



Robert Mroczek

Can Professional Driver Training Improve Your Chauffeuring Business?

Tim Barnes-Clay

Whether you are a self-employed chauffeur, or you drive for someone else, it's in everyone's interest for a business to do well. Nurturing relationships and maintaining a professional service are fundamental ingredients for success – and this is where professional driver training is crucial.

The chauffeur industry draws people from all backgrounds and is understandably an appealing proposition. But, there is a misconception that you can suddenly become a chauffeur just because you hold a UK driving licence.

CHAUFFEUR TRAINING ACADEMY

Robert Mroczek is a chauffeur and course director at the Chauffeur Training Academy in London. He prides himself on providing development for his students – as he should, as a winner of our 2013 Professional Driver of the Year QSi Gold award. He is dedicated to raising standards because he's seen how some drivers can be anything but professional.

He said: "The passengers who are coming to visit London deserve a better service than they sometimes get. It beggars believe that people are paying loads of money and they get a poor service. Why should we be a country where the service, especially the one I care about the most, is very poor? Why should visitors from overseas go back home and talk about how poor their experience was while visiting UK?"

Speaking to Robert, it's palpable how much passion he has about his work – and it's clear that he wants to pass this positive attitude on to others within the professional driving sector.

"If we provide proper services to visitors and others, then we will be used more – so everyone can earn more money," he explained. But Robert is

quick to point out that it's not just about the money; it's about the job being done well."

He said: "If you can say at the end of your working day that you did your best, then you will feel good and your clients will sense it. They will know you've given 100% and gone the extra mile. The best you can do is the only way.

"Sometimes you watch how people work and how other drivers or chauffeurs provide their services, and it is a really sad picture. I am sure we can

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change that. I am not saying that I am some sort of guru of chauffeuring, but I think I am doing something right. I am still asked to provide chauffeur services to my clients from the past and I am being recommended to others. Perhaps winning the first ever QSi Pro Driver Chauffeur of the Year Gold award in 2013 has had something to do with it!"

Robert continued: "There are a handful of chauffeurs like me in London where we have 110,000 registered private hire drivers and chauffeurs. We can do better than that, I am positive we can. We can turn things around and get our reputation back as excellent service providers."

He continued: "Our mantra at the Chauffeur Training Academy is 'there is no second chance to make a first impression'. We can help people who are seasoned chauffeurs and we support many who are just starting in this field, changing their career or want to learn something new."

Even though the Chauffeur Training Academy is London based, it is now getting requests to provide chauffeur training courses for people from the north of the country.

"The way I look at it is that very soon the 'boys and girls from the north' will be taking over jobs from the guys in London," said Robert. "This is because they will be better qualified and better prepared to provide a professional chauffeur service to their clients."

And when it comes to the training, it really isn't just about driving a car. "It is much more than that," explained Robert. "Driving a car is only about 30-40% of your professional chauffeuring job. The rest are those soft skills: how to take care of the client; how to be a better driver; a safer driver; a more efficient driver. How to take care of yourself, and even how to take care of your tool – your car."

"We teach First Aid skills as well. Every professional driver or chauffeur should know how to try to save the life of a passenger, or someone else in an accident situation. I have been in that position, so I know how important it is," he added.

Robert is the first to admit that he won't make a professional chauffeur out of someone in five days or even 10 days – the duration of his popular courses. But he believes that enrolling with the Chauffeur Training Academy is a good start.

He said: "We share our experience, our tips and teach all we know about chauffeuring. Hopefully, if a driver listens and takes an active part on our course, they will have all those 'tools' needed to be a professional chauffeur and provide a good service to their clients. The rest is up to them and their own willingness to learn. You can make a great career out of chauffeuring, but only if you want to."

Robert continued: "We teach the security aspects of our job, as well as convoy driving, professional etiquette, chauffeur protocol and diplomatic protocols for chauffeurs. We explain how important it is to work alone and how to work as a team. We also teach how to work with Close Pro-



Hybrid car training

An interesting area that has come to light regarding driver training is how to operate a hybrid or electric car effectively. Premium automotive brands, such as Audi and Jaguar Land Rover, are rolling out these cars, and they're only set to become more popular.

Some of the manufacturers try to help drivers get the most out of the cars. For instance, while Audi doesn't offer any specific written guidance, it does encourage its sales staff to walk customers through the drive modes of its e-tron models during the vehicle handover.

Audi's Alex Fisk explained: "We generally find that customers are very well informed on how to get the best out of their vehicle already. But we also encourage guidance to be imparted by our sales staff. They will advise on the best practical usage of the vehicle in day-to-day driving, such as a recommendation to use electric-only driving where possible on shorter journeys and to charge overnight."

Meanwhile, all Jaguar Land Rover retailers are undergoing training to ensure that its customers will be able to get the very best out of future hybrid and electric Jaguars and Land Rovers. The most imminent product is the new Range Rover and Range Rover Sport P400e (Hybrid), with the all-electric Jaguar iPace following later in the year.

