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## Have you Ubered yet? A look at Uber and taxi service in Fort Wayne

By Beth Behrendt, for The News-Sentinel  
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Uber came to Fort Wayne in June. “Finally!” said college students home for the summer. “About time!” said business travelers accustomed to using it in larger cities. “I’ve heard of it. ... But how does it work?” said me; and maybe others like me who spend an inordinate amount of time in their laundry rooms or in their cars ferrying their children around.

Uber, if you don’t already know, is an “on-demand” car service available in more than 150 U.S. cities and 60 countries worldwide. All transactions happen through the app on your phone. Request the ride with a couple of taps on your phone. The request is automatically sent to the nearest Uber driver. Payment is handled through the app: no cash is exchanged, nor does the driver ever see your credit card.

Specific instructions are outlined on uber.com, but I didn’t read them. I figured it couldn’t be that difficult if partying college students and three-martini-dinner businessmen managed to use it all the time. It took me about two minutes to download the app, set up my account and request my first ride — which pulled up exactly six minutes later!

I used Uber a number of times and took a few taxi rides from different companies for comparison. Here are some things you may want to know if your are new to Uber:

Wondering when exactly a taxi will arrive stresses me out. On the Uber app, you can see the Uber car’s location on the map and watch the ETA minutes tick down. I got a big kick out of this feature; and (bonus!) embarrassed my teenager in front of his friends, waving my phone at them in excitement: “Oh, look! It’s turning into the neighborhood! Look! Here it comes!” Of course, cool people don’t stand there watching the map. A notification chimes on your phone when the driver arrives.

I requested Uber in the middle of the day, for dinner reservations, and late at night (“late” meaning 11ish — see above re: laundry and children). Uber is available 24 hours a day for true night owls. I never had to wait more than six minutes to be picked up. Taxis generally took 20 to 45 minutes to arrive; not to mention the couple of times I called a taxi company and got no answer.

All my Uber trips around the southwest part of town or into downtown ran \$8-\$15; about one-third less than the same taxi rides cost.

Uber drivers are “independent contractors” driving their own cars. The cars have to meet certain Uber requirements (see the website if you are interested in being a driver). The cars I rode in were all nice, newish and generally cleaner than any taxi I’ve ever been in. It was also kind of fun to ride around in a variety of different cars and talk to the drivers about them. (See: perhaps too much time in laundry room, etc.)

The drivers were all friendly and professional. I met a school teacher making extra dough on his summer break; a woman who runs a business out of her home and drives when she has a couple of free hours; a mom who manages a local business franchise and drives on her days off; and a retired truck driver who just likes driving.

Tipping? Uber.com says: “there’s no need to tip your driver.” When asked, drivers toed the company’s line: “You are not required to tip.” Then I read an article (helpfully titled “7 Things You Do That Annoy Your Uber Driver”) that said you should tip. So I started giving the drivers a buck or two and saying “I’m not taking no for an answer” as I got out of the car. No one threw the money back out the window at me.

Uber has a few features that made me feel very safe:

- It does extensive background checks (details on its website) before accepting a driver.



Courtesy of Beth Behrendt  
Beth Behrendt is a freelancer for The News-Sentinel.

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- When you confirm your ride request, a picture of the driver with his/her name and the car's make and model shows in the app so you can verify you are getting into an official Uber car.
- Uber prompts you to rate your driver as soon as the ride is over, so you can immediately express any concerns.
- Drivers are required to have their own auto insurance, but once you get in, Uber's "industry leading" commercial coverage kicks in.
- Use the "share ETA" option in the app — it sends a text with a link to your trip map so that your friends or family can follow your route and see when you will be arriving

Lastly, the fact that it could so easily take a lot of people off the road who maybe should not be on it in the first place, makes me think it could be one of the biggest public-safety benefits around.

At dinner one night, another customer apparently overheard me telling our server and my friends that I used Uber to get there. Later, when I stepped outside to meet the Uber car, the other customer, leaning heavily against a pillar, hailed me loudly: "Hey! Hey! Is that your Uber? That was fast!"

"I know!" I said. "You should try it!" (I sincerely hope he did.)

This column is the commentary of the writer and does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of The News-Sentinel. Beth Behrendt is a Fort Wayne residents and writer.

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