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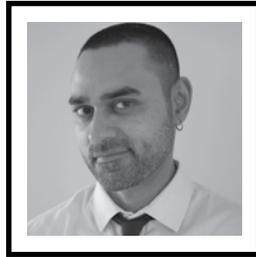
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PABLO CHATERJI

Executive Editor

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Lockdown, stock and barrel

I really can't believe that I'm writing yet another of these letters while sat on a balcony in Goa, looking out at a variety of reasonably exotic birds perched on the branches of the trees in the forest next to my house. It's been six weeks since I arrived here, way back in March, and the world was literally a different place then; it was beginning to show signs that all was not well, of course, but I don't think anyone could have predicted the situation we find ourselves in now. I don't even know whether I have the right to complain, really, because after some initial hiccups concerning the supply of essential provisions and medicine, Goa has been flat out the best place to be stuck in this lockdown.

To begin with, it has *always* been a socially distanced state, purely because of the way its population is spread out in non-clustered ways, and also because most Goans have independent houses of varying sizes, which means that they're usually not living cheek-by-jowl with their neighbours, unlike in the multi-storey monstrosities that people increasingly call home in most urban areas. Now that it's officially a 'green' zone, with no known active cases of COVID (a statistic which I am inclined to take with a pinch of salt), life here is back to as normal a degree as one can hope for. People are out and about, in cars and on two-wheelers, most shops are open, village grounds are seeing cricket and football matches again, fishermen are sitting alongside creeks and canals, shooting the breeze and hoping for a nibble and, most

importantly for Goa, liquor stores are open; when it was announced, the last-named was met with a whoop of approval that was probably heard in neighbouring states. Not to put too fine a point on it, but I've made as much of these conditions as is humanly possible. When the rest of the world is locked up, being able to experience these simple pleasures makes me feel guilty, but I try not to let that weigh on me too heavily.

I cannot, of course, wait to get back to driving, riding, travelling and everything else that comes with this glorious job, but I know that for the next year (at the very least), life will not be the same. How can it possibly be, when for the first time in the history of India's automotive industry, every manufacturer sold the sum total of zero units last month? Eventually India — and the world — will recover, and a time will come when we'll be able to drive and ride across district and state borders without having to take permission from the police, but until then, we thought we'd do a bit of a throwback to the good old days, when we could head out any time we wanted and pull off the quirky, fun-filled stories that define us. Enjoy the issue, and here's hoping that the next letter I write will be on the road, or at my desk at work, or on an airplane — anything but a lockdown, really.



LUST
SIR STIRLING MOSS
TRIBUTE

10

Lust Sir Stirling Moss Tribute Run Of The Millie

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

The day was May 2, 1955, in Monza, Italy, a Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Roadster left the starting line, a light red 722 on the other corner leading the race at around 100 mph. And after 10 hours 7 minutes and 48 seconds, in which a thousand miles were completed at an average of 127.22 km/h, history was made. Stirling Moss had arrived, along with navigator Denis Jackson. That time out of the Villa Maletto was enough for Moss, and he only raced for Mercedes-Benz for that one season. Moss is known as the most successful driver to sport two world championships (495 races on 84 different cars, finishing 266 of those events and winning 22). And a million hours of work, the world, for and on April 12, 2020, at 80 years old. But he's back at this stage from 1955. There's time on his way to victory, an extraordinary 65 hours in the most glorious racing moment. *Copyright, Sir Stirling Moss*

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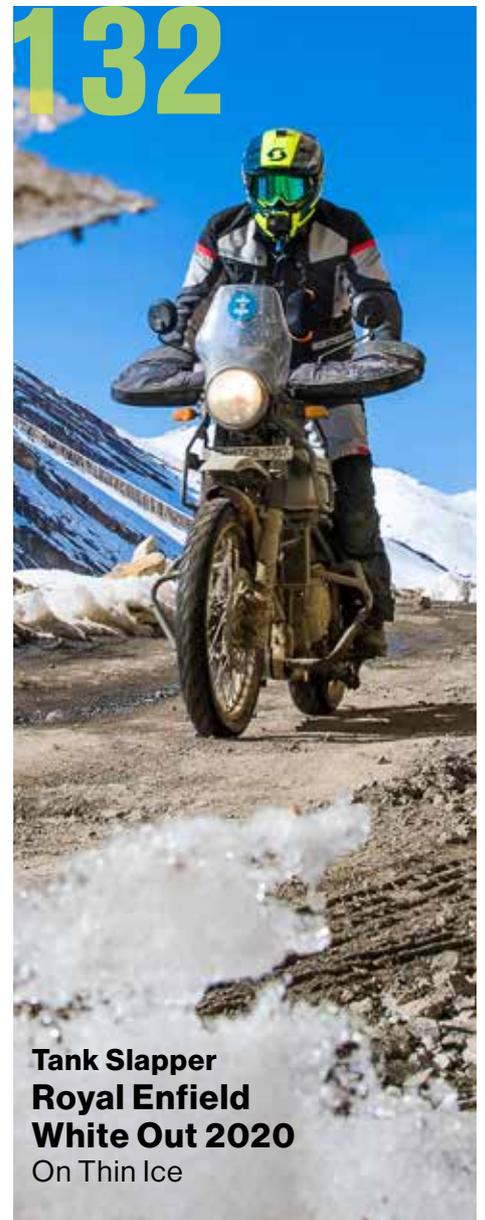
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Norton Atlas 650 Nomad
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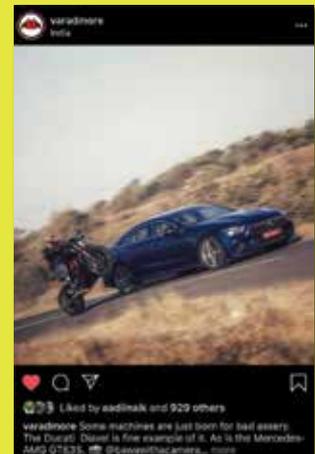
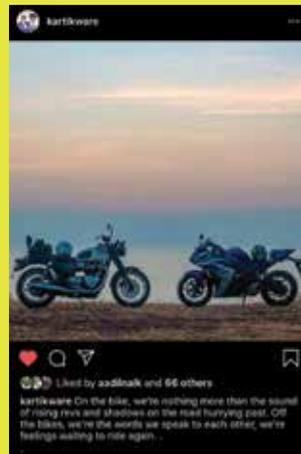
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Hawkeye

WRITE HAND DRIVE



Here's what our Instagram-enabled monkeys have been up to with their opposable thumbs...

Schooled

The Maruti Suzuki Esteem Vs Yamaha RX 100 article brought all the memories of my early 20s rushing back. I was lucky enough to have both of these vehicles in my stable around the same time, too. You're absolutely right in that these vehicles, despite being sold as simple commuter machines, had more personality than most of the cars and bikes on sale today. Seeing them in print makes me regret selling my Esteem and RX100. Maybe it's time to scour the classifieds for some clean examples.

Ravi Iyer

This is as good a time as any to get into these vehicles!

Air Force

I always look forward to the *Car Vs Bike* issue of *Motoring World* to see what combinations you guys have come up with and I can tell you, I've never been disappointed. The Mercedes-AMG GT 63 S pairs surprisingly well against the Ducati Diavel, no doubt. However, what really excited me was the Mercedes-Benz G-Class against the BMW R 1250 GS. If ever I felt the itch to cross continents on wheels, these are the exact vehicles I'd want at my disposal. To top it all off, the visuals in this issue were absolutely stunning; keep those jump shots coming, I say!

Mayur Rao

If only we got to keep the G-Class and the GS a little longer, we're sure we'd have headed to a remote part of the country for the lockdown.

Seeing eye to i

I'm glad to see TVS getting into the electric scooter game with the



iQube. I love the quirky design of the scooter and the range seems perfect for me, too. Actually, considering how most people don't ride their scooters more than a handful of kilometres every day, it's the perfect entry into electric mobility for most people. It's a very difficult choice between the Bajaj Chetak EV and the TVS iQube, though. Maybe a comparison test is in order?

Rakesh Khanvilkar

We'll get you that comparison test soon enough!



