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The Yellow Taxi Goes Green

By Dana Mayer

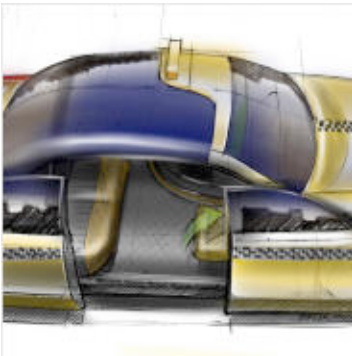
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Landscape architect Ken Smith designed the "Green Taxi," a hybrid vehicle shorter in length to reduce traffic congestion. His plan includes dedicated taxi lanes that would result in faster rides.

In May 2005, The Design Trust for Public Space gathered representatives from the taxi industry, including fleet owners, drivers, urban planners, graphic designers, and others to brainstorm the best ways to improve this New York icon. Their ideas are presented in *Designing the Taxi*, an exhibition at Parsons The New School for Design on display until January 15, 2006. The exhibition is set up to resemble a city street, with posters featuring the varying designs plastered onto a graffiti-covered wall. Streaming video clips of the innumerable movies and television shows that feature taxis emphasize the fact that cabs are one of the most recognizable symbols of New York. Large images of re-designed cabs and a colorful taxi stand suggest what passengers have to look forward to.

Although hybrid-electric vehicles have been on the market since the 1990s, it was not until October 2005 that the New York Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) approved them for use as medallion cabs. To date, only six of the Ford Escape SUV hybrids can be found in the city. The gas-guzzling Ford Crown Victoria still comprises 92% of the city's current cab fleet, but with the cooperation of the TLC, New Yorker's can expect that number to increase significantly in the coming years.



In the exhibit, New York-based industrial design consultancy Hybrid Product Design + Development proposed three varying sizes of cabs using hybrid-electric technology: the Mini, the Maxi, and the Mogul. Hybrid's design recognizes the need for both small and large vehicles, since 69% of all taxi rides consist of only one passenger, according to the New York City Taxicab Fact Book.

Multi-disciplinary design firm Pentagram modernizes the Checker Cab of the 1920's, applying hybrid technology and creating an ergonomic interior. The inside of each cab is reconfigured, swiveling the front passenger seat around to face the rear to make better use of the space.

Fox + Fowle Architects, a design firm in New York, imagines the creation of a sustainable interior by using nutrient materials, such as recycled denim fiber and wool, which can be re-used or broken down organically. The design takes further strides in environmental sustainability by adding filters to each taxi's front grill. In doing so, these cabs would help improve air quality.

As an integral part of the public transportation system, taxis provide limited travel for both the disabled and those with children. With more than 12,000 cabs in New York only twelve are wheelchair-accessible. CityStreets, an advocacy group that fights for pedestrians' rights, developed the CABsule, which features sliding doors and a curbside ramp, facilitating entry and exit for the disabled, strollers, and anyone carrying large items.



Hybrid Product Design + Development created the compact MiniModal taxi, which can accommodate four passengers or one passenger

While many of the proposed changes are dramatic and would take years to implement, some changes that could be seen within the next two years include the addition of GPS systems, partitions with passenger services (including credit/debit payment options), and improved roof lights. Cell-phone technology, including text messaging and satellite locating, may also make it faster and easier hail your taxi.

In response to the exhibition, The Design Trust for Public Space initiated Taxi 07, a group of organizations whose objective is to make New York cabs more accessible, safe, and sustainable by the taxi's (New York gas-powered taxi's)



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driver's seat and large window panels increase visibility for passengers and drivers.



A curbside ramp makes Hybrid's MiniModal design wheelchair-accessible. Rear safety lights signify when a passenger is entering or exiting, creating a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

centennial in 2007. "There is very enlightened leadership right now at the Taxi and Limo Commission," says Deborah Marton, executive director of the Design Trust for Public Space. "Taxi 07's ultimate goal is to have a new taxi design in time for the centennial." With vehicle manufacturers drawing prototypes with help from the TLC, a safer and more sustainable taxi could be here sooner than we think.



Blue Marlin Brand Design envisions a glass roof taxi, affording exceptional views of the city.



Using large type and light-emitting diodes (LED) technology, Antenna Design clarifies taxi status for both tourists and locals. Using LED lighting allows the roof light to be clearly visible, even in daylight.



GPS systems are an addition we may see in cabs in the next year. Antenna Design's console features not only the GPS system, but also a swipe card system and a microphone.

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