



GIVING IT A TRI(CYCLE): The Post's Jeremy Olshan navigates a family of tourists through Midtown traffic.

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Transit Reporter

I "pedaled" my body on the streets of Midtown for two days, and all I have to show for it are sore legs, a bunch of black-and-blues and less than a hundred bucks.

My brief, exhausting career as a pedicab driver began at the Fifth Avenue storefront offices of Bicy-Taxi, one of the more than half-dozen rickshaw fleets that have set up shop here in recent years.

Interviewing for the job was short and simple: Mehdi, the manager, basically just asked to hear my résumé.

Though I had little cycling experience, he seemed impressed with my cardiovascular credentials — I just finished my second marathon — and the fact that I was a born-and-bred New Yorker who wouldn't need a map.

Most importantly, I had the \$150 in cash for the one-week leasing fee for a vehicle.

I signed the lease, which stipulated I wear a helmet, obey all traffic laws, refrain from drinking or smoking while driving and pay for any damages I cause to pedestrians or property — rules it later became clear were mostly optional. I showed no identification.

"You're going to make a lot of money," Mehdi assured me, vigorously shaking my hand and handing me a copy of the insurance policy. "All you have to do is smile. Go up Sixth Avenue and down Fifth Avenue, go to Rockefeller Center and Macy's, and you'll do fine."

As for how much to charge passengers, I was told a buck a block is a good rule of thumb but to use my discretion.

In figuring a fare, a driver employs a complex calculus that takes into account not only distance, but the number and weight

A tough roll: My days as a street pedaler

of passengers — and how much money they might have.

As I pedaled into traffic, I was immediately sandwiched between two city buses, honked and cursed at by a yellow-cab driver, and stared down by several apparent New York natives with the kind of disgust normally reserved for tourists.

Still, many people were curious and positive. I rang the bell on my handlebars and searched for customers.

At the corner of 40th Street, I found my first customer — a computer technician who was so frustrated with his inability to find a cab that he decided to give me a try.

"How much to Eighth Avenue and 49th Street?" he asked.

Since this was my first fare — and he was only of medium build — I offered him a discounted rate of \$10. He agreed.

With a passenger in the back and a slight incline, pedaling became considerably harder. My pedicab had an "electric assist" that makes it slightly easier to pedal. I was told to use it sparingly, because the battery would drain fast.

Each time I turned it on, I felt relief surge through my legs like a hospital patient hitting the morphine button. By the end of the shift, I was an addict — revving it almost constantly.

My passenger seemed slightly

upset when I misjudged my ability to make it through an intersection before a yellow light turned red. But in the end, he thanked me for the ride and gave me a \$2 tip.

I then staked out the tree at Rockefeller Center and several corners near Times Square.

Many of my colleagues played a numbers game, accosting every pedestrian they could to ask if they wanted a ride.

I decided to try to play to my strengths, offering help to confused-looking tourists.

A family from London asked me for directions to the theme restaurant Mars 2112, and I managed to convince them that with the two little boys riding on laps,

they could all fit in my pedicab and hitch a ride there.

I may not be cut out for sales, but telling stories about the lore and history of my hometown is in my wheelhouse.

When the family remarked on the ease of New York's grid, I told them that not all Londoners shared their opinion.

"When Charles Dickens came to New York, he hated the straightness of the roads. Every street in London had a mystery at its end. Manhattan, on the other hand, was all too predictable," I said.

They gave me a \$10 tip on top of the \$10 fare.

I was feeling confident now, so when three sizable Israeli men asked for a ride from Rockefeller Center to 74th Street and West End Avenue, I stupidly agreed.

As I furiously pedaled at a speed of under 2 mph, several pedestrians taunted me, shouting, "Pedal! Pedal! You can go faster than that."

The trio put me out of my misery at Columbus Circle and said they'd take the subway.

Exhausted, I made my way back to BicyTaxi. After working the streets for about 10 hours over two nights, I averaged under \$10 an hour.

I pulled in \$38 on my first day on the job after four hours of pedaling. On Day 2, I earned \$55 over five hours.

A group of my fellow drivers asked how I did. Feeling dejected, I lied — and added \$50 to my earnings.

"Wow, for your first couple of days, that's really good," a Tunisian driver told me. "It gets much easier."

"Nothing easy about this gig," I told him and then limped toward the subway and back to my much cushier day job.

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