REWIND/PLAY
**1964 FORD MUSTANG/
2020 FORD MUSTANG**

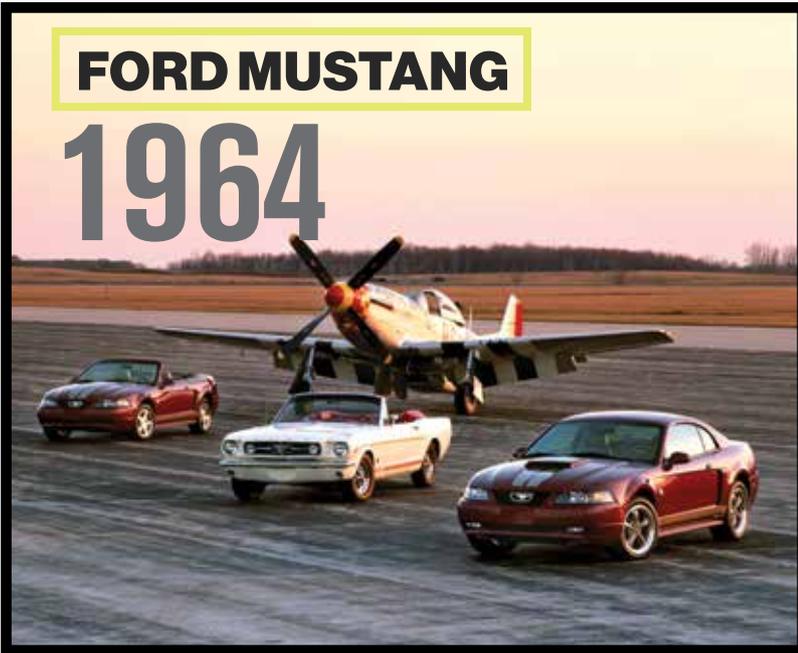
PONY UP

At 56 years old, the Ford Mustang shows no signs of slowing down

THEN

FORD MUSTANG

1964



- Originally conceived as a mid-engined two-seat sports car, the Mustang later became what it is now thanks to Lee Iacocca.
- On the day it was launched at the World's Fair on April 17th, 1964, Ford managed to sell 22,000 Mustangs.
- Ford expected to sell about 1,00,000 Mustangs that year. That number was crossed in just three months, with the Mustang going on to set a record for highest single-year sales at over 400,000 units.
- The first Mustang ever built, which was meant to be a prototype, was accidentally sold in Canada. It took Ford a couple of years to finally buy the car back and restore it to its original condition.
- The Mustang was launched as a sports car, but it wasn't until Carroll Shelby worked his magic on it that the Mustang finally became a performance car.

NOW

FORD MUSTANG

2020

- Though he had no hand in their development, Carroll Shelby is immortalised in the Mustang range with the track-focused GT350 and GT500 models bearing his name.
- The sixth-generation Mustang was the first model to be designed as a right-hand-drive model

from the factory, which is why it's officially on sale here; earlier models had to be converted by a third-party.

- The Mustang nameplate is one of the very few to stay in continuous production for over 50 years.

- With the addition of the Mustang Mach-E SUV to the lineup, it looks like Ford is gearing up for another 56 years with the Mustang nameplate. ■



FAST
MCLAREN ELVA



FEATHERWEIGHT

The Elva is McLaren's lightest roadgoing car yet!

The idea of an open-cockpit roadster is as old as the sports car itself. However, it's seen a resurgence lately, with cars like the Aston Martin Speedster and the Ferrari Monza. The McLaren Elva, named after Bruce McLaren's M1A McLaren-Elva of the 1960s, is the newest car to join this club.

Unlike the Aston and the Ferrari, you can actually spec the Elva with a windscreen, but McLaren thinks you won't need it because of the Active Air Management System (AAMS). The system creates an air bubble for the passengers using flaps in front of the cockpit. And in track mode, the AAMS directs airflow towards the engine, helping it stay cool. Nonetheless, we'd still recommend a helmet since it's no fun showing up at your destination with a mouth full of insects.

Powering the Elva is an 804-bhp

version of the 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8 engine from the McLaren Senna which propels the Elva to 100 kph in well under 3 seconds. And thanks to the reduced weight, the Elva beats the Senna to 200 kph, too. In fact, the Elva hits 200 kph in about the same time as the legendary McLaren F1 crossed the 100-kph mark!

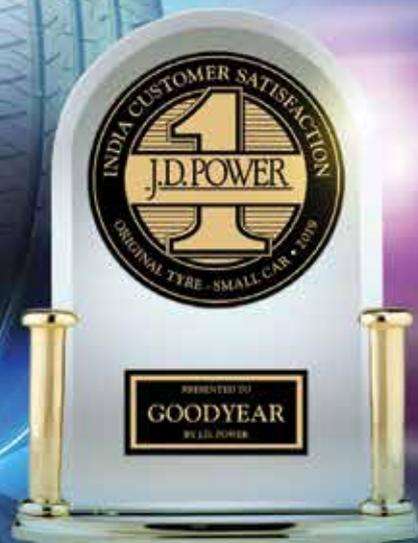
Just how much does the Elva weigh? We don't know the exact

number yet, but considering the fact that it's made of carbon-fibre and doesn't have a roof, windows or a windshield, we're pretty sure it's going to weigh less than the 1200-kg Senna. McLaren has limited the number of cars being built to just 249 units to maintain exclusivity, so you better act fast if you want one of these ₹ 13.3 crore roadsters. And stick that wig on really hard. ■



GOODYEAR

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**RATING IN
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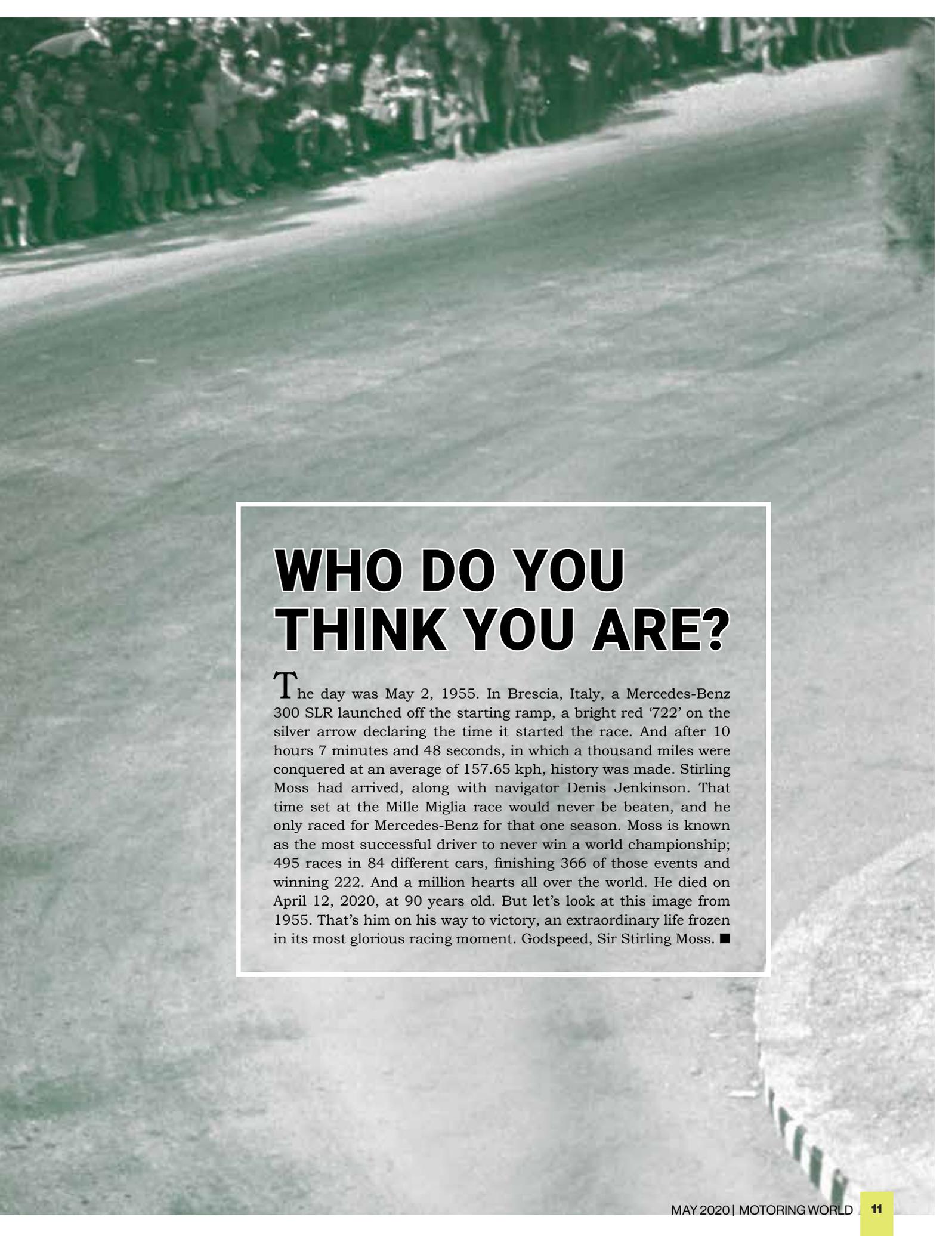
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LUST
SIR STIRLING MOSS
TRIBUTE





WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

The day was May 2, 1955. In Brescia, Italy, a Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR launched off the starting ramp, a bright red '722' on the silver arrow declaring the time it started the race. And after 10 hours 7 minutes and 48 seconds, in which a thousand miles were conquered at an average of 157.65 kph, history was made. Stirling Moss had arrived, along with navigator Denis Jenkinson. That time set at the Mille Miglia race would never be beaten, and he only raced for Mercedes-Benz for that one season. Moss is known as the most successful driver to never win a world championship; 495 races in 84 different cars, finishing 366 of those events and winning 222. And a million hearts all over the world. He died on April 12, 2020, at 90 years old. But let's look at this image from 1955. That's him on his way to victory, an extraordinary life frozen in its most glorious racing moment. Godspeed, Sir Stirling Moss. ■

BEHIND THE SINS THIS IS HOW WE DO IT



NEW IT

I didn't think it was possible to get jet lag without leaving the house. And yet, here I am, awake at all the times I shouldn't be. I've watched more shows than I will ever remember again, downloaded enough e-books to last me several lifetimes, finished playing all the Need For Speed games, and have even managed to lose a couple of kg off my kerb weight. I don't mind sitting indoors for what seems like a decade because there is always something

to keep me occupied. If all else fails, the Internet holds an infinite number of cat videos for my sanity to hold on with its fingernails. What I can't handle is not riding a brand-new motorcycle that I ostensibly bought at the wrongest possible time in human history. Sometimes the itch is so bad, I want to ride it, even if it's straight into a wall. At least there'd be something happening.

