

Yellow Cab Cleans Up Image Of Charlotte Cab Market

By Russell Clark
Post Staff Writer



Al Wheeler (left) and Marvin Conley (right) are opening new doors in the Charlotte cab market. Photo By Russell Clark

If you have cruised through the Queen City and noticed many shiny yellow cars zipping back and forth, then you've probably caught a glance at the pride of the New Yellow Cab Company.

Centered in Houston, Texas, the new transportation firm is located at 5006 Beatties Ford Rd. and is gearing up to erase negative image that the cab industry has created in Charlotte.

"We are going to chance the negative images and misconceptions by upgrading the cab industry in Charlotte, and our appearance, mentions Marvin Conley, executive vice president and general manager. "We currently have about 130 cars operating in our fleet and most of them are 1985-87 models. If a care is wrecked or has a missing hub cap, we ask the driver to take it off the streets until it can be fixed on replaced," Conley continues.

"Our drivers are also asked to be clean and wear standard work clothing. This helps us build a better image of the city because the first thing that a visitor to the city sees is a taxi and a driver."

"Their vehicles are in great condition," confirms Al Austin, cab inspector for the City. "Most of them, are '85 Plymouth along with some '87s. They seem to be taking a step ahead and making the cab market more competitive by adding more cars."

How safe are cab drivers at night?

"Since a lot of our drivers work at night, we have a new "Taxis On Patrol" (TOPS) program," enlightens Al Wheeler, vice president



Marvin Conley, executive vice president and general manager of the new Yellow Cab Company, poses with Mayor Harvey Gantt as he prepares to cut the ribbon at the company's recent grand opening ceremony. Photo By David Morrison

of public affairs and cooperate sales. "We have an agreement with 7 Eleven stores to allow our drivers to sit in their parking lots at night. This not only give our drivers a nice light place to wait for calls, but it can also help convenience store operators," Wheeler points out. "A person will think twice about holding up a store if they see a cab sitting out front because all of our cars have dispatch radios and many have telephones."

The company has also inserted a Mr. Safety Program. "We allow an undercover police officer to ride

in a cab to see if the driver is following the standard operations procedures," Wheeler asserts. "If the driver follows the procedures, he gets \$25 from the officer and gets to keep the fare, but if he fails, he receives a sheet that is filled out by the officer telling the driver what they need to work on."

The Special Services Department at the firm is currently bidding on a contract to transport social service recipients in Charlotte. "We want to provide immediate transportation for elderly and handicapped people so they don't have to be placed on a long waiting list," says Wheeler.

In January, a new City Ordinance called for an increase in cab

fares. The rate shot-up to \$1.25 from the moment you get in a cab and it charges \$.10 for every one and one-tenth of a mile. The ordinance also created a surcharge for persons coming downtown from the airport, according to Conley. "I think the new ordinance will hurt the cab industry in the long run because of the \$2 per person surcharge," he voices. "We feel that the \$10 flat rate is enough to charge passengers coming in from the airport. If seven people wanted a round trip ride from the airport to downtown, we have to charge them about \$50. This will hurt us because some of them can rent vans for that much."

In a continuing effort to make

driving safer, the company has implemented a Don't Drive Drunk program. "The program is designed to jeep people off the road who have had too much to drink," says Wheeler. "We give each of the major bars and hotels vouchers to give to people whom they feel cannot drive home safely. To be safe, they call us and we give them a free ride home."

The firm, is 85% minority-owned and has a cab ownership program. With \$500 down, you can purchase a new Plymouth Grand Fury and have it financed

in two years. Your total weekly payments on the car would cost \$278 per week with insurance and warranty.

The firm also plans to build on its site and offer defensive driving courses for drives at the other cab companies. "We're going to become the school of cab companies in Charlotte," Wheeler projects with enthusiasm. "By offering our defensive driving course and other services to other cab companies, we're going to do our part in becoming a viable business in the community."

