



7th July 2020

It's funny how life has twists and turns. Today is my first full solo day behind the wheel of a TESCO van as a delivery driver.

I don't remember this featuring when I had my careers advice, but it's a new skill. 😊

23rd July 2020

So, I love most of my customers, and on balance, I think most like me (particularly the septuagenarian ladies (who doesn't like a young man in uniform?! 🤔))

But yesterday, as I struggled to find a property in Shackleford, my satnav told me to drive into the grounds of what appeared to be a stately home. With gravel that looked like it had been arranged pebble by pebble, I decided it better not to take the van up to the front door.

With the palatial gates open to Shack Castle, I pressed the video intercom button. Now, I should say that I was hot, quite smelly, and a little dishevelled by this stage.

I waited, and then an intercom light came on. I have no doubt that the person on the other end could see me in 4K video, and hear me too.

Before I could ask if the property I sought was in their substantial grounds, the gates silently, and majestically closed in front of me.

As I turned to return to my truck, the gates equally silently opened again.

What an awfully Surraay way of saying "Fuck orf, you grubby little man". 😞

Bet they would have spoken to a Waitrose driver. 🏠

27th July 2020

Yesterday while delivering, I was surrounded by a group of excited 3-6 year olds. After telling me their favourite foods, they declared me "the best man in the world ever".

All for delivering their favourite yoghurt! 😊



8th August 2020

15 drops. 750kg. 4 hours.

Let sweaty battle commence.

I am Edvald, King of the Road, Charmer of the old, Saviour of the stay-at-home drinkers.



9th August 2020

Last post on this subject (probably!)

My office. Smells like school a locker room! 😬

I wanted a picture of this with tonight's sunset, but my deliveries were inconveniently facing the wrong direction...

I think my Friday night post was poorly judged, and sounded more angry than I meant it.

I know the many very positive reasons I do this strange (for me) job. I'm learning about me, and about people, and also discovering what a truly wonderful part of the country we live in.

The thing I do differently now is that I recognise the person on the check out at B&Q, the person delivering food to my table, the person taking my order at KFC, and the person serving me a pint are not anonymous robots. They're a person doing a job, and they deserve a smile and my recognition that they exist as a person. If I've learnt nothing else, I hope to hold onto this change.

10th August 2020

On a lighter note, from "Driving Mr Grumpy":

I drive with the windows down, as the chilled air is reserved for the shopping, and not the driver.

Occasionally, prudence says that you close the windows and lock the van while delivering - just in case the locals fancy a freebie of beans. Having made one such delivery, and for no good reason at all while reversing, I went to look over my shoulder, and out of the window. And nearly broke my nose on the closed glass... How I laughed through the involuntary tears.

Then, on Saturday, while smashing it out in a bid to beat the heat, I arrived at my penultimate stop - only to find the blue roll down shutter fully open. The main shopping (anything up to 600kg) is secured by the roll down door (open), and little blue triangular thingies (which frequently don't work).

The good lord Jack Cohen must have been looking down on me as I caroused the roundabouts of Farnham. 🙏



11th August 2020

My first tip - from a lady with a small order, living in a deprived area with her elderly and ill mother.

Several offers of water and ice cream today.



12th August 2020

Mrs Mudflap (peering at me from her front door - struggling to see me through the biblical weather conditions):

“You’ve not been here before, have you?”

Me: “Oh yes, Mrs Mudflap, I know your property very well indeed. I just enjoy golf-ball sized hailstones bouncing off my head, so I’m taking the air for a few minutes. I’ll have your shopping with you, just as soon as I’ve satiated my pain fetish.”



13th August 2020

Not the sign you want to see when your van is 9' wide, and 22' feet long.

With trepidation in my heart, I crunched my way to the delivery - about 1.5 miles with no turning places.

“Does this road ‘go through’ I enquired?”
“No” says the lady, it’s very steep and narrow.
“Yes” says the husband. You’ll be fine.

Oh, so a hung jury on this one. I’ve learnt to my cost that when a homeowner says there’s space to turn, there’s space to turn a Smart car.

So, on I drive (Hobson’s choice really). Another half mile of increasingly narrow and overhung track, pruning trees and collecting foliage as I go.

When confronted with what could easily be described as a wall of narrow tarmac, I felt my heart flutter.

Still, I’d just passed a farm gate. I could either reverse over 2 miles, without the aid of my mirrors, or try the turn.

I tried the turn.

With my van nose buried into the impenetrable hedge, I felt the drive wheels start to spin uselessly in the mud.

Adrenalin now turned to 🤖 as I was basically wedged perpendicular across the road.

With beads of sweat pooling in my lap, I resisted the temptation to scream hysterically and throw the keys over the hedge. It was a close thing.