Reventón

DIECAST CRAZY

I don't think I will ever be able to get over the obsession of collecting diecasts. And I actually shouldn't. I had a collection back in the day, most of which has somehow vanished. Spending most of my time at home in the lockdown, I've managed to scavenge all the diecasts I've stockpiled over time. This new collection is not big, but I intend to make it so some day. I had the biggest temptation to take them out of that packaging, ogling from all angles, especially that invisible left side. And then stack them like some mega meet-up. Heck, I could probably play out an imaginary Gumball Rally with all these cars in it. So what if I don't have any tracks?

Bizzarrini





OLD GOLD

One of the (very) few positives to have come out of this infernal lockdown, for me, is a return to reading — actual reading, that is, not staring at a screen. Over the last six weeks, I have read and re-read all manner of books, magazines and other printed material, including a stack of letters that I wrote to my parents while in boarding school, most of which they have preserved. What they have also preserved is every issue of BSM/Motoring that I've helped produce, going back to the September 2003 edition. It's been an absolute joy to revisit those days (a 'hand brake turn into nostalgia lane', as Reventón aptly put it); how we got away with some of the things we did and wrote, I will never know. Since the lockdown seems set to be extended, at least I know that I have a wealth of hugely entertaining reading material to go through.

Gallardo

OFF TO THE RACES



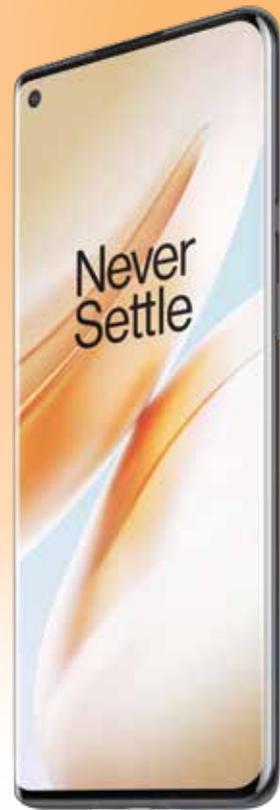
There are some truly immersive racing simulators out there, which is just what the doctor ordered to scratch that driving itch during this lockdown. Since it began, I've been looking for the perfect one to keep me occupied. There is, of course, the official F1 game which even lets me play online against current F1 drivers, but then, I'd have to get a wheel and pedals and a whole set-up. Could I try my hand at rallying? The new DiRT Rally 2.0 lets me dive headfirst into the world of rallying, with stages so realistic I'd almost feel guilty for roaming about. Maybe next time. After deliberation, I settled on one game, one which truly tests your mettle, one where the highs are euphoric and the lows are devastating. I chose Mario Kart — the one racing game which sends you into a rage as you come upon a red shell just as you round the last corner. Sure, it's not a full simulator experience, but hey, most F1 drivers started off in karting, no?

Estoque

**COOL
HOT STUFF**

LEVEL UP!

The OnePlus 8 Pro hopes to be the best smartphone you can buy



What is it?

Possibly your next phone, the OnePlus 8 Pro.

Why is it cool?

When OnePlus originally came to market with the OnePlus One, it was marketed (and priced) as a flagship killer, undercutting flagship phones on price while still packing most of the features. In the years

since, OnePlus phones have steadily increased in price, while not quite keeping up with other manufacturers on performance. All that changes with the new OnePlus 8 Pro, however. This is a proper no-holds-barred attempt by OnePlus to take the top spot. The OnePlus 8 Pro comes with the latest Snapdragon 865 processor, 8 GB of memory

and 128 GB of storage on the standard model. That's right up there with the Samsung S20 Ultra. What's more, the OnePlus 8 Pro finally gets wireless charging, so you can drop it on any Qi-compatible charging mat to recharge it.

Is it expensive?

At ₹ 54,999 for the standard model and ₹ 59,999 for a version with 12 GB of RAM and 256 GB of internal storage, the OnePlus 8 Pro offers performance that's on par with phones that cost twice as much!



GARAGE SCALE

Feeling the itch to buy a new motorcycle but have no place to park it? Lego has just the thing for you

What is it?

It's a Ducati Panigale V4 R, of course, but made of Lego.

Why is it cool?

Unlike the blocks you may have played with, Lego Technic kits are what they call 'engineering toys' featuring realistic movement



and mechanisms to help you explore the engineering behind a model like the Panigale V4 R. This model has working steering and suspension systems. Heck, it even comes with a working two-speed gearbox! This, or any Lego Technic kit for that matter, is a fun project to build while we're all stuck at home.

How Much Does It Cost?

The kit, which goes on sale in June, comes in at roughly ₹ 4,500. We're certain there are used real bikes out there for not much more money, but try building one of those in your living room. ■

COMING SOON!



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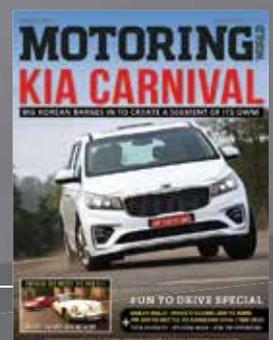
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PEAK TALK

BALBIR SINGH DHILLON -
AUDI INDIA



FULL STEAM AHEAD

We talk to Balbir Singh Dhillon, Head, Audi India about the the company and the automotive industry in general

Motoring World: *After the launch of the Q8 and A8 earlier this year, what's next for Audi in India, both in terms of product launches and general strategy direction?*

Balbir Singh Dhillon: The A8 L and the Q8 are the epitome of luxury and form an extremely important part of our product portfolio for 2020 that focuses on the push for C- & D-segment cars. Both these products have received a very positive customer response.

Customers are at the core of our business — whatever we do, our utmost priority is our customers. We have defined a clear strategy for Audi in India — we have termed it 'Strategy 2025'. As part of this, we will focus on four key pillars: 1) Customer Centricity 2) Products 3) Network 4) Digitalisation.

We are bringing in new BSVI-compliant models, new technologies, introducing digital



measures and other services in India that will boost the sale of Audi cars in the year 2020 and beyond.

We are focusing on building a profitable and sustainable business model. As a brand, we want to be sustainable not just by focusing on sales but 'quality of sales' that lead to happy customers and a strong brand.

Our product launch calendar for 2020 will include a mix of sportscars, SUVs and luxury sedans.

MW: *Do you see any demand for electrification from the customers? What is the potential timeline for the e-Tron in India?*

BSD: EVs are the way forward, but the market is not going to develop overnight. Infrastructure plays an important role. Tangible measures by the government towards e-mobility infrastructure and adequate support towards the import of electric vehicles would be a welcome move. We showcased the Audi e-tron in India last year and that generated excitement amongst enthusiasts; we are confident that

the e-tron will be a right match for a dynamic market like India. The launch is on the cards and we will announce the launch timeline in due course.

MW: *Does Audi plan on bringing in smaller cars to the Indian market, possibly to slot in below the A3?*

BSD: We evaluate all options from our global portfolio — however, there has to be a strong business case with a potential for good volumes. Our experience tells us that entry-model luxury cars is a very competitive segment; while it does bring in volume, it is most difficult to sustain. As a brand, we can't compromise on the price positioning when we provide great quality products that are also technology rich. Having said that, you will hear from us in the months ahead on our plans for these upcoming product launches.

MW: *The 2500 import-without-homologation rule allows you to test the waters with fun cars. Does Audi plan on taking advantage of that to*

bring anything into the country?

BSD: Absolutely! The government's decision to allow brands to import 2500 units under the homologation-exception rule will allow us to bring products into the country. We are thankful to our government for this initiative. While this is a very small volume in the overall automotive industry, what it allows is to bring in new technologies, faster introduction of new models and sportscars into the country.

MW: *How is Audi coping with the current COVID-19 crisis?*

BSD: It is still too early to gauge the full impact of Covid-19. Given the dynamic nature of what we are all dealing with, business planning becomes a key focus area. Our top priority is to minimise the impact on our customers, dealer partners, and teams. We are actively engaging at all levels so that we can support and sail through such challenging times. While we distance ourselves from each other during this lockdown, we are all in this together and will emerge stronger.

THE GRAPEVINE IN THE NEWS

FACE OFF

The facelifted Hyundai Verna has been launched starting at ₹ 9.3 lakh, ex-showroom, for the base model. The front bumper, grille and fog light surrounds are completely redesigned, while the rest of the car sees minor revisions, too. While the layout of the dashboard is the same, it gets a shot in the arm in terms of features. Top-end variants now get a fully-digital gauge cluster, paddle shifters, wireless charging and an 8.0-inch infotainment screen.

