

FIRST PERSON

# What happens when a Boomer tries Uber for the first time

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*First Person* is a daily personal piece submitted by readers. Have a story to tell? See our guidelines at [tgam.ca/essayguide](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/first-person/article-what-happens-when-a-boomer-tries-uber-for-the-first-time/).

I don't adapt to change easily. I still have a land line, a Rolodex and a functional fountain pen. I even write in cursive. I thought we had it all with the invention of the sticky note. I am especially uncomfortable with technology. Unlike my kids, I do not constantly look at my cellphone. And I did not undergo my recent inaugural Uber ride lightly.

I needed to get to the subway station. I was going to take a taxi but my son Daniel discretely and with subtlety, suggested I try Uber. He said, "Go Uber, Dad. Enter the 21st century."

I had my concerns about using what I considered to be a non-taxi taxi. To me, if I were to pay for a ride in a car, the car had to have a beacon on the roof. As well there should be a meter inside. I was somewhat flexible in that I would not worry about the cab's colour though it would add reassurance if it were yellow.

After some hemming and hawing, I asked him to order one for me. He told me I had to download an app on my mobile. Unlike a taxi, you cannot just call a simple phone number.

It did not take long for me to get stumped in the downloading process. Fortunately, my 10-year-old granddaughter Laya came to the rescue.

I opened the app and tried to order the Uber ride. I keyed in my destination "Finch station." I thought that would suffice. Those magic words after all work with a taxi.

The screen gave me three price options: Uber X, pool or express pool.

Express pool was the cheapest. The catch however read, "Starts and ends with a short walk." Those words sounded a bit broad, arbitrary and uncertain. To save \$4.23 I did not want to risk having to hike to Timbuktu.

I chose Uber X, which was a solo ride. Why not go wild!

Once I confirmed the order some interesting activity took place on my cellphone. A map appeared and I saw what looked like a bug moving around, getting closer to my house. It was my Uber ride. Information appeared about the driver's name, Henry, identifying his car make and colour and the licence plate number. It said he would be arriving in two minutes, and the ETA to my destination was 10 minutes.

This was certainly in contrast to the last taxi ride I ordered in Manhattan, where the cab failed to show up altogether following which I telephoned the company and the dispatcher said to me irately, "Hey bud. It's raining. What's your problem?"

The Uber car pulled up at my house and the driver and I looked at one another. I had mixed feelings about getting in.

I needed reassurance. I queried in a shaky voice, "Henry?" He nodded yes. That was the most reassurance I could expect. I entered the vehicle.

I looked around in the car expecting to see the driver's headshot and identification details. However, this was not a taxi. Then again some of those driver mug shots are a bit frightening, looking like the cabbie just made bail. Not surprisingly, there was no button inside for the passenger to press, triggering an exterior light with a message, "Help! Uber is kidnapping me!"

The driver was a bit of a chatty sports fan, raving about the Toronto teams. I did not want to risk disturbing my ambivalent mood by engaging him and telling him what I thought about those Leafs.

The ride took about 11 minutes, being almost the amount of time noted in the ETA.

Upon arrival, I reached for my wallet and Henry reminded me this was a cashless ride; Uber was debiting my Visa card. With one foot out the door, my mood started to elevate, and I was bursting with vim and vigour. I felt like Rocky Balboa standing on top of the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. I responded to Henry, “Of course, Henry. Isn’t today’s technology awesome!”

My ice-breaker voyage with Uber was a success. I almost wanted to skip that subway ride and take another Uber back home. I pranced down the stairs to the subway station. Unlike Rocky, I did not run back up and raise my hands over my head triumphantly.

After the ride, Uber sent me an e-mail whereby I could rate the driver, on a scale of one to five.

All things considered, I gave him a four. It wasn’t perfect but certainly a lot more than most of us would give the Leafs. Or even the Blue Jays.

I went the distance. Bring on the next challenge. But I definitely am not ready for AI.

*Marcel Strigberger lives in Thornhill, Ont.*

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