

Horse-drawn cab drivers insist on stand in Valletta centre



Karozzini owners are resisting the removal of a station in St George's Square, Valletta. Photo: Jason Borg.

The sight of horse-drawn carriages ambling along Valletta's streets may become a thing of the past if authorities remove the base in St George's Square and do not give drivers an alternative in the city centre.

Kevin Deguara, from the Karozzini Association, said yesterday that horse-drawn cabs had to be in the city centre or they would not be able to work. "The main business is in the centre of Valletta. You don't see people elsewhere," he said when contacted.

On Monday, the courts are expected to decide on the removal of the base in St George's Square after cab drivers filed an application for a warrant of prohibitory injunction against the Malta Transport Authority (ADT) to stop it from relocating the stand, even temporarily.

The station has to be moved while work is underway to embellish the square but the new plans do not include a station for horses.

Yesterday, the ADT filed a counter application, saying it would be abusing its powers if it allowed the station to remain in a pedestrian zone and disrupt the embellishment project.

"The station is incompatible with a decent pedestrian zone," the authority said, adding that reserving central areas for pedestrians was a normal procedure in many cities. The ADT argued that restrictions for vehicles had been in place for a number of years and the project to pedestrianise more areas meant vehicles would have to choose other routes.

"The speed limits of karozzini would lead to big congestion problems," the authority argued, adding it wanted to strike a balance between the tourist attraction of horse-drawn cabs and the capital city's practical needs.

The authority said it planned to install a number of tents along the route to protect the horses but could not accept the cab owners' requests.

In their court application, 43 owners said the ADT had ignored their offer to change the wheels of their carriages to prevent further damage to the paving but still allowed electric cabs and park-and-ride vans to drive through roads where people were walking.

This was denied by the authority, which said there was no comparison between the two because the electric cabs did not pose a danger to pedestrians and did not dirty the area.

The cab drivers claimed they were self-employed and this was their main breadwinning activity.

Their stand in the square had been there for several years with the approval of the competent authorities.

A Transport Ministry spokes-man pointed out that some of the cab drivers who signed the court application appeared to be registering for work on the Employment and Training Corporation files. Others were registered as inactive and only 32 were either part-time or full-time self-employed cab drivers.

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Comments

d bugeja (3 weeks, 5 days ago)

The drivers and their cabbies really are in a shabby state. the drivers themselves wear shabby clothes and they look as if though they have emerged from a whole day working in the fields.

Secondly they are very impolite, they hassle the tourists all the time. One time I heard one cabbie driver hassling a German tourists to take him around in his cabbie. When the tourist told him that he did not wish to ride, the cabbie driver told him ' you come to Malta to spend money and not to save them' . They are exactly the words he said. It was very embarrassing. And I am sure it impressed the German tourists in bad way.

john fenech (4 weeks ago)

Mr Farrugia you missed the cabstand; 3 rd paragraph- first sentence- that is a shelter for the animal as well as his keeper. Sometimes when one is carried away, it will be so difficult to see the whole picture! By the way thanks for reading my comment.

anthea doughty (4 weeks, 1 day ago)

I note you will post the negative comments made by a Maltese but not one of the tourists that visits your beautiful island twice a year! The drivers do irritate me keeping on to take a ride in their cab, they hassle you when you go past and even if you pass back by again shortly after they try again! Some of these horses are malnourished too. I have also seen cruelty towards them - we witnessed one of the horses receive a punch on the nose from a driver last year as he walked past for absolutely no reason whatsoever. To drive these horses in the extreme heat on hard surfaces and to see them with their nostrils flaring and sides heaving, sweat dripping after a round of the city makes me feel sick quite frankly. To those who would say they are a tradition, perhaps so, however, in a world more educated now we have to realise that some of the old traditions and practices are actually cruel and should no longer be practiced.

Franco Farrugia (4 weeks, 1 day ago)

I think it is shameful to read John Fenech's and C. Agiust's comments in which there isn't a single thought expressed in favour of the animals themselves. It also shows the state we're in, in this country.

john fenech (4 weeks, 1 day ago)

These people have a right to make a living. On the other hand, they have to respect the laws and cooperate with the authorities in the overall upkeep of the environment, especially if their commerce is creating nuisances to the locals and the tourist trade in general.

For instance, the horse dropping issue must be resolved. The horse's urine is another cause of concern. The disruption caused to the traffic flow because of the slow moving cab. It is also a fact that most of the cabby drivers disregard the traffic regulations; rarely stopping at stop signs, keep to the middle of the lane and in most instances assume the right of way at any traffic intersection.