The Verna now comes with a choice of five powertrain options. The base engine is now a 115-bhp 1.5-litre petrol engine, which is available with either a 6-speed manual gearbox or a CVT. You can also get a 1.5-litre diesel



engine mated to either a 6-speed manual transmission or a 6-speed torque-converter automatic transmission. Finally, there is the sporty turbo variant which is powered by the 1.0-litre turbo-petrol engine that does duty in the Venue as well as the Aura. In this application, the engine makes 118 bhp and is mated exclusively to a 7-speed dual-clutch transmission. No matter what you're looking for, there's a combination of the Verna that works for you. Additionally, you can now book your car directly from Hyundai's website, right from the comfort of your home.

TOTAL RECALL

Volvo issued a safety recall for 1981 cars in India as part of a larger global recall. The Automatic Emergency Braking system could potentially malfunction at higher temperatures, resulting in a situation where the system detects an obstacle but fails to apply the brakes. This issue affects XC40, XC60, XC90, V90

CrossCountry and S90 models built in 2019 and 2020. Keep an eye out for communication from your dealer if you have one of the affected vehicles. Thankfully, the fix for this is as simple as a software patch, so your car should be fully operational in no time.



SHORT BURST



GAS IT UP

While other automakers are consolidating their powertrain options, Hyundai seems to be going the other way. The Grand i10 Nios is not only one of the very few small hatchbacks with a diesel engine on offer, it is now available with a factory-fitted CNG kit. The 1.2-litre engine makes 68 bhp and 9.7 km in the CNG variant, which is 12 bhp less

than in the petrol variant, but it's a small price to pay for significantly lower running costs. The CNG variant is available in two trim levels, the Magna and the Sportz. Prices for the Magna start at ₹ 6.62 lakh, ex-showroom, Mumbai, while the Sportz retails at ₹ 7.16 lakh, ex-showroom, Mumbai.



STING OPERATION

Prices for the BS6-compliant Mahindra Scorpio start at ₹ 11.98 lakh, ex-showroom, Mumbai, for the base S5 variant and go up to Rs 15.52 lakh, ex-showroom, Mumbai, for the top-of-the-line S11 model. Save for the engine, it's business as usual for the Scorpio, which now comes with a 2.2-litre 140-bhp turbo-diesel engine across the range. A four-wheel-drive system is missing from the range, which we hope is only a temporary situation.



FAREWELL

The switch from the BS4 emissions standard to BS6 has seen a few casualties in the Indian car market. The latest cars to fall prey to it are the Toyota Etios family of cars and the Toyota Corolla. The Toyota Glanza, which is a product of Toyota's partnership with Maruti Suzuki, is now the most affordable Toyota you can buy.

TENDER LOVING CARE



With your cars parked for an extended period of time during this pandemic, it's a good idea to have them serviced before taking them out on the road again. Thankfully, Pitstop now offers a door-step service for you to get that done without ever stepping out. The Pitstop Revive service evaluates key functional areas of your car like the battery, tyres, brakes and fluids for any abnormal wear and addresses any issues that may arise, ensuring that you and your car are ready to hit the ground running once this lockdown ends. What's more, Pitstop also thoroughly disinfects your car for you, to curb the spread of disease.

CLASS DISMISSED

After a short hiatus, the inline-six-cylinder diesel-powered E350d is back in the Mercedes-Benz E-Class lineup. The BS6-compliant E350d, which is priced at ₹ 75.29 lakh, ex-showroom, India, makes 285 bhp of peak power and 61.2 kgm of torque. Apart from the silky-smooth inline-six engine, you also get standard air suspension, memory-program front seats and steering wheel, and 18-inch wheels. Sounds like a worthy upgrade to us!



THE GRAPEVINE



ALL SEDAN DONE

Audi pulled the wraps off the latest A3 sedan recently. Based on the updated MQB platform, the same one that underpins the eighth-generation Volkswagen Golf, so the wheelbase remains the same, but overall dimensions of the new A3 have grown marginally. The A3's design has been updated, too, in line with the rest of the Audi lineup. That means the addition of LED matrix headlamps, an enlarged grille and a restyled rear end. Inside, the infotainment screen which always felt like an afterthought makes way for a much better integrated screen, part of the connected-car ecosystem Audi calls MIB3. Initially, the A3 will be available with two engine choices, a 2.0-litre diesel good for 149 bhp and 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbo-petrol motor paired to a 48V mild-hybrid system producing 149 bhp, too. Expect the A3 to join its stablemates some time next year.

SO IT BEGINS

Hyundai's luxury sub-brand, Genesis, is on a roll lately. Hot on the heels of the new GV80 SUV comes the updated G80 mid-size sedan. The G80 features the familiar imposing grille up front flanked by split headlamps. If you can get past the front end and step into the car, you'll be greeted by an interior that's swathed in aluminium, leather and wood on every possible surface. A 36-cm infotainment display takes centre stage — this is the

command center for all the tech crammed into the car. And there's a lot of it, too, from the usual suite of active and passive safety features to the ability to pay using Apple CarPlay right from the infotainment screen! The G80 is available in three engine options: first up is a 2.2-litre 208-bhp diesel engine which sends power to the rear wheels, a 2.5-litre 302-bhp turbo-petrol, and a range-topping 3.5-litre 379-bhp turbo-petrol with all-wheel drive. As of now, there's no word on Genesis coming to India, but if it does, we sure hope it brings the G80 in tow.



THREAD THE NEEDLE

Barely a year after the Elantra facelift came out, Hyundai unveiled the all-new seventh-generation Elantra. As you can see from the pictures, the Elantra takes styling cues from recent Hyundai concept cars like the *Le Fil Rouge*.

As is the case with most new models, the new Elantra is longer, wider and sits lower than the outgoing model. It's now larger on the outside than the new Honda Civic, and the increased dimensions also mean more room for

passengers, of course.

Inside, the Elantra comes absolutely packed with technology, as Hyundai is wont to do. The infotainment system is equipped with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and higher trim levels even come with a screen in place of the gauge cluster, just like the new Creta. The Elantra also lets you use your smartphone in place of its traditional keys. How's that for a connected car?





SOCKET TO ME

The Evoque and Discovery Sport are the latest models in the Land Rover lineup to get plug-in hybrid variants. The Evoque and Discovery Sport P300e models augment a 1.5-litre three-cylinder Ingenium petrol engine with a 108-bhp electric motor to yield a combined system output of over 300 bhp. The internal-combustion engine sends power exclusively to the front wheels, while the electric motor powers the rears, giving

these cars electrically assisted all-wheel drive. The PTA architecture these models are based on was designed with electrification in mind, so the battery pack sits under the rear seats without compromising passenger or cargo space. With the instant torque from the electric motor, it's no surprise that these hybrid variants are quicker to 100 kph than their internal-combustion variants.

You can choose to plug them into a

regular household outlet, which takes about 6 hours 45 minutes to fully charge the battery. Plug the cars into a DC fast charger and you can go from 0-80 per cent charge in under half an hour! On a full charge, the Evoque P300e can travel 66 km on electric power alone, while the Discovery Sport manages 61 km. There's no word on whether either of these models will make it to India, but we think they'd make a fine addition to the, er, range.

WCOTY

The Kia Telluride has been declared the World Car Of The Year for 2020, beating competition from the Mazda CX30 and the Mazda 3. This mid-size SUV packs a whole lot of functionality within its 5-metre frame. The Telluride offers three rows of comfortable seating, enough tech to keep all its occupants busy, and

a full-time all-wheel-drive system capable of taking it where roads don't go. Powering the Telluride is a 3.8-litre V6 good for 289 bhp. We personally think the Telluride would look great parked next to the Seltos and the Carnival in Indian Kia showrooms, and even better on Indian roads, don't you agree? What's

more, Kia also took home top honours in the World Urban Car Of The Year category with its Soul EV. We drove it last year, and aren't the least bit surprised it won. It's a supremely capable urban cruiser and, again, it'd look and feel mighty fine in the various traffic jams in India. What say, Kia?



WORLD CAR AWARDS

SHORT SHIFT
2020 FORD ENDEAVOUR

ABOVE **AND** UNDER

From chasing the skies to nose-diving into the Great Indian Desert, it's dune-bashing time in the new Endeavour

By Janak Sorap Photographs Ford



This is the 2020 Ford Endeavour. And if you have the bankrolls, go buy it. End of story. I promise that you won't regret buying one, not because I have been a perennial lover of this SUV, but because of one thing that this SUV lets you do — bully. It's got a sheer bruteness that makes the rear-view mirrors of cars ahead tremble with fear and they quickly get out of the way rather than get run over by the mighty

Endy. A game of dominance, I could call it, considering the standard of driving etiquette across our country.

And it doesn't come as a surprise from an American car brand, which is why they haven't bothered much changing the design for the 2020 model. Good thing, there! In fact, there are only two changes on the outside; the headlamps are now all-LED with a squarish-ish housing for the projector, and the badging

on the side grille now just says 'Endeavour' instead of the earlier '3.2' and '2.2'. That's because Ford has discontinued both the motors and equipped it with a new 2.0-litre mill that comes paired to a 10-speed transmission.

Also, the folks at Ford swear by the Endeavour, which is why they flew down a bunch of motoring journos to Jaisalmer for a day of dune bashing to showcase the



capabilities of the new powertrain in the Great Indian Desert also geographically known as the Thar Desert. Now, I am nowhere close to a professional at off-roading and above that, I'm a complete noob when it comes to tackling sand. Thankfully, there were instructors at hand to guide me so that I didn't end up beaching the two-tonne-plus vehicle or, in the worst case, parking it upside down.

