

## Lifestyle | Features



Regular motorcycle taxis queue for passengers without helmet or kits for safety unlike Uber-style branded motorbike taxis in Lagos. — AFP photos



ORide driver arrives on motorbike taxi to attend meeting at company headquarters, Ikeja in Lagos.



ORide driver decked out in a bib and with client on helmets in company's colors drive past motorbikes parked at the company headquarters.

## Motorbike taxi apps jostle for trade on crowded Lagos roads



ORide driver decked out in bib and helmet in company colors drives through traffic gridlock in Lagos.



Opay country manager Iniabasi Akpan speaks about his brand at the company's headquarters in Lagos.



Founder and Chief Executive Officer of MaxOkada Tayo Bamiduro poses with helmet in company color in Lagos.

Banker Yemi Adegbola used to leave his home in Lagos before 4 am each day, but would still arrive late to work because of the notorious traffic in Nigeria's biggest city. Now he says he has "dumped his car" for one of a raft of new motorbike ride hailing apps that developers hope can speed up journeys for the roughly 20 million residents of the economic capital. For years the jams-known locally as "go-slows"-have been a nightmare for Lagosians. Potholed roads, reckless driving and too many cars have helped turn the daily commute into an ordeal that often lasts for hours.

People miss appointments and business suffers as one of Africa's largest markets grinds to a standstill. Sensing an opportunity, a growing number of ride hailing services have stepped into the chaos-bringing order to the "okada" motorbike taxis that have long whizzed perilously around Lagos. First to launch was Gokada in 2018, pioneering an Uber-style system for two-wheeled transport that had already been successfully rolled out by firms elsewhere. It has since been followed by other operators like Maxokada and ORide-and the competitors are looking to overtake each other with better technology, lower prices and more services.

## 'Open market'

Before these startups, Lagosians in a hurry had to put their faith in the army of unregulated "okada" riders weaving hazardously through the city, they were seen as dangerous and blamed by the police for a rise in petty crime. The authorities clamped down and in 2012 banned the 100cc bikes from 475 roads and highways around the city. This year some 3,000 motorcycles were impounded and destroyed for violating the restrictions, police said. The ride hailing apps provide a striking difference.

Their drivers are decked out in bibs and helmets in company colors, carry safety kits with them and have more powerful bikes that can make longer trips. Passengers are charged an Uber-style tariff, and no longer have to resort to haggling each time they hail a ride. A traditional "okada" ride can cost between 50 naira (14 US cents, 12 euro centimes) and several hundred naira—depending on the distance, area and the mood of the driver. New entrant ORide kick-

started its services in May and is looking to tap into the abundant opportunities with 3,000 trained drivers.

The firm-part of the OPay online payment service-is looking to expand operations as part of a \$50 million push and already works in six other cities in Nigeria. "It's an open market in which everybody has something to offer. There's so much to cover in Nigeria," Iniabasi Akpan, OPay country manager, told AFP. Unlike other players which allow users to hail a ride both online or on the streets, passengers can only pay via the OPay app, developed by Norway's Opera Software. The firm has comprehensive insurance that covers both riders and passengers and secures it drivers with asset financing contracts that sees them pay back the cost of their new bikes in 18 months.

## Bumps in the road

Overall the two-wheeler taxi market is forecast to reach \$9 billion worldwide by 2021, according to India-based Tech Sci. But it has not been all smooth riding since the apps launched. Accidents remain unavoidable in the confusion of Nigeria's roads, online tools have faltered, drivers have looked to inflate fares and corrupt officials still prey on road-users. Gokada in May announced over \$5 million in new funding and said it hoped to branch out into other forms of transport and eventually push outside Nigeria.

But last month the firm shut down for two weeks after its chief executive Fahim Saleh encountered some of the navigational problems when a short journey ended up taking much longer. The driver he ordered took 15 minutes to pick him up, admitted he wasn't using GPS and then set off on a circuitous route to the destination.

"How could I be the CEO of Gokada, the company that pioneered motorcycle ride-hailing in Nigeria and be experiencing this?" Saleh wrote in an online post. "I told the pilot to pull over to the side of the road, I would hop over the median and wait for an Uber. 'This is what it has come to,' I thought." The disappointment chimed with the gripes of some Nigerian users who have complained of navigation problems while using the various apps and accuse drivers of deliberately taking longer routes to increase

fares. Firms have sought ways around the issues. Gokada relaunched its 2.0 service with a fresh fleet of bikes after giving drivers more training and incorporating features like helmets with inbuilt mobile headsets.



Founder and CEO MaxOkada Tayo Bamiduro speaks, relaxing on motorbike taxi at company headquarters, Lekki in Lagos.

