

## Positive Spin on Parking

“It has been a boyhood dream of mine to work in the parking industry” is not a phrase that has ever passed my lips. But here I am, Marketing Executive at Alpha Parking, the independent parking consultancy company; a job that has caused much mirth amongst my friend’s and family, with jokes a plenty being conjured up on nights out at the pub, over the dinner table, via e-mail and Facebook, pretty much through every medium of communication – carrier pigeon has yet to be used but I wouldn’t put it past them. Their jokes and jibes are often amusing, sometimes tedious, but mostly show an ignorance of the importance the industry plays in the day to day running of British life; and of course it has its perks.

The parking industry has been around for many decades and, through the growth in the use of cars, has become vital to the way this country works. Though parking is seen as low down on the list of life priorities faced by people in Britain, it does have important repercussions. There are now more than thirty two million cars in Britain which accounts to around one for every two people, which is a huge amount of cars if you consider that around 20% of the population is under the legal driving age. All these cars need to be stored somewhere, with an estimated 96% of all cars in the UK being parked at anyone time. Adequate parking facilities and management, therefore, pays a large part in battling the congestion on our roads and in our cities.

Many outside the industry would advocate an anarchistic approach to parking where responsibility falls onto each individual to park appropriately. In theory this is a nice idea, in practice it doesn’t work. If people parked with due consideration to others there would be no need for parking restrictions. Given the chance, however, frustrated drivers in a hurry will quite happily double park, park on a pavement or even drive straight through a shop window if it meant that they would be home in time for Eastenders. Maybe the last one is an over exaggeration, but a free for all parking system will never work. It is, therefore, extremely necessary to bring order to the roads of Britain, something that the parking industry strives to do. And anyway, are we in a position to be encouraging car use?

Global warming and its effect on the environment are high on the political agenda. The coalition government recently set out its aim to meet the challenges described by the Environment Audit Committee’s (EAC) inquiry on Adapting to Climate Change published in March of this year by making it a high priority for this country to reduce its carbon footprint. Surely one major way of doing this is to encourage the use of public transport, car share schemes and ultimately discourage multiple car families. Is it therefore not a good thing that there exists an industry whose sole purpose is to manage and regulate parking controls in Britain?



As a country we have to concede that though we are a large industrialised nation, we are a small island whose population cannot continue to consume the resources we do. Recent research by Global Footprint Network place Britain 31<sup>st</sup> in a list of countries 'ecological footprint' – the amount of land and sea each person needs to provide the food, clothes and other products they consume. Though the study shows that Britain has improved – down from 15<sup>th</sup> two years ago – it does show that there is still a long way to go. Car use should not be considered a basic human right and regulations on parking should go some way to discourage this. The parking industry comes under constant scrutiny from the public and many sectors of the media as parking restrictions are seen as draconian rules that impede on the general public's livelihoods. Although car use aids business and tourism and helps to keep the economy moving forward (something that is obviously needed in these times), it should not be seen as a given. Those that park on public land should pay for the privilege; especially as the income produced helps local authorities improve other transport and highways services.

Parking enforcement is viewed as solely a source for local authorities to make money. Obviously this is not the case, but the revenue produced does go some way to providing local authorities with a usable income. The general public often forget that public services do not come free. With heavy cuts due to be made to the public sector, parking enforcement offers a way for local authority transport and highways departments to become semi self-sufficient. In short, the parking industry is not the evil money making monster that it is made out to be and is extremely important to the smooth running of the nation. It is also has its perks.

There is no other industry that would result in me attending the premiere awards ceremony in the country. No, not the BAFTAs; the British Parking Awards. The 'Parkies', as I like to call them, showcases the best of the industry: a lively group of individuals who take pride in what they do. The parking industry deserves a pat on the back and the British Parking Awards offers this. It also shows that although the people who work within it do some important work within this country, they do not take themselves too seriously. So in answer to the question posed in the title of this piece, no we don't teach people how to park cars, we help alleviate congestion on the roads, reduce the environmental cost of bad car management and provide funding for local authorities to carry out the necessary public services that help the country run smoothly.

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