Somehow, and with Jack Cohen once again smiling on me, I somehow got traction, and made a 9 point turn.



15th August 2020

Look lively Church Crookham - the sheriff is in town! 😊



16th August 2020

Given that most of my tips come from the less wealthy, the elderly, and the vulnerable, I've decided to give them to charity.

Just seems the right thing to do.

"Pay it forward".

18th August 2020

Felt like I was carrying the Olympic torch this morning, as about 8 youngsters ran alongside the van chanting "TESCO! TESCO! TESCO!".

Not wanting to disappoint, I whooped and hollered in reply, and tooted the horn! 🚚💪😊



22nd August 2020

If you want vans parking, get someone from the TESCO team to do it!



25th August 2020

I enjoy the variety of driving the job offers.

From narrow lanes with the mirrors buried in bushes, to urban, to areas like Bentley - where I could be in Devon. 😊



26th August 2020

I bring you “nesting” - the practice of hiding high value items in a trolley, surrounded and covered by everyday items. The advent of self-scan made this possible.

This was an actual “customer” trolley that was intercepted and is now used to highlight this practice. (The towel would originally have been folded).

The value?

A little under £1,500 😲

They nearly made it... But they didn't.



28th August 2020

Green-laning tonight.

Interesting going forwards with headlights.

Quite lively reversing with no mirrors.

2nd September 2020

Sometimes I'm Edvald - Norse god of the road, akin to a lion with my silver mane.

And sometimes I'm Ted - akin to a nervous spaniel.

For much of yesterday, I was Ted. This was in part due to the fact that I was driving a Mercedes Sprinter - which turns about as well as Margaret Thatcher.

Having had my masculinity questioned by my first delivery of the day ("Oh, the other drivers drive in"), my day was marked by badly parked cars, narrow lanes, long gravel drives, fast roads and other random shit that left me carrying groceries long distances.

Arriving at Pone Hose (ala Allo Allo), I did the usual maths on delivery, and opted to walk the first 2 trays, and see if I could drive in and out (reversing onto the road would be bonkers).

Ted: Good afternoon Mrs Teukineuk.

Mrs T: Oh hello, you funny little man. You're carrying my shopping one at a time? How quaint.

T: Well, reversing onto the road would be difficult, as it's so fast and busy.

Mrs T: But our drive is an in-out.

I assessed the drive. There was a race prepared Subaru Impreza and an Aston Martin languishing casually on it, and the guttering of their magnificent pile framed the other side. It presented a tantalising chicane. If there's one thing a delivery van likes, it's guttering. They peel off a treat - hanging behind a van like beer cans on a just-married car.

With my male ego disappearing back inside me like I'd jumped into a frozen lake, I declined the offer of an insurance claim and an angry husband.

T: I'll pop your shopping on the sack truck.

Mrs T: Gosh, the other drivers do it. Never mind, I'll lend you the remote for the gates.

T: Thanks! I had dinner with friends last night, so I need to work off the calories.

I popped the blipper next to where my masculinity used to be, and went about the delivery.

Match result:

Ego: Nil

Insurance claim: Nil



2nd September 2020

Frogger:

To some people, it's an arcade game from 1981.

To me, it's delivering groceries to 221B Upper Hale Hill.

Mrs Adler does like her shopping, easily being 8 trays and 80kg+.

With parking directly opposite her flat, or at some distant point down the hill, there's a choice to be made:

Burn 2,000 calories and 15 minutes

OR

Trust the tabard of invincibility, unload groceries into the angry traffic, dash lots, and ride the adrenalin wave.

I'm practicing my log and crocodile jumping skills.

Upper Hale Hill is a magnet for angry motorists. I don't know why, but there is little forgiveness. It's the Mount Crumpit for car drivers.



8th September 2020

Glad this isn't one of my receipts. I might be 52, but I still think these 2 substitutions are good value when they're together! 🍆😂



8th September 2020

This is Lightfoot.

Lightfoot is my in-cab wife, though instead of judging my ability with a paintbrush (6/10) or romance (9/10), she measures my driving.

