

The Museum of Modern Art

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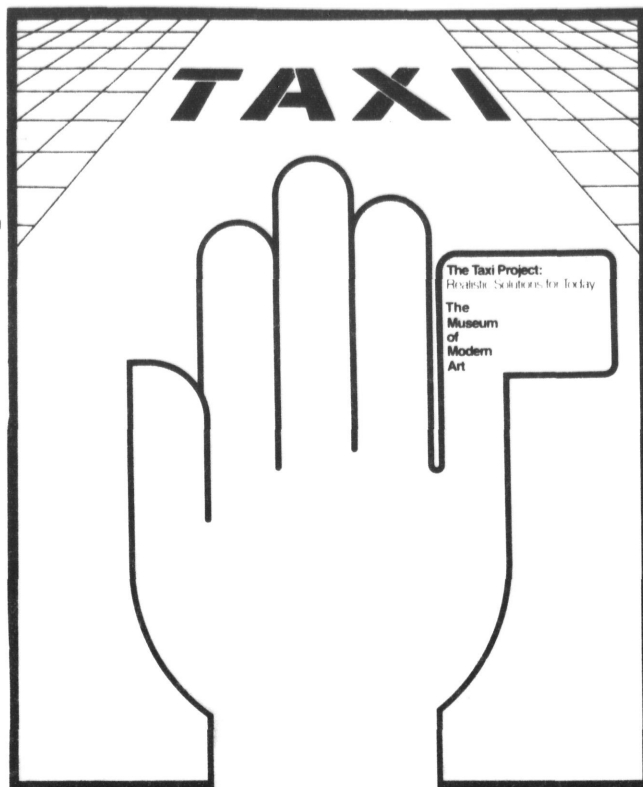
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"Taxis are the unsung heroes of urban transportation" says Emilio Ambasz, Curator of Design and Director of the exhibition. "Their industry is an important part of the national transit system, and a key factor in inter-urban movement. In the U.S., approximately 170,000 vehicles serve 2.5 billion passengers yearly, and are the only form of public transportation in more than 3,400 communities. The taxi prototypes, the outcome of the Museum's Taxi Project, are practical and realistic solutions that industry can produce at reasonable prices and that can be operated economically. The taxis, specially designed for meeting urban traffic conditions, could improve the quality of life in the urban environment, for they would use less energy, reduce air pollution, and cut traffic congestion, as well as provide safe and comfortable accommodations for passengers and luggage."



THE TAXI PROJECT: REALISTIC SOLUTIONS FOR TODAY

Five newly designed taxis, each roomier than the famous London cab, will go on public view at The Museum of Modern Art June 18. The purpose of this important project and exhibition is:

- To produce with the cooperation of the automobile industry, at a reasonable cost, a taxi vehicle which would better serve the needs of the taxi industry, the drivers, and the passengers;
- To propose an expanded role for taxis as a supplement to existing mass transportation, in response to the need for an alternative to conventional transit and the private automobile;
- To demonstrate that "paratransit" vehicles -- taxis, jitneys, dial-a-rides, subscription services, etc. -- are vital to the community in terms of the economy, the environment and the conservation of energy, as well as efficiency and convenience.

Conceived and directed by Emilio Ambasz, Curator of Design, The Taxi Project: Realistic Solutions for Today, was made possible by grants from Mobil Oil Corporation and the Urban Mass Transportation Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation. The exhibition runs through September 7.

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At the Museum's invitation, two American and two European car manufacturers produced new working prototypes of taxicabs, based on specifications developed by the Museum and the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission. The American manufacturers, American Machine and Foundry, and Steam Power Systems, both of California, worked under a contract from the U.S. Department of Transportation. The European companies are Volvo and Volkswagen. A third European company, Alfa Romeo, adopted the Museum's Design Specifications for developing -- on its own -- a taxi for the European market. This prototype is exhibited hors concours. The familiar London cab, long considered by many as the most comfortable taxi, is also being shown.

The taxis are presented in the galleries against a background of New York City's night skyline. Painted on the gallery walls, the skyline contains "billboards" on which color slides are projected showing the taxis operating on city streets: how they can be easily entered by passengers juggling large packages, by people in wheelchairs, by mothers with baby strollers; how the driver in his protected compartment is able to communicate with passengers.

