

Casual Carpool Gives Commuters Quick Access to SF

By Jennifer Wake

Getting into San Francisco during commute time can not only rattle your nerves, but can seem to take forever – at least for those not carpooling or taking mass transit. For hundreds of Lamorinda residents who work far from one of the many San Francisco BART stations, work odd hours, or who want a friendlier commute, another option has proven beneficial: the casual carpool.

A mainstay of commuting in the East Bay for more than 20 years, three main casual carpool locations in Lafayette (north of the BART station, just outside and to the right of the parking lot), Orinda (in the alley on the north side of Theater Square) and Moraga (north side of Moraga Way, west of School Street) offer Lamorinda commuters a quick and convenient way to get into the city. And during peak hours you don't have to wait long for riders, or for a ride.

At the Lafayette carpool site, Meheriar – who has been driving in casual carpools for the past four years as a way to help the environment – says the longest he's ever had to wait for passengers to fill his car is 15 minutes.

"We're saving the air," said another driver from inside her car.

Moraga resident Rose Camp Blouse is an auditor and uses the casual carpool to fit her changing schedule. "My mother told me to never hitchhike," she said as she stood at casual carpool site located at the bus stop by the Safeway store on Moraga Way, "yet this is like being chauffeured into work."

Another Moraga resident who has been using the casual carpool for the past ten years says the program helps reduce his commute time by 30 to 45 minutes because he can bypass long delays at the Bay Bridge toll plaza.

But there are rules.

Created as a mutually beneficial operation where additional riders help drivers save time and a toll, the carpools are not overseen by any specific organization and no money is exchanged.

Over the years, casual carpool etiquette has emerged. For example, there should be no more than three people per car (to maximize the number of car pools), the system is "first come, first served" so it is frowned upon to cut ahead in line, food and loud music are usually inappropriate, and drivers generally should be the ones to initiate any conversation.

A Web site called Casual Car Pool News, which is dedicated to casual carpool information (<http://www.ridenow.org/carpool/what.htm>), offers a way for commuters to post warnings about specific drivers who are reckless or not following the rules. One passenger warned North Berkeley commuters about a driver who "listens to

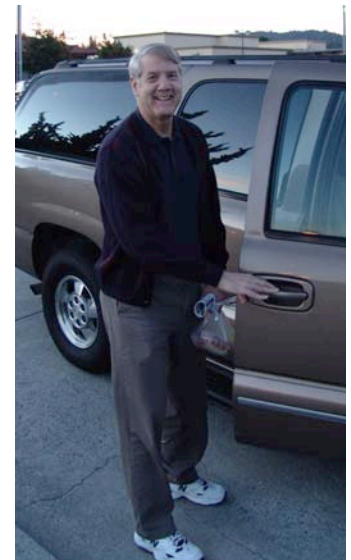
seriously conservative religious radio, hands out religious propaganda to passengers, and discusses the evil and sin of Victoria's Secret catalogues."

For most casual carpoolers in Lamorinda, however, the experience has been nothing but enjoyable.

One Orinda resident, who has participated in the casual carpool for the past 25 years and was a member of the committee in Orinda that chose the carpool site, says it works like a charm.

"I've met people from New York who feel incredulous that this system works," he said. "It's the easiest way to get into the city."

J. Lucenti contributed to this story.



Moraga resident gets a ride to SF

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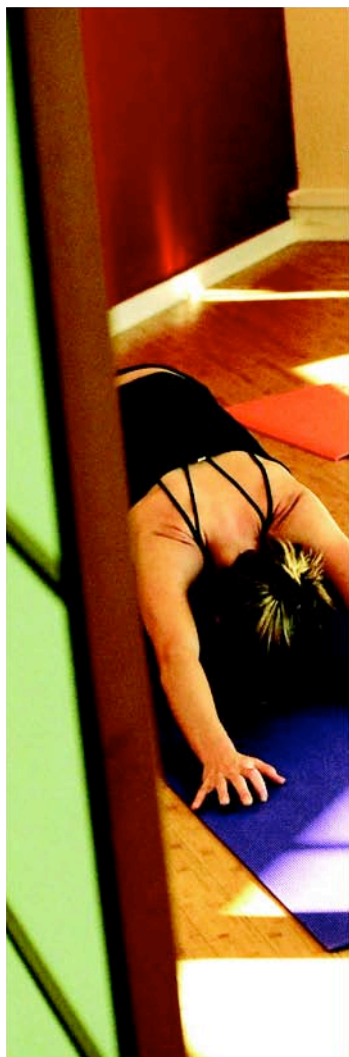
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