With tyre pressures dropped to cast a larger footprint, the dial for the terrain management system was rotated to Sand. From the dry shrubs, I drove towards the dunes that lay ahead, with a steady throttle, and made it over one without much effort. But that was only before getting beached on the very next one. Aargh! Not used to this form of throttle control and the given terrain, it was quite an embarrassing moment to get an SUV stuck so soon. But thankfully, shifting the transmission to reverse, I managed to get out and back up a sufficient distance to build up good momentum and get over it. But that was nothing, according

to the instructor, because on the other side of the crest meeting the horizon was an endless array of dunes of different shapes and sizes glimmering under the bright sun.

The plan was to follow the route made by the tyre tracks of the lead vehicle. Now the trick here was to have a steady throttle but with some modulation as and when needed to scale the dunes. The initial mounds were pretty easy to manoeuvre due to the not-so-steep approach angles. But as we ventured more and more into the desert, the gradients of the dunes got steeper and more challenging. Want to know how I realised that? Well, I beached the Endy again. This time, however, right on the crest of a dune. To get a better understanding of the situation, I got out only to find my shoes sinking right into the soft and fine sand. Cursing while I pushed the sand aside for the tyres to gain movement, my instructor, who was now behind the wheel, engaged the diff-lock and easily got the Endy out of the rather sandy situation.

Now back behind the wheel, after driving around more, I started



Headlamps get LED upgrade. We like

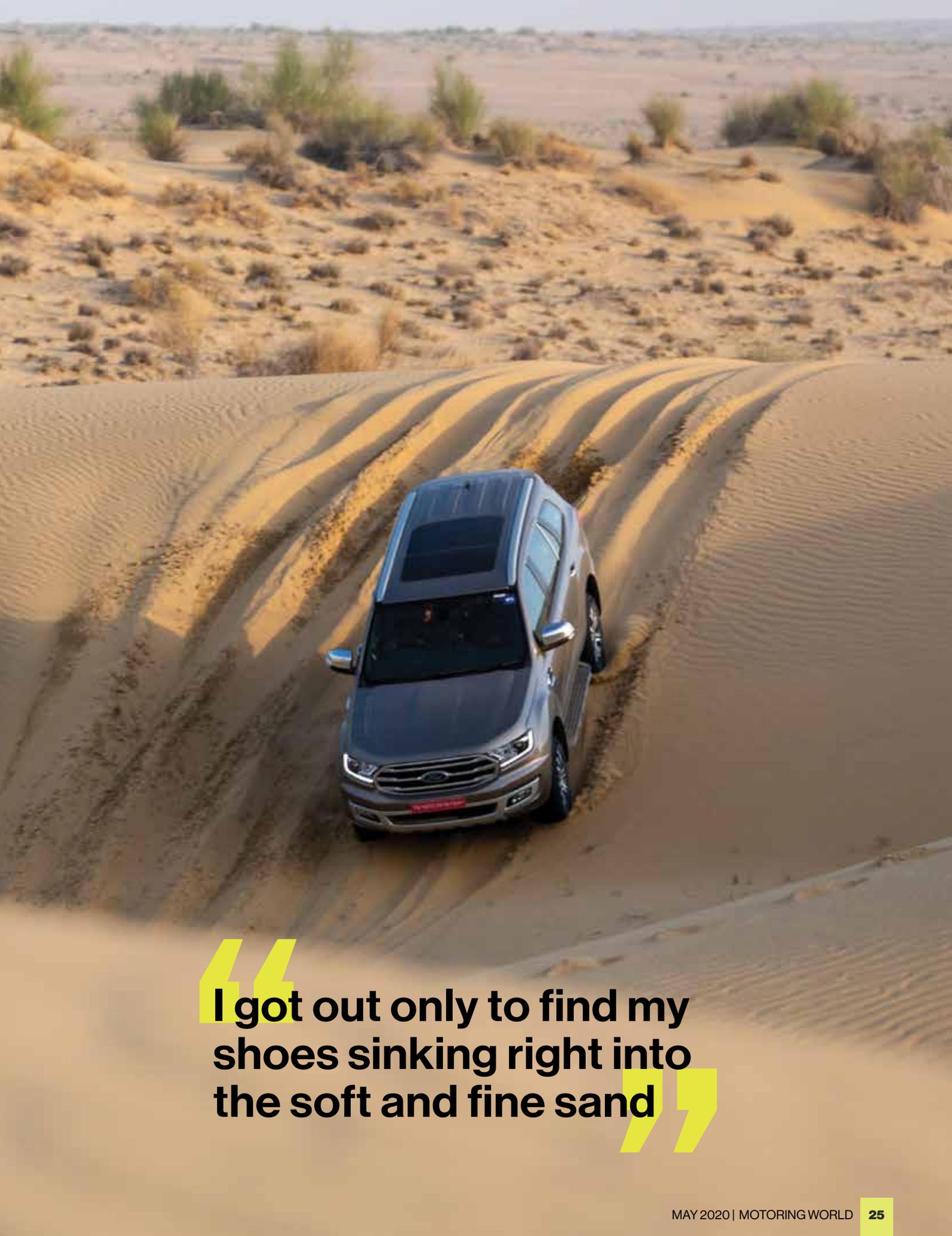


Variety of off-road assists to play with



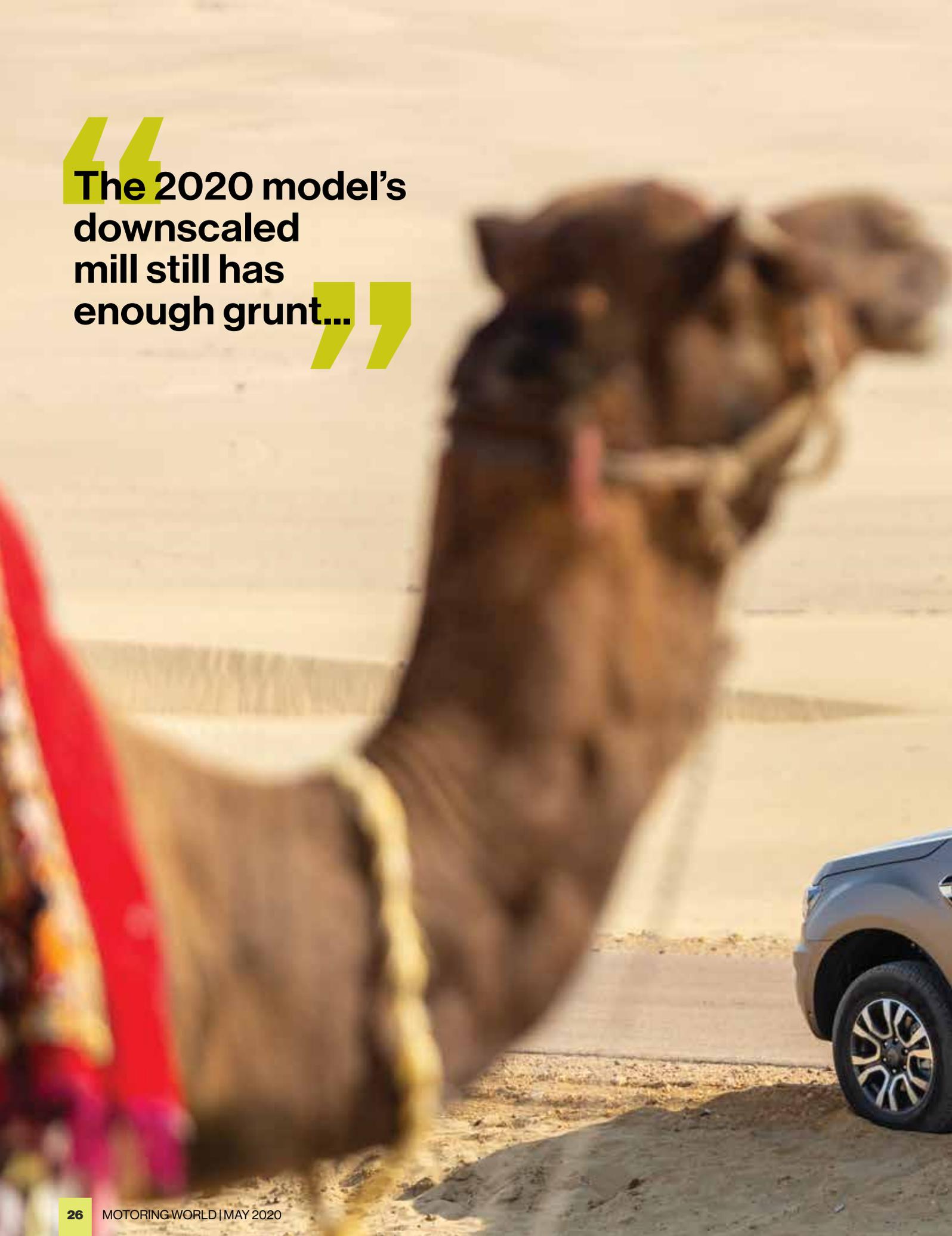
10-speed gearbox is a segment first





“ I got out only to find my shoes sinking right into the soft and fine sand ”

**“The 2020 model’s
downscaled
mill still has
enough grunt...”**”



getting comfortable, probably due to the sand in my shoes letting me connect better with the elements. I had also gained more confidence, and was more aware of how to approach a dune, when and how to throttle, and when to stop and back up to avoid getting beached. I started seeing the fun part of dune bashing rather than looking at each one as an obstacle ahead.

