

London Taxis Made in China

John Belmont:

London taxis are as British as bowler hats and Big Ben. But the latest models coming off this assembly line are unlikely to ever touch an English road. The meticulous, hand-welded construction used in these vehicles has forced London Taxi International to seek ways to cut costs and expand production. This sprawling factory just outside Shanghai was the perfect pick.

Paul Stowe:

Well, China's obviously the-the largest-growing and, er, well, is the second-largest auto market in the world. Um, but we also get advantages from our supply base here. Er, we're looking at resourcing all the parts to China, which adds advantages for the U.K. companies so that they can actually purchase lower cost parts and be more competitive in the taxi market, both in the U.K. and around the world.

John Belmont:

Production for black cabs that will drive the streets of London will continue at a factory in Coventry, England, but the Chinese-built models will go to destinations like Singapore, Dubai, and Moscow: places that covet the image associated with the high-topped taxis. And by the way, that tall roof was designed with a specific purpose in mind.

Paul Stowe:

I-I don't carry it everywhere, but I do use it as a prop to explain why we have such a high roof in the vehicle. And it all generates from the original history of the vehicle and the culture within London that the vehicle had to be, er, accessible for gentlemen to wear their bowler hats without moving while traveling. So, er, to explain what a bowler hat is in China, I always carry one round me.

John Belmont:

London Taxi International will retain control of the operations, assuring the sophistication and elegance remain inherently British. As for the bowler hats...

Paul Stowe:

I actually, um, purchased the bowler hat in the U.K., in London. Um, but I was surprised to see, when I actually looked at the label, that it was made in China.

John Belmont:

John Belmont, The Associated Press.

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