



Photographs by Stephanie Dianl for The New York Times

TO THE RESCUE Jordan Smith of Home James arrives on his folding scooter to drive a client home after a "liquid lunch."

Too Tipsy to Drive? Call In the Cavalry

Two new services send chauffeurs to ferry Angelenos who have overdone it.



By **TODD KRIEGER**

ARVIN BROWN, a television director whose credits include episodes of "Everwood" and "The Practice," had something of a problem. Leaving a party in the San Fernando Valley, 40 minutes by freeway from his home in Marina del Rey, he did not feel sober enough to drive his Jaguar. Nor did he relish calling a taxi and leaving the luxury car behind. Then he remembered Home James, a chauffeur service with a twist: you're driven home in your own car.

Mr. Brown made a call, and 20 minutes later his driver arrived, dressed in a mod suit accented by a Union Jack armband, riding a collapsible scooter. Greetings were exchanged. The driver folded the scooter into a carrying case, threw it in the trunk of the Jag and whisked Mr. Brown safely home. "It was a spur of the moment thing," Mr. Brown said later. "I've now used them several times, and it gives me a relaxed feeling not to worry about the drive home."

In this car-dependent city, where even the drive for a morning cup of coffee takes 20 minutes, the long white-knuckle trip home after an evening of martini-enhanced socializing, windows rolled down for sobering blasts of air, is an all-too-familiar ritual.

Also a dangerous one. Drunken driving has caused 7,681 accidents and 97 deaths in the last three years, and the city's efforts to crack down are well publicized. The police stake out the homes of repeat offenders to catch them coming or going under the

influence. A proposal before the City Council would make Los Angeles the first major city to seize the cars of anyone arrested while driving drunk.

Enter Home James and a rival service, Autopilots, whose clientele are aware of the consequences of drunken driving, yet often find themselves out on the town, drink in hand, following the strong imperative toward partying in the entertainment industry, and among weekend club hoppers.

"I thought if any city was tailor-made for something like this, it was L.A.," said Barrett Worland, the founder of Autopilots, who took his inspiration from similar businesses in London.

"The last thought anybody wants to have is, God, did I have one glass too many?" he added. "We're for the people who want to go out and really Wang Chung."

Or as James Gibb, the founder of Home James, put it in his own British colloquial, "Public transport here is rubbish."

Both services, which began last December, have slowly if not spectacularly caught on. Autopilots says it has driven rock stars and actors. Home James ferried guests after a birthday party for the actress Natasha Henstridge and is booked for two events during Los Angeles Fashion Week, which starts Oct. 25, including the 2 B Free show's after-party, whose host is Tara Reid.

The collapsible Di Blasi

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WHITE KNIGHT The scooter goes into the trunk, and Vicki Whicker is whisked home in her boyfriend's new BMW.