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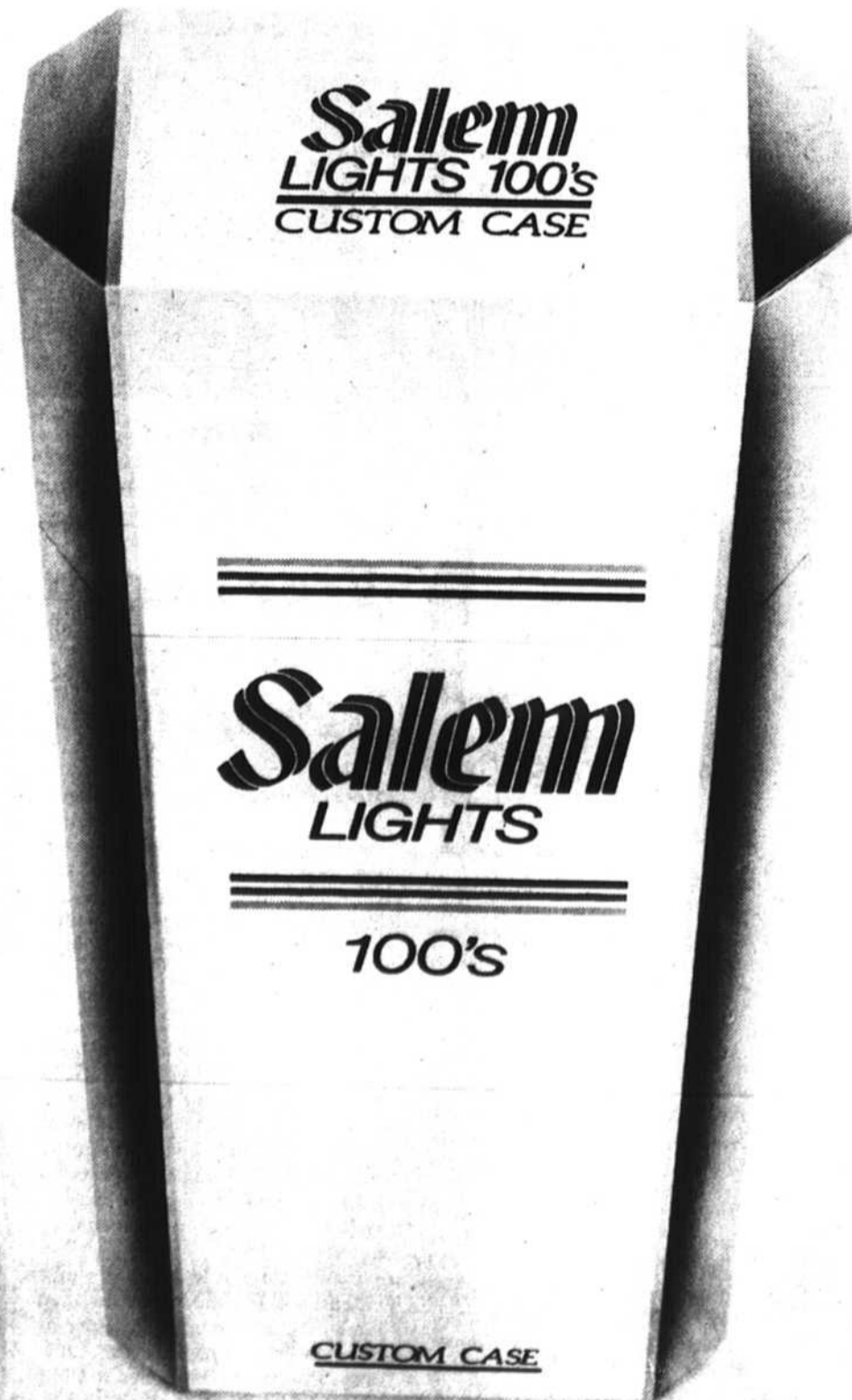


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