A major reason behind all that fun is to be credited to the Endeavour. The 2020 model's new downscaled mill still has enough grunt to keep it going through all the action the dunes had to offer. The terrain select mode, diff-lock and

select-shift function that limits the cogs from upshifting to keep the revs up turned out to be of immense help when tackling aggressive approach angles.

By the end of the day, I was left longing for more as I had just managed to scratch the surface of driving in the desert. It is addictive and has a different kind of an adrenaline rush that requires alertness for the continuously changing conditions and smooth coordination of throttle and steering. With sand still in the deepest parts of my shoes, I have to admit that the Endeavour can be an absolute bully on the dunes, too. ■

AUTODATA

FORD ENDEAVOUR

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	1996cc, inline-4, diesel
Max power	167.6 bhp@3500 rpm
Max torque	42.82 kgm@2000-2500 rpm
Transmission	6-speed automatic
TYRES	
F/R	265/60 R18
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	4903/1869/1837
Wheelbase	2850 mm
Ground clearance	NA
Kerb weight	2410 kg
Fuel capacity	80 litres
PRICE	
₹ 33.25 LAKH (ex-showroom, Delhi)	



COVER STORY

BMW 2 SERIES GRAN COUPE

FUN

TIMES 2

The BMW 2 Series Gran Coupe may be front-wheel driven, but that doesn't mean it isn't a proper BMW at heart

By Pablo Chaterji Photographs BMW

So you're a BMW fan — always have been. From the moment you sat in the back of your friend's 5 Series (which she inherited from her dad), you were hooked. The way that thing drove (your friend didn't believe in holding back), the way it felt like it was wrapped around you even in the back seat, the impeccable quality of its build — the whole lot made you tell yourself that when you were able, you would install a BMW in your garage. A later drive, at the wheel of another friend's 330i (he'd helpfully said, 'Break it, buy it') had blown your mind; you'd questioned how an executive sedan could go, handle and sound like that, and you'd considered getting the famous propellers tattooed on your chest. You were more determined than ever to walk into the nearest BMW showroom, point imperiously at the shiny 3 Series in the corner and say, 'That one. I'll have that one.' Then you'd slap a cheque down on the table, grab the keys and lay rubber out of there.

Except there's just one problem

— your bank account doesn't quite extend to the heft of the cheque required to gain possession of that 3 Series, so you're clean out of luck. Or at least you would have been until now, but here's the thing — BMW has picked up on the unexpressed desires of people just like you, and is bringing the 2 Series Gran Coupe to India, as its gateway drug (as it were) to the world of BMW. It will be its most affordable offering in India, and naturally BMW hopes it'll have a positive effect on sales graphs, although with the Armageddon upon us, it will have its task cut out for it in no uncertain terms.

What is the 2 Series GC, then? Well, it's a sedan, but one without pillars, so it looks like a... well, coupe with four doors. My favourite view of it is its profile; it has a sporty, smoothly flowing roof line that ends in a fastback derriere. The rear, in profile, is on the meaty side, so the GC isn't as pleasing as, say, an 8 Series. From head on, there's a distinct similarity to the Z4 in the way the headlights sweep backwards, either side of the split grille (which,







thankfully, is of a reasonable size and won't be visible from space). The chin is fairly busy, with large scoops under the headlights and a 'smile' under the grille, and there are sporty lines running up the bonnet. The rear is, to be honest, not entirely to my taste — I find it to be too busy, and the large L-shaped LED tail-lamps seem a little out of proportion to the rest of the design. The car I was driving in Lisbon (this was in the days, not so long ago, when the words 'air travel' didn't make the authorities reach for the thermal scanners and protective suits) rode on very stylish 19-inch wheels, but I have a feeling the cars that come to India will have 17-inch numbers on them. All told, the 2 GC looks like a BMW all right, just

not the more stately BMW sedans we've become used to; I have some minor reservations about its design, but I think the younger segment of the car-buying public at which it's aimed will think differently. This is a compact-looking car, too, with an overall length of 4526 mm; in comparison, its upcoming competition, the Mercedes-Benz A-Class sedan, is 4549 mm long, but the 2 GC is wider, at 1800 mm.

Sat inside its cabin, I could immediately tell that BMW had spared no effort in constructing it to the high standards it sets for the rest of its cars — no stepmotherly treatment here. It isn't as spacious as a 3 Series, naturally, but the cabin wraps itself around you in a pleasing manner. The seats are

excellent, offering great comfort and support front and rear, and if you've called dibs on the keys, the driving position is near-perfect. Even as a back-seat car, the 2 GC isn't as cooped up as might seem from the outside. Sure, the rear doors are small-ish, and getting into the back seats requires a little effort, but you'll find that once you get yourself settled, there's enough room at the back for two tall people (three adults side by side will lead to some frayed nerves after a while). The rear seats are set higher than those at the front, so visibility from there is also good — I, for one, get a little annoyed when my view from the back seat is blocked by someone's head. In terms of fit, finish and kit, there's no real room for complaint,



As driver-focussed as any BMW you'll step in. Passenger has plenty of space to hold on to



It'll be a couple of inches smaller for India

The 220d was the car I spent the most time in, and it doesn't exactly lack for motive force...



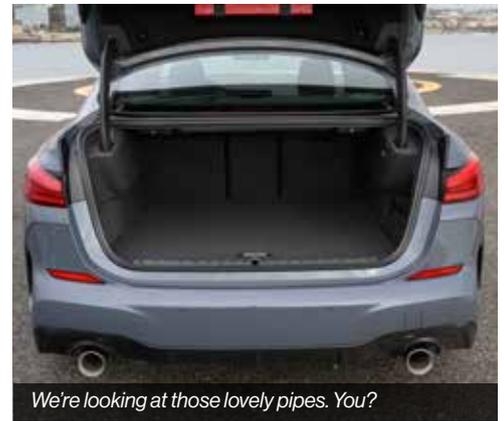
Nearly kidney-grilled that layout, eh?



Freeze the kneecaps of any back-seat drivers



An Indian driver gets into a European one



We're looking at those lovely pipes. You?



Petrol or diesel? Right answer gets hired by BMW

since everything you look at and touch is of high quality — metal, fabric, leather and plastic. The features-and-safety list is extensive, as you would expect from any BMW, and the 430-litre boot is pretty practical, too.

Before you grab the key, leap into the driver's seat and think of turning the 2 GC into a hoonigan, keep in mind that it's a BMW that's very different from the rest of the firm's lineup. Instead of a longitudinally-mounted engine and rear- or all-wheel drive you'll find in its elder brethren, this car has a transversely-mounted engine, with power being sent to the *front* wheels (except in select models that won't come to India). You may well recoil at the thought of a front-wheel-drive

BMW, but that was the compromise that was arrived at, since this configuration is cheaper and makes better use of space. India will see two engines being brought in, the 2.0-litre diesel and petrol units in the 220d and 220i respectively; tragically, the full-fat M235i xDrive — with 301 wholesome bhp, all-wheel drive and an extremely high grin factor — won't make it here.

The 220d was the car I spent the most time in, and it doesn't exactly lack for motive force, what with 188 bhp and a very meaty 40.76 kgm of torque; this engine also powers the 320d, which is a heavier car, so it's unsurprising that the 2 GC feels anything but underpowered. It's a refined unit, too, and between low and medium velocities, it's eager to

play traffic light GP; as you hit its mid-range, there's a wall of turning force that kicks in and propels you further down the road. Modulating the gas pedal is really all it takes to play with this car at this point, since the torque on offer allows you to turn up the volume and shoot off (0-100 kph, by the way, is in a claimed 7.5 seconds), or dial things down, bide your time behind that lumbering truck and then make your move when the coast is clear. The 8-speed automatic gearbox — new and improved — is absolutely top notch, both in terms of how quickly it shifts and its refinement. Suffice to say that you'll have proper fun driving this car in almost any conditions.

The answer to the question that's been uppermost in your mind, then

**“...you’ll find that the 2 GC
feels very solid indeed; as a
matter of fact, it’s a lot of fun”**





— ‘No, it’s not quite as involving to drive as a 3 Series when the road starts winding about.’ Not even the wizards at BMW can make a front-driven car handle as well as a rear-driven one, but they’ve given it an almighty shot, I can tell you. Understeer never raises its ugly head, and as long as you don’t do very silly things with it around a set of corners, you’ll find that the 2 GC feels very solid indeed; as a matter of fact, it’s a lot of fun. The steering wheel is wonderful, both to hold and in the amount of heft and feedback it offers at all the speeds you’re likely to drive it at; this car will go exactly where you point it, with its brakes spreading a sharp and wide safety net, and for most drivers, that will be all they require. If you insist on going full tilt, here’s what will likely happen — as you slam on the brakes before a corner, the car will take just a little time to set itself up for it; after it does and you give it some gas to exit the turn, the large amounts of torque the front wheels have to deal with will again

leave it guessing for a bit, before it gets with program and does what’s necessary. In a rear-driven 3 Series, you’d be able to pull this off in one, smooth manoeuvre. Happily, the ride quality on offer isn’t on the stiff side; BMW has managed to inject as much fun as possible into the suspension while also making it pliant, very silent and nicely damped over a variety of road conditions, which is good news for when it comes to India.

