

Lawsuit Goes for a Ride

By Reg P. Wydeven
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One of my buddies at work has a Porsche Boxter, and it is a totally sweet ride. It's a convertible, so there's nothing better on a summer day than hopping in it and going for a cruise while the wind blows your hair.

However, this summer hasn't been exactly great for convertibles. Because of all the rain we've had, the top on the Boxter has been up more than it's been down this year. A few weeks ago we went out for lunch, so, of course, I was quick to call dibs on riding in the Porsche.

Needless to say, it was a rainy day and the top was up. I didn't realize just how much more difficult it was to crawl into the car with the top up versus being down. Things were compounded by the fact that his petite wife left the seat way up from the night before. After about 15 minutes of contorting my body in ways I didn't think possible, I was able to squeeze in. As a result, I decided I must be a yogi and I have begun teaching yoga classes.

After my lunch ride, on the way home that night in my roomy minivan, I felt like I was sitting alone in a gymnasium. This experience was just another reminder for me of so many aspects of my life that I try not to, but certainly still do, take for granted. The recently filed lawsuit against Uber just hits that point home harder for me.

Earlier this month, Disability Rights Advocates, a non-profit watchdog group, filed a lawsuit against Uber in the New York State Supreme Court in Manhattan. According to the suit, the ride-hailing service discriminates against disabled passengers in New York City. The organization claims that not enough vehicles are equipped to transport passengers that use wheelchairs.

According to the complaint, "Having grown rapidly since it began operating in New York in 2011, Uber provides hundreds of thousands of rides a day in New York City, but for riders who need wheelchair-accessible vehicles, it provides vastly inferior service, or in many cases, no service at all."

While the company's UberWAV service offers wheelchair-accessible vehicles, Disability Rights Advocates asserts that of the 58,000 Uber vehicles dispatched in the city, there are fewer than 100 that can accommodate passengers in wheelchairs. Uber contends that they have nearly 200 such vehicles in the city. The lawsuit maintains that while the wheelchair-friendly vehicles are giving rides to non-disabled passengers, disabled riders must "face extended wait times, or are still denied access to the service altogether."

While the advocacy group is not seeking monetary damages, their lawsuit does request that Uber be forced to "develop and implement a remedial plan to ensure full and equal access to its services for riders who require accessible transportation."

Alix Anfang, an Uber spokeswoman, countered by saying, "Uber's technology has expanded access to reliable transportation options for all riders, including those with disabilities and has enabled people with disabilities to earn income in new ways." She went on to say that, "While there is certainly more work to be done, we will continue advocating for a solution that offers affordable, reliable transportation to those who need a wheelchair accessible vehicle."

For our disabled population's sake, I hope Anfang's promise is true. In the meantime, if a disabled passenger can't find a wheelchair-friendly Uber driver, I hope they get one with a Porsche Boxter. While it may be tricky getting in and out, the passenger will look extremely cool on their commute. And they'll get to their destination pretty fast.

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