

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I noted, just the other week, that a passenger was killed when the minibus in which she was riding tipped on its side, throwing her out of the window and killing her. I talked to Bo-Bo, my froglike husband, about the situation and he just threw his hands into the air and exclaimed: 'Another one!' On questioning my spouse, he told me that many of the minibus drivers should not be permitted to drive and that the reason for accidents, involving this type of public transport, is, normally, due to poor driving habits. Of course, I did not believe Bo-Bo because every man believes himself to be the best driver in the world: Nobody could, possibly, be better. So, I determined to do my own survey. The result: For a change, Bo-Bo is correct. I took the minibus, Number 22, from Central up to Hongkong Park on 15 different occasions on different days and at different times and this is what I learned:

- 1. Many of the minibus operators become very dangerous drivers when sitting behind the wheels of their vehicles, taking terrible risks;*
- 2. Many of the minibus drivers yell and scream at drivers of other motor vehicles, for one reason or another;*
- 3. Most of the minibus drivers take very aggressive actions on the road when driving, during rush hours;*
- 4. Some of the minibus operators drive at excessive speed, considering the conditions of the road;*
- 5. None of the minibus drivers are courteous to other users of the road;*
- 6. Some of the minibus drivers do not seem to understand the rules of the road;*
- 7. Some of the minibus operators are in the habit of talking to their friends/family on mobile telephones while driving;*
- 8. Many minibus drivers run red lights; and,*
- 9. None of the minibus operators seem to care a fig about the safety of their passengers.*

One of the minibus operators, that I observed, an elderly man, aged I estimate at about 65 years, at least, has the habit of moving his head from side to side in an arc of about 180 degrees to the right, seemingly for no particular reason. This head-movement he executes about 20 times per minute. (This is not an exaggeration) He does not drive dangerously, mind you, but it, really, worried me because I did not understand what was the reason for his violent head movements. Another driver had the habit of employing what the American call a leaden foot: He presses hard down on the brake pedal so that the minibus is continuously jerking, either stopping, completely, or starting up like a rabbit jump. It gave me a bit of a headache, in fact, and I was glad to leave that minibus even though the little trip only took about 10 minutes. Then, there was the incident when there was a near miss with a private motor car which was on the right of the minibus in which I was sitting. Neither the minibus nor the motor car was damaged, but I would not like

to repeat to you what the minibus operator yelled to the driver of the private motor car. Another thing that I endured on my survey of travelling on minibuses was that I had to suffer, listening to jazz music, coming from the minibus's radio. The driver on this trip, who appeared to be quite young, about 35 years, was nodding his head in cadence with the beat of the music. It seemed that one was forced to listen to the loud music, determined by the driver. On this trip, it would have been impossible to hold a conversation with a fellow commuter because the music would have drowned out any conversation.

I don't know about Hongkong, but in other countries of the world, one is forced to apply for a chauffer's licence before the relevant authority permits a driver to take passengers aboard upon the payment of a fee. If, in fact, minibus operators have a special licence, does the relevant authority in Hongkong re-examine them from time to time in order to determine that they are, still, capable of driving a vehicle for hire? Further, at what age is it determined that the driver of a motor vehicle for hire is too old to be in charge of his vehicle? It seems to me that there is no retirement age for some of the minibus operators. It would be an interesting exercise to learn how many elderly men, operating minibuses, today, have been involved in accidents over the past few years, don't you think?

As a final thought, it occurs to me that if I can do a survey of minibus drivers, for what reason cannot the Hongkong Government? Would it not be a good idea for the Hongkong Government to be proactive and to have inspectors, secretly ride on minibuses in order to evaluate the drivers and the conditions of the vehicles and to make a determination as to whether or not there is room for improvement?

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

*While **TARGET** makes every attempt to ensure accuracy of all data published, **TARGET** cannot be held responsible for any errors and/or omissions.*

*If readers feel that they would like to voice their opinions about that which they have read in **TARGET**, please feel free to e-mail your views to editor@targetnewspapers.com. **TARGET** does not guarantee to publish readers' views, but reserves the right so to do subject to the laws of libel.*