

# Women-only taxis

## ForShe cabs for women who don't like to ride with male drivers

By Anveep Dhingra  
in New Delhi

AN ALL-women radio taxi service was flagged off in Delhi on Friday in an attempt to make travelling safer for the fairer sex in the Capital.

Christened ForShe, the 24-hour service with 20 vehicles will be fully operational in Delhi-NCR from April 1.

In the first week, the cabs operated by ORIX Auto Infrastructure Services Limited will be available only till 10 pm. To avail of the service, one has to dial 4422222 or 4433322.

Several cabbies have already been selected to drive the cabs, which more or less match the international safety norms for women taxi drivers.

Each cab has a thick separation between the front seats and back. The divider, made of polymer-type material, has a small rectangular hole in the middle for the driver to communicate with the passengers.

This apart, there's a small metallic 'grill' wedged between the driver's seat and the left-hand front seat.

The drivers include two housewives, two BA students and a free-lancing 34-year-old who "has no family obligations". When asked about their safety in a city known for its notorious citizens raise against women, they declared nonchalantly that they

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were not afraid to take up "the challenge" — which includes late-night shifts.

Most of these women come from the economically weaker section of society and have been imparted a two-month training in driving.

The women have been adequately trained and groomed. Apart from being trained to meet any emergency, they have been trained in martial arts too.

"It is an exclusive driving service for women and their families. It is safe," said the country's first woman IPS officer Kiran Bedi after launching the service. In fact, the taxi service is Bedi's brainchild.

Equipped with a hi-tech GPS system for navigation, the cabs have a "panic button" that will alert the operator in case of any untoward incident.

The cabs are fitted with an electronic fare meter and passengers will have to pay the standard charge of Rs 15 per km. Another unique feature will be its feeder service to Metro stations across the city.

A similar service in Mumbai has been running successfully. "We have 20 cabs running in Mumbai since February 14 last year. We expect the same response in the Capital," Bevatkar, managing director of ForShe, said.

The service has also been touted as a small but bold step towards women's emancipation. It's another marker that women make up only one per cent of New York City's 44,280 taxi drivers, also known as cabs.

It will be less than one per cent in Delhi. But then, what the heck! A beginning has been made.



### KAVITA KUMAR

The 29-year-old chose to become a driver to prove a point: women drivers are as good as men. "I have always heard men say female drivers are careless and silly. I want to prove them wrong. I believe women make excellent drivers," she says. "I am pursuing a master in arts through distance learning. By driving a cab, I can earn while I learn," she adds. Doesn't she feel threatened by the harrowing experiences of drivers? "No," she says. "I have been trained in self-defence."



### ANITA YADAV

"If women can serve in the armed forces, can work as doctors and lawyers, then why can't they drive taxis? The society in which we live peddles stereotypes. However, I am not bothered," says Anita, 20. The adventure that driving a cab offers prompted her to take up the job. She loves being behind the wheel despite the dangers involved. "Thanks to ForShe, I have become independent at such a young age," she says.



### PUSHPA YADAV

She is aware of the perils drivers face on the city's roads: rowdy passengers, passengers who do not pay up and drivers who scare other drivers, especially women, by dangerously swerving past them. But she brushes them off. "If I keep thinking about the risks, I would never be able to become anything. Every profession has its share of risks," she says.



### BEAUTY BANO

A housewife and mother of two children, she took up the job to support her family. "My family is not very well-off. I and my husband have two kids to support and our finances are low. I took up the job as I wanted to support my family and myself," she says. "It was a big step for me, though a necessary one. From here, life will only get better," says Bano, whose husband does petty jobs and does not earn much. Is she afraid of Delhi's unsafe roads and crimes against women? "No," she says. "We have been trained to tackle them."

### NEELAM DEVI

Before joining ForShe, she was a housewife, dividing time between raising her three daughters, cooking and watching television that she says introduced her to many successful women. She too began dreaming of achieving something, so when the offer to drive a cab on the Capital's roads came, she jumped at it. "Whenever I watched successful women on TV, I would wish the same for myself. ForShe has provided me with an opportunity to prove myself and I am really proud of myself. Now I can ensure a good future for my children," she says.



The ForShe cabs will be fitted with (1) Global Positioning System, (2) tamper-proof electronic fare meter and (3) panic button that will let the driver alert the company if she is in danger.

## STAYING SAFE ABROAD

- Safety shields dividing the front seat from the back.
- Bandit lights, also called hijack lights, are mounted on top of the car or near the front and rear bumpers. When the driver flips them on, the police will know she is in danger.
- Surveillance cameras inside cabs.
- Global Positioning System or GPS that let cab company

- track taxis on the move
- Emergency radios that allow fast communication in case of an emergency
- Cashless fare system. A cab that is equipped to work with debit and credit cards may deter cash-hungry robbers
- In the US, women cab drivers carry arms
- In Germany, they drive with a German Shepherd on the front seat