

CABiT signals clean, green turn for Melbourne taxis

August 24, 2015 - 6:52AM

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Harry Katsiabani, the director of Cabit, which is rolling out a fleet of Green, environmentally friendly hybrid cabs. *Photo: JasonSouth*

"A big green taxi come and took away my old man" isn't quite what Joni Mitchell sang, but it could have been had she lived in Melbourne in 2015.

More than 400 lime-coloured taxis will hit Melbourne streets, breaking the monotony of yellow at the city's cab ranks.

Taxi industry upstart CABiT will paint its fleet of low-emission cabs bright green.

It hopes the distinctive look will help it take on industry giants 13CABS and Silver Top Taxi.

CABiT director Harry Katsiabani said 22 cabs had undergone the fruity makeover during a three-month trial and the entire fleet would turn green within the next 12 months.

CABiT, which was formed by Mr Katsiabani and five other taxi operators last year, said it offered a superior service because of cab ownership, driver training and lower cost.

Mr Katsiabani said the colourful cabs needed to be distinctive to capitalise on those differences.

"It's got to be distinctively different, so people understand that green is superior, cleaner and cheaper," he said.

"I think people need to understand that there is a point of difference and now the customer has got a choice."

As well as being green in colour, the taxis will be green in nature, fitted with liquefied petroleum gas hybrid engines.

The hybrid vehicles have rechargeable batteries that kick in when the cab is driving at low speed, increasing fuel efficiency.

"I think our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will laugh at us for what we've done with fossil fuels . . . [so] if we can do our bit for the environment, then that's important," Mr Katsiabani said.

The fuel savings will help to offset the cost of paying drivers a higher wage.

The company hopes it will also attract customers concerned about the environment.

Mr Katsiabani said the green taxis would be 5 per cent cheaper than standard taxis.



Illustration: Matt Golding

"Since we own the entire value chain, we are able to discount the price and offer our drivers a better reward than normal," he said.

All Victoria's cabs were painted yellow under former premier Jeff Kennett's taxi reforms in the 1990s to make the vehicles easier to identify. However, the restriction has been rolled back in recent years.

White taxis have been on the road in regional areas since 2013 and Melbourne operators have been able to apply to the Victorian Taxi Services Commission for permission to use a colour other than "Victorian Taxi Yellow" since July 2014.

Several premium service taxis have since been painted silver.

Mr Katsiabanis owns Taxi Link, Australia's largest independent taxi company.

Taxi Services Commission spokesman Jamie Collins said allowing different coloured taxis would help operators differentiate themselves and help customers to choose which company they used.

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