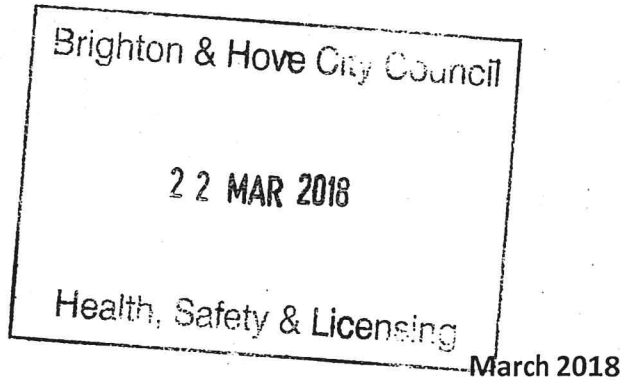


(To be received at BHHC by 23 March 2018 at the latest.)

To be sent via email or post to:

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Dear Sir

**Re: Renewal of Uber's Private Hire Operator's Licence, 4 May 2018**

I am writing to you as a ~~Taxi~~/Private Hire driver licensed by Brighton and Hove City Council.

For the reasons set out in numerous emails circulated by the local Licensed Operators and fellow members of the Taxi Trade Forum since the renewal of Uber's Private Hire Operator's Licence last November, I oppose its renewal due on 4 May 2018.

I totally support the representations being made by the operators, namely Brighton and Hove Streamline, Brighton and Hove Radio Cabs and Brighton and Hove City Cabs in opposing the renewal of Uber Britannia's licence here in Brighton and Hove.

Yours faithfully

[Full name of sender]

MR. G. BECKMAN

[Badge Number]

979

by Tom Rawstone

**N**IGHT-TIME and a 14-year-old girl climbs into a waiting cab. As the vehicle heads across South London to her suburban family home, she and the 35-year-old driver, Spyros Ntounis, begin chatting.

He offers her chewing gum and asks what she has been up to and how old she is. Next, he gives her his telephone number, saying if she ever needs a lift, she should call him. He gets her to text him there and then, so he can save her number.

Ntounis then tells the girl she is 'hot' and that she has 'nice lips'.

She is alarmed that a man old enough to be her father is talking to her in this way and her unease grows as he slows the car to a 5mph crawl.

He said he wanted to spend more time with me, she later recalled.

Finally arriving home, the girl ran inside. But the next morning, she received the first of several messages.

Ntounis asked if she was 'OK' before, secretly offering to 'give her someone' anything she wanted. He lied, saying he was 26, and asked if he had 'passed the age test', then tried to persuade her to meet him. 'I would love it,' he wrote.

Worried, the girl told her parents about the unwanted advances. They called the police, Ntounis was arrested and, following a trial at Kingston Crown Court a few weeks ago, he was convicted of attempting to groom an underage girl. He could face jail when sentenced this month.

A lucky escape, one might conclude. But the details of this case should ring further alarm bells — because Ntounis was a driver for Uber, the controversial company behind the hugely popular taxi-hailing app, even though he had a criminal conviction for dishonesty and had been accused of sexually harassing other passengers.

In the months before the incident with the teenage girl, three other women had separately complained to Uber about his inappropriate behaviour.

It was claimed he told the first he felt 'horny', while starting an 'inappropriate' conversation with the second one, whom he stared at continuously as he drove.

And the day before picking up the 14-year-old, he had asked a third woman if he could 'satisfy her needs'.

**W**HAT'S more, Ntounis's case is not a one-off. On the same day that he was found guilty, Shahid Qureshi, another Uber driver, was convicted at Inner London Crown Court of two counts of sexual assault. The first related to a woman he groped in 2016, the second to a 16-year-old exchange student.

His initial victim had complained to Uber, who had not reported the matter to police — leaving him free to carry on working. Both of these cases will fuel concerns about how Uber operates.

According to a company rule, under-18s should not travel alone in Uber cars. 'Drivers are not supposed to pick up people under 18 — but, say they get a job and the fare's under 18. What do they do?' asks Steve McNamara, general secretary of the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association and a vocal opponent of Uber. 'Of course, they take it.'

He adds: 'The reason Uber is so popular is because it's so cheap. So, rather than get out of bed in the middle of the night to pick up their daughter from her mate's, parents send an Uber. But people are sacrificing common sense for a pound or two. Why would you put your 16-year-old daughter in a stranger's car?'

