, please contact the secretary Andy Childs on 07788 844 514.

Jason reveals a deep passion!



THE hidden secrets of the sea have always held a great allure for Jason Clements...

That's why he likes nothing better than to dive into the watery underworld as often as he can, to discover just what lives beneath the waves.

As a professionally trained scuba diver and member of the British Sub Aqua Club, Jason, who is a driver at Waterside Way, has travelled all over the

UK to see what creatures inhabit our waters.

Jason said: "I'd always wanted to take up the hobby, ever since I was a lifeguard after I left school. Then I discovered that my cousin was interested, too, so we went along to our local club together. I was immediately hooked and couldn't wait to do all the training."

Having dived in the sea off the UK and in lakes, including those found up mountains, Jason says he's seen some stunning flora and fauna during the past five years.

"Some of the basking sharks and sun fish I've seen off our coastline have been quite amazing. I've also been inside a few wrecks," said Jason.

Now a qualified assistant instructor, Jason teaches at his club in Tooting on Wednesday nights and says it's great being able to pass his knowledge and experience on to others.

Dancing duo are strictly winners



THEY may have had to put the competitions on hold for the moment, but Glenn Harper and his wife Carol are still king and queen of the ballroom.

The couple have spent nine years dancing their way to the top and, four years ago, they were ranked 13th in the country.

Winning gold at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in the Latin dance competition and becoming overall winners of the Grand Prix in 2002 are just two highlights from their success story. Becoming the Latin dance senior intermediate couple of the year in 2004 was another career high.

Mingling with well-known professional dancers like Brendan Cole, Anton Du Beke and Erin Boag has become a part and parcel of their life.

Former world champions Chris Hawkins and Hazel

Newberry have even taken time out to teach Glenn and Carol.

Glenn, who is base manager at Waterloo, said: "The first time my wife asked me to go to a class with her she had to drag me along kicking and screaming! Within six weeks I was hooked."

"Dancing keeps us fit. It's great fun and good for socialising, too."

While Glenn and Carol still dance every Saturday night, they've not competed in their usual Sunday competitions for a good few months now.

"Carol has injured her knees so we've had to take a back seat from competitions and training for the moment."

"At one stage, we were spending around £23,000 on the hobby, what with the classes, travel expenses and costumes, but it was worth it," added Glenn.

Model is a mini marvel

CALLING all model bus collectors – here's an opportunity to own a miniature version of the E400 on Route 36.

You'll have to be quick, though, as there is a limited number of models and they are expected to be snapped up quickly.

They are available to staff at a cost of £25 each (only one per person).

All you have to do is call in at Go-Ahead London's head office in Merton and see Valerie Clark, the directors' secretary, who will gladly sell you one. Alternatively, send a cheque for £25 (made payable to London General) to Valerie Clark, Go-Ahead London, 18 Merton High Street, London, SW19 1DN.