When it does, expect prices to start around the ₹ 33 lakh mark, going up to around ₹ 40 lakh for the top-spec models. For that money, you’ll get a superbly engineered BMW that will do your every bidding. It won’t be quite as spacious as a 3 Series, or as involving at the limit to drive, but it will definitely put a great big smile on your face, keep you comfortable and safe and grant you entry into the BMW club. Who knows, a few years down the line, you may find yourself trading your 2 GC in for a car that has ‘M3’ on its tail. ■



AUTODATA

BMW 220D GRAN COUPE

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	1995cc, I-4, diesel
Max power	188 bhp@4000 rpm
Max torque	40.8 kgm@1750-2500 rpm
Transmission	8 speed, automatic
TYRES	
F/R	225/45 R17
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	4526/1800/1420
Wheelbase	2670 mm
Ground clearance	152 mm
Kerb weight	1580 kg
Fuel tank capacity	50 litres
PRICE	₹ 33 - 39 LAKH (estimated)

REAR VIEW

CHRISTOPHER RODRICKS



OFF THE OLD BLOCKS

**A young member of the old guard.
Meet Christopher Rodricks**

By Kartik Ware Photographs Ruman Devmane and Kartik Ware

They say youth is wasted on the young. And in almost all cases, this saying is all too true. However, whether it's sooner in life or later, all time spent with machines keeps you younger than you should be. That explains why Christopher Rodricks, who says he's 29 years old, looks younger than that number might imply. It's also probably because he seems to never stop smiling, grinning, laughing or displaying similar derivatives of expressing happiness.

We're at Rodricks Restorations in Bangalore, and right at the moment Ruman and I walk in, we're obliged to stop in our tracks. I'm not at liberty to name all that occupies the parking spaces in this place, but I can safely say that a big chunk of the history of automobile evolution is on finely-restored display in this 3500-square-foot workshop. We'd need calendars from 1933 to 1972 to match their birthdates.

Rodricks is a sprightly chap whose hands are constantly looking for the right spanner. The place he works in is a decently-sized workshop, though the sheer size of some of the cars makes you think it could be bigger. We walk around for a bit, trying to

come up with questions at the last moment (as usual). The smell of old metal, leather and wood sinks into our brains, our vision diffused by the soft glint of chrome in shade. The smell of fuel hanging in the air, probably the only constant in the automobile's evolution, assures me that this guy is more or less one of us. Then the questions come easily.

When asked for a background, he replies, 'I have a master's degree in applied commerce from an Australian university. I spent five years in Australia, but right out of college, I got a job at an automobile mechanic workshop. I had no formal training for the job and didn't take it on for the money — only to learn and enjoy myself.' While the workshop catered to new and old cars alike, Rodricks's main interest was in the old Jaguars, Rolls-Royces and Bentleys that rolled in. But, as with any newbie, he started out at the lowest-ranked place in any workshop hierarchy — the washing bay.

What's notable, though, is that by the time he left the place, he'd graduated to head mechanic. I suppose that's what a raging automotive fire in the heart will do for a person. While working there, he

got a call from India that offered him the chance to work on four cars that belonged to the Nizam of Hyderabad. It was an opportunity for him to return to India and so he did, in July 2012.

The oldest car Rodricks has worked on yet is from 1904, while the newest is from 1994 — now there's adding some perspective to life. So what are his favourites? 'Well, Rolls-Royces and Bentleys. They aren't the best-designed automobiles, but they're extremely well-built ones. I am more inclined towards European cars than American ones. Cars from the '20s and '30s are the best. I believe that was the golden era of automobiles. Machines were all about simplicity of design and solid build. Today, cars are built with maximum profit in mind. It wasn't like that back then.'

The conversation then veers to a topic that has more than a hint of irony. Old cars now have a saviour that is probably the most modern thing in the world, a creation that is the pinnacle of mankind's technological progress, what defines this century — the Internet. Rodricks explains, 'The Internet was a shot in the arm for



“Old cars now have a saviour that is probably the most modern thing in the world...”

old cars. Ten years ago, there was little to no interest in accurate restoration of old cars. Cars were modded and altered to keep them on the road. Availability of parts and information was the biggest problem. The Internet solved that to a huge extent. More than anything, it made information-sharing easy.’

In fact, this is one thing I find mildly surprising, the way Rodricks talks about sharing information. Most restorers I’ve met are a bit on in the years and zealously guard whatever secrets they might have (they’re not too savvy with the Internet, either). Rodricks, though, cannot seem to emphasise enough how important sharing is, whether it’s information or knowledge.

‘There was this Mercedes-Benz

230 SL whose technology I just couldn’t understand. I didn’t know what to do with it, but a really knowledgeable restorer from Mumbai shared information and helped me with everything I needed. I’m a big believer of sharing information. It is important to pass it on, to do it for the love of cars, not for yourselves.’ Which leads me to my next question — what’s it like being a young chap in an old world?

‘Well, the number of young guys in this field is increasing, as with any other line of work. The interest in old cars is growing, certainly. Most of the new lot might be slow to get hands-on, but they’re getting there. There are many young guys who do good work these days.’ Looking around his garage, I can only bring



myself to agree.

Even from under a cover, it's only a very high level of quality that peeks out at you. It's not the 'Oh, it's running' kind of work, mind you. It's as detailed and painstaking as any art you'd expect to come across. Today, people want good restorations, not mediocre ones. The quality of restoration work in India today is almost as good as foreign jobs — and some might even be better. But overall, in a few years, we will be on par with the level of work anywhere in the world.' But it is hard work, I'm sure, which is why the lack of assistants is a bit puzzling. Have they taken the day off?

'No! There's only one other person in this workshop besides me. I do

everything myself and don't really need a team to work for me. I like to be hands-on with the cars, learning as much as I can. I don't want to sit in an office and order people around. Plus I have to be accountable for the work that goes on in here. I have to know everything. The car has to go out with me knowing everything that's happened to it. And that will happen only if I've been in, over and under it myself.' And what about people who want modifications done to their cars? What does he think about these 'resto mods'?

'Well, I'm not against mods as long

as the essence of a car is not diluted. That said, I'm not too much of a fan. I'd rather preserve history the way it was. I suppose I follow a more purist approach,' he says almost apologetically. What he says next is far more emphatic, 'I want to prove that old technology is still reliable and better than new technology.' Quite an ambitious goal, that. And quite achievable, it seems, seeing as he's currently giving the once-over to some old cars that are to head out to Goa for a vacation.

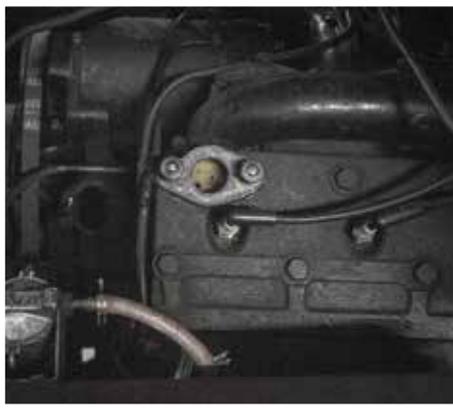
Rodricks's passion for old cars virtually bounces off the walls of his workshop. It's clear that he approaches each set of ancient wheels with



Rodricks' passion for old cars virtually bounces off the walls of his workshop



If you're not careful here, you just might tumble into a gigantic engine bay and get lost for a day or two





Organised chaos, just like most creative places. Working on old machines is far from a boring job

the same level of enthusiasm and dedication. However, surely there has to be one restoration that stands out? As expected, the answer is, 'So many of them!' After pressing a bit, he says, 'A 40 hp Napiers. I had only a page of information about it, so I had to put myself in the shoes of those who built it back in the day. When you complete something as challenging, it is most satisfying.'

He continues, 'It always amazes me how they did things in those days. The designs and the thought processes I see in these old machines, it's like travelling through time. Maybe that's what's attracting more people into the fold, the genuine passion for these things. I've seen a big change over the past few years in this field. And I'm glad to say it's for the better, not worse.'

Finally, I end at the beginning by asking him what people think when they meet him. He laughs the answer out, 'People are a bit shocked, they always expect someone older! Sometimes they don't believe that I can do a certain job, but I'm happy to say that my work speaks for itself, so I don't have to spend too much

time convincing them! I'm just happy getting up each day, happy to go to work. There are always new things to learn.' He keeps talking long after I've stopped jotting down my hurried notes. His mind and mouth keep on running, just like those machines he works on. I lean back in the chair and look around. The future of the past seems to be in good hands. ■



REAL TIME

Redefining speed in the fastest car made in India

By *Kartik Ware* Photographs *Suresh Narayanan*

Time, as physicists will finger-waggingly have you know, is relative. Take for example, two vastly different quantities of time — on one hand, you have eight years and on the other, 11.05 seconds. Now, I haven't really learnt a whole lot in the past eight years, so I have little hope of learning anything in 11.05 seconds. Or do I? Well, at least I now know that persistence will get me into trouble. This is the only time I've been scared for my life inside a car. Something as mad as this had to do it, of course, though I absolutely did not see it coming.