Kim Palmer of Land Rover UK said: "Upon customer handover, sales executives will spend time explaining charging options, both at home and on the road; how to use timed charging; how to take advantage of the InControl Remote phone app to manage charging; and how to make the most of battery power during driving. There is no set time for this handover, so the customer can take as long as they require."

On the professional driver front, Chauffeur Training Academy's Robert Mroczek added: "We will be including hybrid and electric cars on our next training courses, as this is a very challenging subject, and it is a different game. It is almost like re-learning how to drive a car again, especially when it comes to a pure electric vehicle, so watch this space!"

tection Teams, how to act when on private aviation grounds and all the rules and regulations. Other skills, like proper planning and what should be considered when working in different cities, are taught, too. Once you master all that, you can work as a chauffeur anywhere in the world."

The one thing the Chauffeur Training Academy will not teach, though, is handbrake turns, J-turns or Y-turns, or driving at speed through ambushes. Robert explained: "For those skills we would refer drivers to one of the companies who can provide such training. We do the basics, the core and fundamental knowledge of chauffeuring and anything

beyond that. Anything specialised, we will point people in the right direction."

After completing and passing the five-day, \$895 Chauffeur Training Course, drivers will receive a certificate from the Chauffeur Training Academy. They also get a certificate from the Industry Qualification Board, which is an equivalent of NVQ Level 3. Drivers attending the course will receive a First Aid training certificate, which is valid for two years. And if they take the 10-day \$1,395 Advanced Training course, they will go through RoSPA training. "If they pass, that alone will help lower their insurance premium," says Robert.



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POLARIS OPERATIONS

Polaris Operations is a provider of bespoke personal security services for discerning clients. The company also delivers training for those who want to be more than just a driver.

Jon Hill is the director of the business. He explained that demand for chauffeur training and protection driver training has increased, due to clients recognising that a PHV licence and a driving licence do not necessarily make a professional.

He said: "The basis of all professional training has to be the RoSPA award system – Silver and Gold being a requirement to proceed to specialist protection driver training. This is a national standard not specific to the chauffeur industry, but it's renewable every three years – matching professional medical and security qualifications."

Jon continued: "The old style NVQs are things of the past, and entry level 2 Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) awards are the way forward. These consist of three-day chauffeur basics, which should be taken alongside the RoSPA driving test and the BTEC that can be obtained from achieving a Silver or Gold award. This currently matches some internal training from larger professional chauffeur companies, but internal training is seldom nationally accredited. This means training can't be proved externally."

He added: "The level 3 qualifications in Protection Driving and Enhanced Chauffeur Skills

form a qualification that is comparable to the Security Industry Authority (SIA) Close Protection national criteria. The courses currently available are matched on the Police National Protection Driver's Course. This has become the national standard demanded by many of our corporate clients and particularly US high net worth clients."

Jon also said that training providers who deliver courses to national protection standards, and combine them with genuine chauffeur experience, are the ones who are fully PHV and PCO licenced and are based in the area in which candidates will ultimately work.

He explained: "PHV requirements and on-the-ground knowledge are essential for the UK protection driver. Unscrupulous trainers are often training high skillsets, but forget the basics of the task: protocol, knowledge, competence, safety, discretion. It's not all

J-turns and Y-turns on a gravel patch!"

Jon added that the use of manual vehicles in the modern environment is a highly questionable practice, too. He said: "Trainers should have access to current Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Range Rover and Audi models at the very least. The modern professional will never drive a manual, and time spent indulging in practices from the early 2000s are more about a trainer's past than a student's future."

Furthermore, Jon explained that armoured saloon driver-training in the UK is very limited. He said: "Large numbers of big bearded gentlemen with excellent sun-tans trained in Toyota 4x4s in hot and unpleasant countries aside, there are less than 25 commercially rentable current or recent model armoured vehicles. Similarly, despite what Google may seem to imply, there are only two accredited armoured saloon courses. Both are based in the

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Guild of Professional Chauffeurs

The recently formed Guild of Professional Chauffeurs (GoPC) recently welcomed its first potential members. The first 'open to industry' assessment day took place on February 24 at Parkers European, near Bicester.

Drivers applying for membership need to pass a full assessment process to gain acceptance into the organisation. Chairman Steve Sommerfeld said: "It's taken a lot of hard work by a handful of very committed volunteers, but the result has definitely been worth the wait. We decided it was time to be proactive, and we firmly believe the GoPC has the potential to change the industry. Too many individuals are referring to themselves as 'professional chauffeurs' without being able to provide any tangible evidence to support such a grandiose title."



Steve Sommerfeld

The response to the new body has been positive from both industry service providers and chauffeurs. Vice-chairman Andy Dubberley explained why: "The traditional art of chauffeuring is gradually being lost unfortunately, although there are still plenty of guys who take enormous pride in what they do – and we want to support them. The profession's been diluted by too many inferior quality drivers with no understanding or appreciation of proper standards. Our Guild now exists to provide a platform for the really good chauffeurs with relevant skills to stand out once again."

