



268 – Renault Dauphine

Dinky's Renault Dauphine minicab was produced from 1962 to 1966. Some of the toys were traditional empty shells, but others had plastic interiors. Some had Meccano ads on their sides and others had ads for Kenwood food products, although the car at left seems to have a Meccano ad on one side and a Kenwood ad on the other.

This car was made in Dinky's Liverpool factory but it was the sibling of the Renault Dauphine produced in the Bobigny plant, outside Paris, from 1957 to 1962 (nos. 24E and 524).

In bringing out the minicab version Dinky was capitalising on a major event in taxi history – the London minicab invasion of 1961.



Prior to the 1960s the London taxi trade was monopolised by purpose-built taxis like the [Austin FX3](#) and [FX4](#). There was also a private hire trade that offered what were essentially limousine services – upscale cars and drivers for upscale customers. Private hire cars could not solicit customers on the street or on cab stands. Cars had to be pre-booked, in person or by phone, from the company office.

A loophole in existing taxi legislation left an opening for entrepreneurs who used ordinary sedans to provide cut-rate taxi service.

The biggest minicab operator was Michael Gotla, the managing director of Welbeck Motors, a car rental and private hire service. In June, 1961 he imported 200 bright red Renault Dauphines from France and sold advertising space on their sides, trunks and roofs.

The appearance of the Dauphines was the flashpoint that ignited the London Taxi War of 1961. Gotla drivers were encouraged to pick up passengers on the street, but to have them use the cab's two-way radio to call Welbeck and "book" the trip. Welbeck would then "dispatch" the driver.

Other drivers simply operated illegally, relying on the lack of law enforcement in the face of so many offenders.

The reaction of London taxi drivers, who are tightly regulated, was outrage. Gotla had announced his minicab plans well in advance of the launch date, and on March 8, 1961 some 2,500 London taxi drivers held a two-hour protest meeting in central London, blocking traffic with their parked cabs.

In 1962 a court decision decreed that the mere fact that the Gotla's gaudily painted Dauphines were travelling or parking on city streets meant that they were plying for hire illegally. Gotla shut down his minicab operation and resigned from Welbeck.

Of course, minicabs did not go away, but it was not until 2001 that they were regulated. Since the 1960s minicabs and traditional London taxis have grudgingly coexisted and, more recently, have even joined forces to fight incursions by illegal minicabs and Uber.

Picture Sources (page 1)

All pictures – fripau ([Link](#)).

Other Notes

“Taxis of the United Kingdom,” Wikipedia ([Link](#)).

Andrew Roberts, “London’s original minicab wars, 60 years on,” The Telegraph, March 5, 2021 ([Link](#)).

“Do You Remember - The Renault Dauphine Minicabs,” Lancaster Insurance Services, April 24, 2019 ([Link](#)).