Until recently, her scale was:

>90% "Elite driving", said with an enthusiastic tone of supportive approval

>80% "Great driving", said with gusto

>70% "Good work", said with a more neutral tone, but warm nonetheless

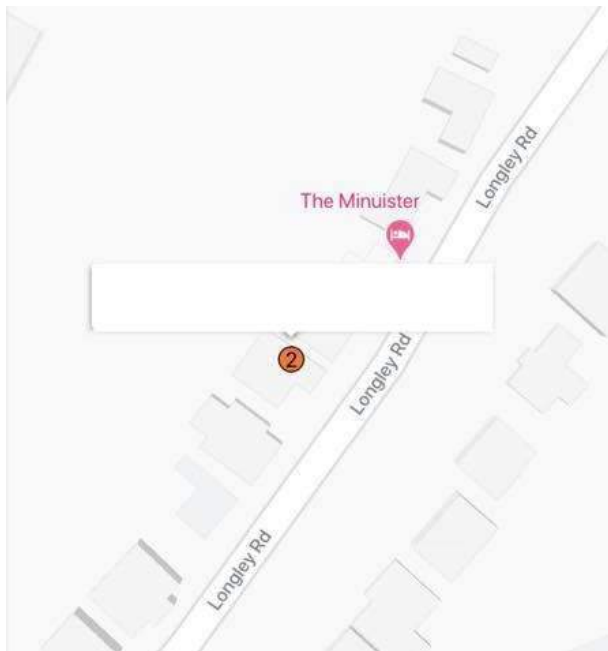
Last week, she changed, and become more polarised:

>90% "Outstanding driving!!" which is reminiscent of Meg Ryan in "When Harry met Sally", and there's a distinct sexual overtone. With the cab window down, arriving at a customers house with breathless panting coming from within is a touch embarrassing

>80% "Great work" is more subdued, but I still feel complimented. A bit of proud parent about it

>70% has real whiff of contempt "You call that driving?" with the icy tone reserved for the doorstep, late at night, when you've arrived home without your keys, and you have kebab sauce dribbling down your jeans

She's a tough audience, but I like the new Meg.



10th September 2020

There are few things quite so dispiriting, and occasionally perplexing, as having a door shut in your face. Especially when you're chatting to the customer, or at least you think you are.

If I'm returning to a property, and this happens about 1/100 drops, and something stands out in my mind from the first visit, I'll reference it.

So, I had quite the horticultural chat about everlasting sweet-peas with one lady, and then I commented on how well they were doing when I returned. If I recall the overpowering smell of urine from within, I tend to internalise my recollection.

Visiting one property, they were having paving done on their new build. On my second visit, the work had been completed, and it looked magnificent. Capability Brown would have been chuffed.

As I finished popping the shopping onto the customers doormat, I commented:

"I was here when your paving was being done. Your property looks wonderful, now it's been completed. You must both be very pleased."

Well, I would have. Part way through my “chat” the door shut in my face. I was a little put out, and more so when it was locked 1/2 a second later.

I’ll return.

And their Haribos won’t be in the tray (they LIKE Haribos a lot) 🐱

They don’t live on Longley Road - I was just happy to be delivering at my namesake address.



15th September 2020

Explicit content warning:

Up to now, I’ve had 2 “Fuck me’s” in my driving vocabulary:

“Fuck me, where did that come from?”. Usually uttered under the breath, but not always, when some structure or vehicle of size or value appears suddenly in view. The adrenalin surge follows momentarily after.

“Fuck me, that was close.” Uttered in heart-stopping fashion when a manoeuvre conducted with flourish, or ill-judged speed, results in a gap of a cm or 2 between the van and a structure or object of size or value. Quickly followed by euphoria regarding the acquired skill that prevented a claim.

I added a new one recently:

“Fuck me, that’s green”

Having parked at a delivery, I chose to reverse my van up a hill and around a corner. We’re often confronted with changes in road surface - kerbs, prams, inclines and other things that mean a little more gusto is needed to move.

So, as I reversed, I was aware that progress was, at best, faltering. Putting this down to the known (and quite considerable) incline, and possible kerb, I hoofed it more, with no effect. Hmmm.

A glance in my mirror revealed a substantial tree that was in no mood to acquiesce to my parking needs. As the tree bent and quivered behind me, and the cab filled with the smell of clutch, I was going nowhere.