So a compromise: Cab drivers should wear a standard attire preferably to enhance Maltese folklore, have a standard trip cost arrangement which is published at the cab stands, clean the horse deposit at all times and observe the traffic regulations. All cabs entering Mdina must have rubber protected wheel rims. Most important the authorities must Enforce or legislate, as the case may be, the Code of Conduct for the Horse Cab Owners, which has been on track since 2004!

C. Agius (4 weeks, 1 day ago)

I'm not against the horse drawn cabs, but their place is NOT there. They should be placed - in different places - along Great siege Road with a proper sheltered place. Horse drawn cab drivers should be PROPERLY DRESSED and have a decent uniform not like some with a cigar hanging down their mouths, using foul language and pestering every tourist that goes by to show him around Valletta (some cannot even speak English properly) for an exorbitant charge. Can't we learn from other European civilised countries. The horse drawn cabs are almost in all parts of europe - BUT WHAT A DIFFERNCE!!!!!!!

Are MPs afraid to enact a proper law, or they're afraid of losing VOTES. It's not me or you who should see these thungs but those elected who are pumping money to bring in tourists and who would like us to BRAND MALTA - brand Malta my foot - do your job and give the taxpayer value for what he's paying and don't be afraid of losing votes. About time that something be done for all horse drawn cab and taxi drivers.

c.camilleri (4 weeks, 1 day ago)

The sight of horses together with the rude manners of their owners in their shabby clothes surely is not conducive to the good name to our city.

Judy Vassallo (4 weeks, 1 day ago)

To remove the horse-drawn carriages is to remove part of Valletta. Tourists look to see the horse-drawn carriages and ride in them. It is a great way to see Valletta. To much is being changed and it will not be the same for the visitors to the great country Malta.

T. Grima (4 weeks, 1 day ago)

Qabel ma jiggieldu ghad-drittijiet taghhom, is-sewwieqa jew sidien tal-karozzin ahjar jaraw li jzommu ma' l-OBBLIGI taghhom. Partikolarment:

(a) Li ma jkomplux ihassru t-tarmak fit-toroq tal-Belt bil-hadid tar-roti. Meta ser idawru l-lakstu mar-roti bhalma kienu weghidu li ser jaghmlu fl-Imdina?

(b) Ladarba ma jridux jottempraw ruhhom mal-ligi u jaghmlu l-borza taht iz-ziemel kif isir f'kull pajjiz civilizzat fl-Ewropa u fid-Dinja kollha, almenu ghandhom jigbru l-hmieg li jhallu warajhom. Ta' kuljum qed ihallulna mandra shiha warajhom, partikolarment Great Siege Road, hdejn il-Muzew tal-Gwerra u Dar il-Mediterran. Irid ikun il-maltemp bix-xita biex jitnadedd dak il-hmieg li jhallu..... jew l-istess tyres tal-karozzi sakemm jaghmluh pasta mat-triq kollha, ghalkemm l-intiena tibqa' ma' mnifsejna!

Nappellalhom biex juru li verament ser jahdmu u jiddixxiplina ruhhom, ghax jekk jigri hekk biss il-pubbliku jdur favur il-kawza taghhom. Altrimenti ser nibqghu f'sistema ta' kaos..... b'detriment ghalprodott turistiku Malti.

G Micallef (4 weeks, 1 day ago)

The sooner the horse-drawn cabs are out of the city centre the better. The drivers believe that they are 'untouchables' . I wonder how much income they declare in their tax returns!? I am a frequent visitor to Valletta and their attitude is deplorable. They hassle every foreigner who passes nearby and they charge exorbitant fees. Most of them look like loafers. What about the mess the horses leave behind them in every street coming to and in Valletta?

Franco Farrugia (4 weeks, 1 day ago)

It's a shame that in all this, the plight and the wellbeing of the horses in question is not being discussed. We only care about what hits us as human beings, such as space, money earned, livelihood, stench, damage to cobblestones, etc ...

What about the wellbeing of the horses in question?

What about time-frames within which karozzini can work?

What about proper shelters for the horses?

And then, what about a proper insurance policy for the karozzini?

What about their paying VAT?

What about the prices that they give to the tourists, their clients?

And the general service that they give? And are drivers properly trained, tested and licensed?

These are some of the questions that should be asked.

Nobody is against karozzini in our streets - even if for the drivers, sometimes they are quite a problem due to congestion of traffic (a minor issue). But like everybody else, they need to be regulated. At the moment, they are not and historically every single entity was afraid of confronting the issue, the Police included, due to lack of proper regulations.