Considerable thought has gone into the assessment process to ensure it's credible and fit for purpose. There's a Highway Code examination to pass, together with an hour-long practical assessment testing all chauffeur competences, from dress and deportment through to driving standards.

The GoPC's Executive Committee stand by a strongly-held view that forming the Guild was pointless, unless potential members genuinely had to display a high level of competence to be accepted.

"If we had made the assessment process easy, everyone would fly through it and we'd be back to square one," said Steve Sommerfeld. "This way, those who pass can be proud that they're amongst the best at what they do, and we'll help them publicise that fact to enhance their business or employment prospects," he added.

Full details on how to join the Guild of Professional Chauffeurs can be found at www.guildofprofessionalchauffeurs.co.uk.

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According to Jon, graduates of courses in the London area have all seen an uplift in both work and charge rates. He said: "I've found that most course graduates in the past eight months have over five years' experience as a professional driver. They often attend as a result of being excluded from work that their peers, who have invested in themselves, are now able to dominate.

"The mass 'security driver' sector that has serviced the large Arabian VIP market for years has started to inch towards realising the risk that well-meaning and well-intentioned drivers pose. Recent alterations in contracts and requests for training could see a change in this sector soon."

He added: "Alongside the protection driving skills, drivers should consider medical training in line with the Close Protection Officers they work alongside. First Response Emergency Care Level 3 or First Person on Scene Level 3 and a Paediatric First Aid course are the basic levels of skill to be expected."

Jon is obviously an expert in his field, and Polaris Operations' Level 3 Protection Driver Training course statistics speak for themselves. There have been 276 successful graduates, no crashes and 100% employment. Indeed, 100% of Jon's graduates have reported increased rates of pay and more offers of work.

British Chauffeurs Guild

The British Chauffeurs Guild was created and launched in 1983 and remains the world's first authority in licensing, training and employment provision for its Guild members.

Members of the Guild are available to drive a client's car on a daily, weekly, or long-term basis. It also offers the services of its employment agency to employers seeking chauffeurs for permanent or temporary positions.

Vice President David Cabrera, explained that the British Chauffeurs Guild is dedicated to improving and promoting the interests and reputation of the profession of chauffeuring and its members. He said: "The Guild is designed as a licensing registration authority to record the personal details of applicants and issue its accepted members with a personalised chauffeurs permit. The permits are issued on an indefinite basis and do not have to be renewed."

David added: "We offer a wide and exclusive selection of skilled, licensed and experienced chauffeurs for employment, reducing the need for costly adverts and time-consuming interviews. Regarding permanent positions, pre-selection services are offered on a 'no placement – no fee' basis. And when it comes to the temporary positions, we provide licensed members to drive any make of car. This service is ideal as a prelude to employing a permanent chauffeur, filling in for sick leave and, for instance, avoiding problems related to parking."

David is obviously very proud of the British Chauffeurs Guild, and rightly so. The Guild was even contracted to provide its highly trained chauffeurs to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) during the London 2012 Olympic Games, driving the IOC's VIP guests for the duration.

David explained that his father, Leslie, who is the President and founder, created the organisation to cater for the employers of chauffeurs who, in the past, had little choice but to hire a chauffeur on trust.

He continued: "The Guild also caters for the more professional type of chauffeur who would prefer to register with an accredited body. By joining us, they then disassociate themselves from the 'wrong and undesirable' element often found in this profession. Currently we have around 5,500 members."

To qualify for Guild Membership, an applicant must complete the standard membership application form and submit it to the Guild, together with the payment of the appropriate fee. The sum will be returned unbanked if the application is refused. Currently, the Indefinite Membership Application fee is only £294.

Applicants may only seek membership by accepting to undertake the Guild's Chauffeur Training Programme, and only after having done so, may they then be able to obtain membership.

Once a completed application form has been submitted and accepted, the applicant will receive a complete chauffeur's manual. It contains a full training programme and the information required to work as a professional chauffeur. Also included is a copy of the Guild's rules and codes of conduct, the chauffeur's permit and a lapel badge.

David Cabrera explained that the Guild's Chauffeur Training Programme is done on a home study basis. He said: "The curriculum consists of subjects surrounding theory, practice, etiquette and protocol demands. It also looks at the history and traditions of chauffeuring, and the security awareness chauffeurs need in today's modern day and age."

He continued: "Our recognised standard Diploma of Merit and the Guild's chauffeur permit will be awarded to all candidates who undertake to study the full headings in the manual issued to them. Our diploma is recognised by the world of commerce as a breakthrough in the common 'catch 22' situation frequently experienced of 'no experience, no job; no job, no experience'."

So, the message is clear, as with any profession there is always more to learn. Rather than struggling to succeed, invest in yourself and your employees, and get the correct chauffeur training. Companies seeking new drivers will always look more favourably upon professional chauffeurs who have sought training and have a nationally recognised qualification



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