Of course, coming from a 'rival' organisation, such words could be sour grapes.

Because since Uber launched here in 2012, it has proved a huge hit — one that has severely dented the income of other taxi

Picture: GETTY (POSED BY MODEL)



GUILTY: Driver Spyros Ntounis will be sentenced this month

Many parents now rely on the taxi app to avoid all that late-night ferrying. But two recent convictions raise a disturbing question...

# Should you ever put your teenage daughter in an Uber?

drivers and cab firms. Uber customers download a smartphone app with which they can hail a minicab. A nearby driver is automatically summoned, often making it quicker, easier and cheaper than phoning a minicab or hailing a taxi.

In London, the number of Uber vehicles exceeds the 24,000 black cabs — and Uber now has more than 40,000 drivers across some 40 UK towns and cities.

But the issue of passenger safety remains. Figures last year suggested that sex attacks involving Uber drivers could be running at almost one a week and, last August, it emerged that police had written to Transport for London (TfL), the authority responsible for licensing private hire drivers in the Capital, to express concerns the company

was 'covering up' sex attacks to protect its reputation.

There was more drama last September when TfL stripped Uber of its license, for not being a 'fit and proper' company.

Uber is appealing the decision and is allowed to continue operating in London during the appeal process.

Last month, it vowed to proactively report complaints to police and to set up a 24-hour hotline for passengers.

Of course, for some, that may be too little, too late.

The Mail has established that, in the case of Ntounis, female passengers had complained to Uber about him in October and November 2016 and again on April 21 last year. He picked up the 14-year-old girl the day after the third complaint. Asked if they

had alerted police to the earlier complaints, an Uber spokesman said they hadn't, but had 'warned' Ntounis. He was suspended only after police alerted them to his arrest for the incident with the 14-year-old.

The Mail can also reveal that Ntounis had been licensed as a private hire driver by TfL in September 2014. The following month, he was convicted of dishonesty and given a 12-month jail sentence, suspended for 24 months. TfL was not informed of this. Had they known, they would have reviewed his licence. A TfL spokesman said they would have expected to learn of the conviction from the police or Uber.

In the case of 42-year-old Shahid Qureshi, he picked up a Japanese exchange student at Heathrow Airport on July 30 last

year. While registered as a driver with Uber, on the day in question, he was working for another private cab firm.

The married father-of-four insisted she sat in the front, then groped and kissed her. When she said: 'We don't do this in Japan,' he replied: 'This is England.' The driver continued to pester her for sex on messaging app WhatsApp after she stepped out.

Reported to police, Qureshi was arrested. Detectives then found out he also worked for Uber and asked the company to reveal any other allegations against him.

It was only then that they learnt of an incident in September 2016, when Qureshi had put his hand on a female passenger's thigh.

**T**HE Uber spokesman initially accepted that he had received a complaint from the passenger, but that the driver touched her hand, not her thigh. As a result, Qureshi was warned about his inappropriate behaviour. The spokesman added that, had they known the full story, 'it is very likely he would have been removed from the app'.

But, pushed for further details, Uber subsequently admitted that the report had related to Qureshi touching the woman's thigh, as well as her hand.

After details of this incident were revealed to police by Uber, Qureshi was arrested and charged with a second count of assault.

The Mail has also established that Qureshi had a previous conviction for harassment in 2011, when he kissed and grabbed a colleague while working as a healthcare professional.

This was flagged up to TfL when he applied for a licence in 2014. While he was warned about his future behaviour, the conviction was considered spent and he was granted the licence.

Qureshi, who has lived in Britain for 15 years, was convicted of two counts of sexual assault and jailed for 12 months.

Commenting on the two cases, Uber said: 'We welcome the convictions of these two drivers. Every driver who uses Uber in the UK has been licensed for private hire by a local authority, which includes going through an enhanced background check.'

'Any previous offences would appear in those background checks as part of the licensing process and are only shown to the licensing authority. Every trip on our app is tracked by GPS and we have supported the police in helping to bring these two licensed drivers to justice.'

Siwan Hayward, TfL's head of transport policing, added: 'We take all allegations against licensed taxi and private hire drivers extremely seriously. As soon as we were made aware of

TURN TO NEXT PAGE.