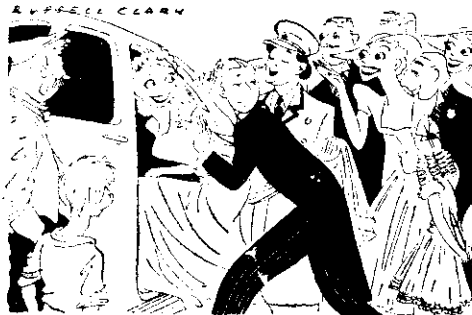


WHEN WOMEN DRIVE

"At First The Public Were A Little Dubious"

[This interview was prepared by a member of our staff who visited Dunedin immediately after New Year. Although an attack on a woman taxi-driver has been reported since that date, this does not affect the picture as a whole.]



"... Better than men for weddings"

"WE had grave doubts," said the manager of a well-known Dunedin taxi-cab company. He paused to fill his pipe. "Very grave doubts."

"What about?" I asked.
"About the New Year."

"I thought it was a very good New Year. All the papers said that the Man-in-the-Street was most optimistic."

"I don't mean the international situation. I mean about our women taxi-drivers. You know what New Year's Eve is like in Dunedin. Many of the directors felt it was hardly the thing to expect our women drivers to go on night shift. But I thought we could risk it."

"And you find your 25 girls satisfactory?"

"Very satisfactory. We took on our first girl 17 months ago, and we haven't had any cause for complaint. At first the public were a little dubious—we're inclined to be conservative in Dunedin, and people used to ring up, ask for a cab and add 'But I don't want a woman.'"

"What did you do?"

"Just sent one along, sometimes on principle, usually because there wasn't a man available. And quite often the customers would ring up later to apologise for their earlier request. And now Dunedin people are so used to women cab-drivers that they almost find it grounds for complaint if you send a man."

Weddings and Maternity Cases

"Then the myth about women being bad drivers is exploded as far as you are concerned?"

"I don't think I ever believed it. Actually our women drivers are doing exactly the same work as the men—same hours, same shifts—and doing it just as well. For some things I find them even better. Weddings, for instance."

"Why?"

"Well, they enter into the spirit of the thing much better than the men do. The men get a little restive if they have to wait round outside the church and outside the photographer's, but the women usually enjoy being part of the proceedings. And they're better at getting the bride into the car. Men often get the bride's veil tangled up with the door handles, and don't even notice it. Yes, I always like to send one of the women to a wedding. And I think their appearance is more in keeping."

"What do they wear?"

"Just their usual uniform—white cap and driving coat."

"Not slacks?"

"To a wedding? Certainly not! I allow slacks on night duty, but then only be-

cause appearance is not so important. Certainly not when driving a bridal car!"

"And do you consider them preferable for any other type of work?"

"Well, the girls themselves tell me that they're much better on maternity cases than the men are. They say that the men are in such a hurry to get to the hospital that they cut the corners and go over the bumps without much regard for their passenger's physical and mental comfort. And I think the girls may be right. I know when I was a taxi-driver I had lots of experience of taking women from house to maternity home, but no matter how often I did it, I never managed to breathe freely till I was doing the homeward trip."

"And how did your women get on over the New Year rush?"

"Very well indeed. They told me they enjoyed it. They were supposed to come off at three a.m., but most of them worked through till five or six just for the fun of the thing. But would you like to hear what they have to say about it?"

It's the Beer

There were two women waiting with their cabs in the rank outside the office, and I had a glimpse of a silk-stockinged leg and peaked cap set at a Jessie Matthews angle as another climbed in to her cab and glided from the rank. We approached one of the two remaining.

"New Year's Eve? Busy! I've never known anything like it! It was quiet till after the shows came out, and then we were going strong till five o'clock. But it was good fun, and no trouble."

"I thought it might have been a little difficult," said the manager. "It's pretty hard to get cabs, and people are sometimes inclined to be a little unreasonable about it at about four o'clock on New Year's morning. That's why we were worried about the women going on shift." He turned to the girl. "Look at poor Robertson. Somebody tried to hit him over the head with a beer bottle."

"But that's just the point, Mr. Blank. Even a man three parts drunk wouldn't try to hit a woman over the head with a beer bottle. No, I thought it was a very quiet New Year's Eve, much quieter, as far as rowdiness was concerned, than last year. In fact, I don't think I had one passenger over the whole of Christmas and New Year, who could be described as more than bright-to-merry."

"I suppose I needn't have had doubts," said the manager to me, as we strolled back to the office. "I'd forgotten about the beer. It just isn't what it used to be!"

—M.B.

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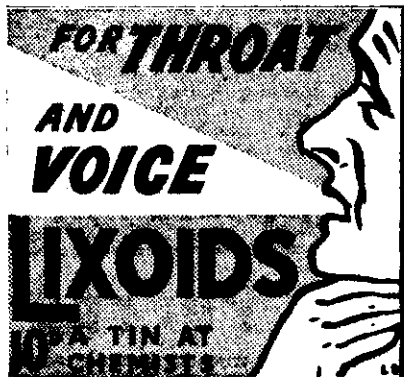
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