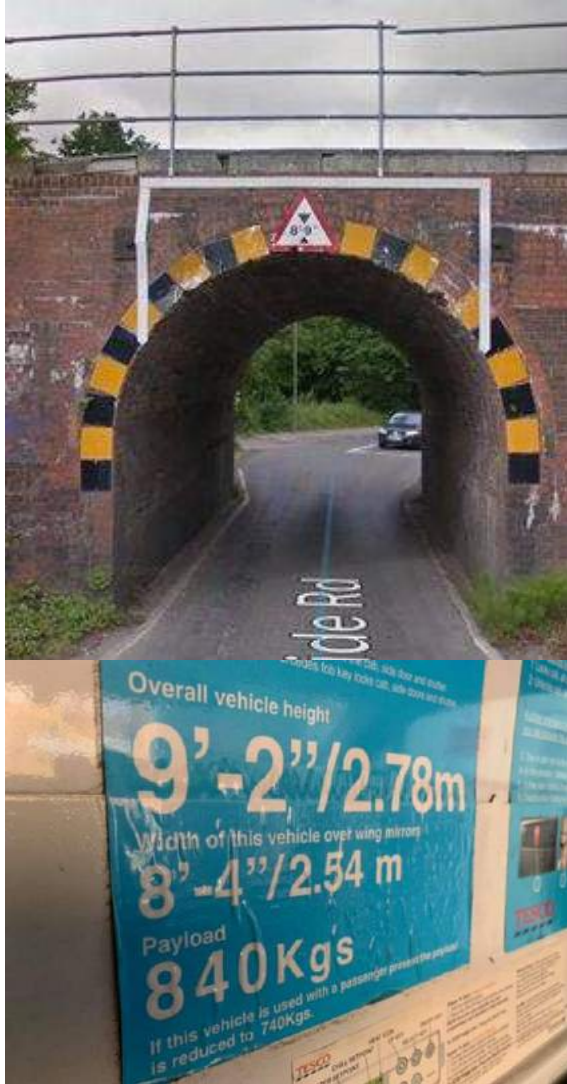
“Fuck me, that’s green” I mused.

I abandoned the move, parked where I’d started, and inspected both van and tree. Whilst in the middle of my damage assessment, a member of the public walked over.

Random: “Would you like some help?”

Me: “Help with what? Parking? Carrying my shopping? Tips for a successful love life? No, sir. Unless you’re a panel beater or tree surgeon, your skills are of no use to me.”

A score draw in Van v Tree.



16th September 2020

I'm not sure how I managed to get under this, and it definitely wasn't helped by the in-cab alarm shrieking "STOP".

As I threaded the needle, and needing my concentration on the road at its pinnacle, I was distracted by the near hysterical electronic instruction. Not massively helpful.

I've never made the news, and I don't know I want to by taking the top off my van, and closing Ash Vale and the railway line to Aldershot.

Man 1 v Bridge 0



18th September 2020

Friday night dinner in Chez Smith could be interesting. 😂



22nd September 2020

My clown shoes.

I love that they keep me planted on the ground, whatever the weather.

I love them less so when switching from the Mercedes to the Iveco - where the brake and accelerator pedals are much closer together.

This morning, while executing a reasonably tight manoeuvre, rather than feathering the brake, I gave the accelerator a hearty nudge.

No need for red bull this morning after that...





23rd September 2020

Not the sign you want when you know with confidence that your property is on this road, and that completing the delivery is the only option.

About a mile onto a rutted track, I had an internal conversation:

Edvald: "Go on, it will make a great story - you wuss"

Ted: "It would be exciting, but if you get stuck, this will never leave you"

A local on a horse confirmed that the track did indeed go to Geronemo Cottage, but that I was surely lost?

Ted prevailed.

Reversing back to tarmac, some miles later I found the other end of the road, and made my way along a dispiritingly small, pot-holed and muddy "road". At one point, I involuntarily left the road, and had a lively bowel moment as I fought to get OGN (my ride) back on "terra firma".

4 miles further into my green-lane odyssey, I cork-screwed deeply down and to the right, into a gully. My now straining bladder erupted through my forehead, as panic started to wash over me. If the house wasn't here, there was f..k all chance of turning, as the track was about 2 feet wider than my van.

Rounding a stupidly angled corner, a structure hove into view - through deep undergrowth.

Relief almost immediately turned to fear. I'd entered the boon-docks - with smoke wisping from a chimney, a rocking chair on the porch, and the sound of banjos duelling inside.

Hike down to Geronemo Cottage in the Devil's Punchbowl, and see if you'd take anything less than a land-rover out there.

And the inhabitant? An absolute charmer who works for the National Trust. Not a whiff of red-neck psycho about him.

24th September 2020

Realised yesterday that my hand gesture to acknowledge other grocery vans, and kindness from motorists, had evolved into something akin to a Nazi salute.

So I've adjusted that. 🙌

25th September 2020

Each of the vans has a distinct personality.

OGS - Trigger's broom (most of it has been replaced)

XYS - Snow White's Wheezy (sounds asthmatic)

ODF - Maggie (doesn't like turning)

Tonight, my ride, KBX, was "Ali" - after my first girlfriend:

Noisy, quite a handful to manage, and bad for my back.



27th September 2020

This Tesco towel dispenser was distraught that I was finishing my 13 weeks with Tesco.

By the numbers:

About 1,170 deliveries
Over 120 tonnes of groceries lifted and shifted
About 1,950 miles driven
300+ hours worked
1 recalcitrant tree
1 lucky bridge
1 immovable school
0 insurable incidents
Lots of genuinely lovely customers
1 customer compliment
1 huge life experience

It's been a blast. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.