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TOYOTA HYBRIDS POWER UP GREENTOMATOCARS



Toyota Hybrids power up GREENTOMATOCARS
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The first all-hybrid private-hire operation is underway in London, as a young company sets out to overturn perceptions of minicabs with its eco-friendly Toyota Prius fleet.

Hammersmith-based greentomatocars has begun a pilot operation in west London which it plans to roll out across the capital by the summer. Toyota Fleet supplied the first five Prius saloons in mid-February and the fleet is expected to number around 50 by the end of June.

Early indications are extremely encouraging, says the man who came up with the idea, former City lawyer Tom Pakenham.

"People are responding very positively - they like the idea and our delivery of it," he says. "They're also fascinated by the Prius. The heads-up display interests them, and the car's so quiet when it stops at the lights they think it's stalled!"

"They're always asking how the Prius works, and we've trained all our drivers to understand the vehicle and our environmental projects, so there's always something to talk about." Many passengers don't realise that the electric batteries of hybrid vehicles recharge automatically while the petrol engine is running, for example.

The Toyota Prius was chosen after considering all possible alternative-fuel options. "The idea is to provide the greenest service possible," says Pakenham. "While I'm a big fan of all-electric vehicles in the right context, we just don't think they are viable at the moment.

"The Prius is comfortable, can go anywhere and is also futuristic. With its eye-catching display and aerodynamic design it gets across quite a different message about alternative-fuelled cars.



"It also has sufficient space, especially when you consider that most cab journeys are made carrying only one or two people. Greentomatocars wants to show that it is possible to provide a top-level, environmentally friendly service at a very good price," says Jonny Goldstone, Pakenham's business partner.

The Toyota Prius emits only half the carbon dioxide given off by a traditional taxi, but greentomatocars insists on taking its environmental responsibilities further by offsetting twice the amount of emissions its cars produce. This is achieved through a rolling programme of tree-planting and other eco-projects.

The package for greentomatocars customers includes online bookings; phone or text alerts; driver name and numberplate provided in advance - and satellite navigation to help ensure that drivers never lose their way.