ORide has a monitoring unit set up to track its drivers. Despite the bumps in the road, riders told AFP the apps were helping them bolster their business and offering a key lifeline. "This scheme has taken many out of poverty by creating jobs," ORide driver Johnson Onipede told AFP, sitting on his light green bike as he waited for his next ride. Onipede said his main headache remained one familiar to all Lagosians-venal local thieves. He said riders needed help getting small gangs of thugs, known as Agberos or Area Boys, to stop their extortion and harassment. "Both the government and company should help us to stop the Agberos and Area Boys because they are making life unbearable for us."—AFP

## Daniel Radcliffe has life turned upside-down in 'Guns Akimbo'

In Daniel Radcliffe's latest film role, the "Harry Potter" star goes in a split second from a normal, anonymous young man to a celebrity sensation whose life is turned upside-down. Does that sound familiar to the former child actor who was plucked from obscurity to front one of the biggest movie franchises of all time? "Yes I suppose so! I really hadn't thought about that," Radcliffe told AFP. "God I need to call my therapist!"

Fortunately for Radcliffe, his real-life journey was considerably more gentle than the protagonist of "Guns Akimbo," which had its world premiere at the Toronto film festival. He plays a nerdy video game developer who wakes from a brutal attack to find guns have been surgically bolted to his hands, and he has been forced to fight to the death for the amusement of a sadistic online community. Asked how he chose the role, Radcliffe said: "A lot of the things I've done have been like weird fairytales, like 'Horns' or 'Swiss Army Man'."

"They're all about somebody living a normal life and then something crazy and transformative happening to them. "So I guess I enjoy those kind of stories, stories

that take a crazy route into a thing we can relate to. And this film definitely falls into that category." As the plot suggests, "Guns Akimbo" is a more radical departure from Hogwarts than any of his projects yet. Its darkly cartoonish approach to copious on-screen violence includes countless gory fight scenes and deaths in which the characters wield guns, hammers and even a bazooka.

Like "The Running Man" or "The Hunger Games," ordinary people are cheered on by bloodthirsty crowds in their fights to the death-with the millennial twist of live-streaming and YouTube-style trolls. "This film is inspired by the darker corners of the internet and parts of social media and those ideas, but it's not necessarily making a massive point about them," said Radcliffe. "Jason is somebody who has absorbed certain parts of the internet and '80s action movies and gaming, and this film is the result of all those things coming together," he said, referring to director Jason Lei Howden. "I don't think anyone should get their moral code from this movie!"—AFP



Daniel Radcliffe attends the 'Guns Akimbo' premiere during the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival at Ryerson Theatre in Toronto, Canada. — AFP

## 'Ford v Ferrari' turns back clock for Hollywood

"Ford v Ferrari," the new auto racing movie starring Christian Bale and Matt Damon, is a proud throwback to an era when Hollywood made authentic blockbusters for grown-ups, its director said Tuesday. The movie portrays how Henry Ford II strove to make his US car brand fashionable once again by hiring a designer and driver capable of beating Enzo Ferrari's Italian racing machines at the famous Le Mans 24-hour race in 1966. Shot for around \$100 million largely without computer-generated special effects by Fox before its Disney takeover, it is a rare Hollywood big-budget project that is not a sequel or a superhero movie.

"We don't mind if you call it old fashioned or a throwback," director James Mangold told journalists yesterday. "I think people miss movies that weren't shot entirely in a room with green backings ... when Hollywood made movies that were large, but not necessarily for 12 year-olds," he added.

Mangold himself is no stranger to superhero films, directing X-Men film "Logan" in 2017 — although the film stands out as the first of its genre to earn an Oscar writing nomination. For his latest film he hired a team of playwrights headed by Jez Butterworth ("Jerusalem"). Mangold said he avoided special effects in "Ford v Ferrari" for the key race scenes because for performers "it's like acting inside a sandwich bag."

The movie employed top professional race drivers-including Ben Collins, who appeared as The Stig on British show "Top Gear"-and built replica vintage cars. Bale was

quick to slap down criticism that he and Damon should have taken the steering wheel themselves. It's a "total insult" to the professionals to "assume that we could really do that," he said. The star praised Ken Miles, the British racing legend he portrays, as an "eccentric, passionate, slightly insane" man in dedicated pursuit of his dream.

## Bale shed 40 pounds

Bale said Miles embodied the contradiction among speedsters "that you feel alive precisely because of the inherent danger that could happen any minute that you're just keeping at bay." "But I guarantee none of these men would have been doing these races if there wasn't that danger present at all times." The British actor, 45, joked that he had to quickly shed the 40 pounds he put on to play US Vice President Dick Cheney in 2018's "Vice" to fit in the car.

"Wouldn't have been the same thing would it, if I'd have been a 240-pound Ken Miles, barely getting into those cars?" he said. "Those cars are not made for large men at all, you know-they're not made for comfort, whatsoever." "Ford v Ferrari," which outside North America is titled "Le Mans '66," hits theaters November 15. The Toronto International Film Festival runs until Sunday. — AFP



Actors Christian Bale (left) and Matt Damon attend the 'Ford v Ferrari' premiere at the Roy Thompson Hall during the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival Day 5 in Toronto, Ontario. — AFP