As a reminder of the role taxis have played around the world for hundreds of years, the exhibition includes photographs and drawings of historical cabs.

The accompanying publication, by Emilio Ambasz, emphasizes the present importance of taxis in the American public transportation system and outlines various proposals for more extensive uses, such as jitneys, dial-a-rides, and subscription services, and discusses forms of financial assistance for the industry. The 160-page volume includes statements written by each of the five engineering and design teams of the participating manufacturers who have produced taxi prototypes; illustrated with numerous diagrams and black-and-white and color photographs.

Background of the Project:

Despite the fact that in the United States taxis transport almost 70 percent more passengers than all rapid transit systems combined, and although recent innovative experiments here and abroad have demonstrated potential uses of taxis, the design of

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this vehicle has been almost universally neglected. The Museum, with the aid of the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission, engineering consultants and representatives of New York City taxi fleet owners as well as private taxi owners, developed a Manual of Design Specifications for an urban vehicle that would provide for the safety and comfort of the driver, ease of communication with passengers, and ease of loading and unloading baggage including wheelchairs, and which would reduce pollution and traffic congestion.

All major manufacturers of motor vehicles in the U.S., and European manufacturers with production facilities in this country, were invited to design taxis meeting these specifications. American manufacturers declined, but the U.S. Department of Transportation made funds available to the two California companies which produced 3-4 passenger prototypes operating on steam propulsion plants. Volvo, now building a 8,000-car capacity assembly plant in Virginia, designed a 3-4 passenger prototype with a complete new body and a diesel engine. Volkswagen, whose factory in this country will be ready in the late 1970s, utilized the Volkswagen camper as the basis for a 4-5 passenger prototype equipped with a new hybrid propulsion system.

The Museum's Design Specifications stressed a pragmatic approach to design. The immediate goal was to create realistic cabs which are economical to operate and maintain; comfortable and safe, and aimed to reduce both pollution and traffic congestion. Among the factors the participants were asked to consider in designing their working prototypes were the safety and comfort of the driver, ease of communication with passenger and ease of loading and unloading baggage. From the point of view of fleet owners, the new designs were to be more efficient and economical to operate and maintain. From the point of view of the passenger, they were to be more comfortable and efficient, roomy enough to allow entrance for a mother with a baby carriage or a handicapped person in a wheelchair. From the point of view of the city, the prototypes had to be designed with the objective of significantly reducing pollution and traffic congestion.

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The taxi vehicles presented at the Museum have successfully answered the strict requirements set by the Design Specifications Manual. The pronounced height and squareness of the vehicles in the Taxi Project exhibition are the consequence of the extremely rigorous standards and restrictions set by the Manual.

The Museum's intent is to call attention to the fact that if the taxi's importance as a public service were recognized, and if the cab were adequately financed and regulated, it could also be made to serve the needs of the handicapped, the old, and the poor who live around the core of central cities, in areas neglected by rail and bus transportation.

The Museum's long-range goal was to demonstrate that "if taxicabs and jitney services were assigned a more important role in urban transit, considerable improvement could be brought about by a comparatively small investment. The impact of such changes would be visible in a short time, and have positive effects throughout the city structure. It would not involve heavy investments in equipment and material, or urban expropriations for motorways and rights of way, with all the concomitant aspects of social disruption common to highway construction in urban areas. An improved and expanded range of taxi services would, moreover, provide a wider set of transit choices. It is clearly the most immediate and economical move which can be taken to improve public transportation in our cities and suburbs" Mr. Ambasz asserts.

THE TAXI PROJECT: REALISTIC SOLUTIONS FOR TODAY, by Emilio Ambasz, with accompanying essays by G.N. Georgano, Martin Wohl and Brian Richards, statements by the five engineering and design teams of the participating manufacturers who have produced prototypes for The Taxi Project. 176 pages; 236 illustrations (12 in color). \$12.00. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Photographs, slides, additional press information, review copies available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, or Linda Gordon, Associate Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019.
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