This is a story that began ten years ago in Bangalore. Ex-Motoring lady, Vaishali Dinakaran, and I had barged into the home of Pratap 'Bobby' Jayaram to feature the Jayaram GT, a homemade special that quite blew us away. Jayaram has been a part of virtually every electric automobile project in India, though it's his trysts with internal combustion that are infinitely more interesting to me. And that late evening, it was something else in a dark garage that caught my eye.

It looked like a Maini Reva, one

of the many electric cars Jayaram has worked on, but something was off. It had flared wheel arches and I could just about decipher the outline of a rollcage in it. When I asked what it was, he replied with one of his characteristic boisterous laughs, 'Something to make people think!' Pressed more, he said it was a project he had begun but had stopped work on for other things. 'I have to have the time and money to blow away my time and money!' It was a Reva, all right, but only in the loosest of senses. Sat in its tiny backside was a Suzuki Hayabusa motor. Whoa. A RevaBusa.

A paradox is a logically unacceptable statement. And there, a few feet away from me, stood the most glorious definition of the term I'd ever seen. The motor from one of the most iconic motorcycles of all time inside India's first electric car. I was an immediate fan. With barely any restraint, I blurted out the demand that the car be completed at the earliest so that I could feature it in the magazine. I don't quite remember the exact response I got, but I have a faint recollection

of being gently pushed out of the garage to the sound of more characteristic boisterous laughter. And that was that for a few years.

Every now and then, I checked in on the progress of the car, but it seemed as if the project was on permanent hold. Eagerness gave way to a quiet wait. The RevaBusa seemed to give a new meaning to the term 'drag racing', as it dragged on for years on end. For something that was intended to be the fastest Indian-made car, it sure was taking its time coming. But I'm sure that Jayaram and his son, Sharan Pratap, who now run their motorsport outfit called Mantra Racing, were even more impatient. And then last year, I got the call.

'Kartik! Did you see the RevaBusa's video?' Jayaram said, referring to the first drag-racing event the car had entered in. Just the sight of a Reva flying away from more expensive machinery was enough to send the crowd into a frenzy. The little beast was born. And I had to get my hands on it. Since then, every time I visited Bangalore, I dropped by





Everything about this machine highlights its focus of chasing single-digit quarter-mile times

the Jayaram residence to see the RevaBusa. It was always in a state of development; the first time I went, it had nitrous oxide feeding its greedy motor, and the second time, it had a massive turbocharger. After each successive event, the father-son pair decided they could do better and kept working away to get to their ultimate aim — 9s in a quarter mile.

A short while before I managed to convince Jayaram about letting me feature it, he clocked an 11.05-second run and became the national drag racing champion. 'Before I open it up again for work, you better get over here and do your bloody story!' he chortled over the phone one day. And just like that, I was in Bangalore within 48 hours, an airstrip arranged for a date with the RevaBusa. It was finally happening. However, as is the case with those with limited foresight, what I failed to see due to my anticipation was what I'd gotten myself into.

So one sunny morning, I found myself on a road meant for aircraft. It was the biggest piece of tarmac I've ever seen in my life and the sheer scale of it only reinforced just how tiny the RevaBusa is. Time

spent looking at and in it proves that this is a racing machine. The machine is so focussed, it makes even its paint seem like excess. There's a big pipe leading from the left window into the back; people often think it feeds the turbocharger, but it's actually to cool the manifold which can get impossibly hot at racing speeds. 'It's like sitting in front of ten fans with your mouth open,' said Sharan. I didn't know it then, but I'd find out soon enough.

The RevaBusa is all about the motor, though, and of that I cannot say much except that it has a fully ported head, racing cams, forged internals, and anti-splash sump, modified oil and water pumps and, of course, the turbocharger. Exact details are confidential since the machine still is active on the racing scene and competitors are still looking for ways to beat it and/or complain against it. However, rest assured that the work done on the otherwise powerful yet benign Suzuki engine can be categorised under 'nuclear grade'.

On the inside, it's all just essentials again; a central racing seat pointing at a sturdy-looking

steering wheel, a tiny gadget that gives out incredible amounts of information from various temperatures and pressures to engine speeds, a gear lever on the left side to work that sequential gearbox, and a wooden floor. Yes, that old material never gets old. There are a few buttons, too, all of which I was told to stay away from, except the one for the cooling fan at the back. Everything about this machine highlights its focus of chasing single-digit quarter-mile times. No wonder I felt so out of place in it.

The Mantra Racing crew was a bit nervous about letting me have a go at their creation, and it's quite understandable, too. What if I blew it up and/or crashed? Unthinkable on an airstrip, but then Einstein did say something about the infinite nature of human stupidity. 'Let's see if you can get into it first,' says Jayaram, and I slither into the RevaBusa like a gymnast at an audition, much to my own surprise. Resigned to fate, Jayaram then tells me what to do and, more importantly, what not to do. In hindsight, his worries were entirely unnecessary. You see, the RevaBusa



is built to take the laws of physics head-on and I'm not.

I never had any intentions of attempting a 9-second run, to begin with. So I took off gently enough, so that first gear wouldn't have a chance of catching me out with a tail-out moment or some such. And I was still taken aback by the sounds and smells the RevaBusa was generating. It's not something a regular guy can get used to very quickly. Everything — every single bloody thing — felt just too hard.

The gear lever made violent noises like it was smashing the gearbox into smithereens, the steering felt like it required more arms than I had to even hold it straight, while the suspension... well, let's just say that I wasn't sure if the car had any. Sharan would later tell me upon asking, 'Have you driven a JCB? Everything feels hard because the components have to be that much substantial to handle the forces going through them.' I didn't know that then, though I did know this thing is no damned JCB.

With no reference in my mind, I stepped on it in second gear and my right foot rose back up roughly ten times faster than it had gone



It's so manically fast that the surroundings will cease to be a source of importance soon enough



A sign of the utter madness that it contains



And then, he proclaimed, 'Let there be flight!'



Shift 'quality'? Hardly. Tough as nails, this

“It accelerates at a rate that instantly puts weird thoughts in your mind...”

down. My brain didn't even have the time to react, I think, it was just my foot getting scared all on its own. Surprised, and a bit more wary, I tried again with the conscious effort to keep my foot planted. And this time, my brain did have the time to react to the acceleration — it immediately went into survival mode and reminded me of just how mortal I am. I just couldn't understand what was happening. And I wasn't even past third gear yet.

The RevaBusa, as I mentioned earlier, has managed a fastest time of 11.05 seconds over 400 metres so far. It did 100 kph from a standstill in 3 seconds and was clocked at 261 kph at the end. Jayaram reckons it'll do 300 kph, but hasn't tested it yet. And they built this thing at home! I couldn't tell what speed I did, but I'm 100 per cent sure it was

less than half of that. I can't imagine what the RevaBusa feels like over 200 kph.

After a few short runs full of sensory overload, I had made up my mind — this is not a car anyone can drive. It can only be driven the way it's meant to be driven by people who know every inch of it. And the RevaBusa is built by people who know intensely what they want and how to get it. I got out of the car, drenched in sweat and arms shaking, only to hear Jayaram issue a relieved guffaw that said, 'What, man! I didn't even hear you floor it!' I mumbled some excuses, but before I'm finished, he'd asked his crew to remove the big manifold-cooling pipe. Apparently, I was supposed to sit next to him while he gave it the stick. 'That's how Sharan and I tune the car! But he usually sits there

without the door.'

Given that I went through a lot of trouble to chicken out of driving the RevaBusa properly, I didn't know what to make of it. But thankfully, the door remained in place. Soon, I found myself wedged into a space that is perhaps sufficient for a chihuahua, holding onto the roll cage, while Jayaram aimed it towards the runway. Suddenly, he dumped the clutch two or three times and pulled two or three wheelies. Yes, wheelies. Before I had a chance to process what had just happened, he floored it — and the world went mad.

If I thought the RevaBusa was overwhelming earlier, it was positively apocalyptic now. It accelerates at a rate that instantly puts weird thoughts in your mind: 'How does the paint stay on the



Pratap Jayaram (left) and Sharan Pratap standing tall



That right there is an internal-combustion symphony



Here's what every Indian car will see in a quarter mile

car?’ ‘Did I just leave hand imprints on the roll cage?’ ‘Hey, today is the last day of the BS III norms.’ And Jayaram had transformed into something else, too. Gone was the man from the entertaining WhatsApp chats. Instead there was only a steely thousand-yard stare in his place accompanied by a blur of a left hand whipping between the gear lever and the steering wheel. His entire face had changed.

My face had changed, too, since it was drained of blood, and I now understood the ‘ten fans’ bit Sharan had mentioned earlier. But I wanted more. No person with even a cursory interest in motors can get enough of this. Thankfully, Jayaram took me out for a couple of more runs and my panic turned into euphoria. This was serious speed we were talking about and somehow suddenly I was at home. What felt raw and cranky at whatever speeds I managed now felt sorted. It’s meant to run wild, this thing. ‘I don’t usually like cars that are always on the edge, but this one...’ Jayaram trails off over the magnificent noise of the turbocharger wastegate. Yes, this

one, indeed.

It was a day of extremes — extreme anticipation, extreme shock, extreme disillusionment and finally, extreme happiness. What a machine. And it isn’t even perfect yet. Like any self-respecting motorsport project, work goes on into refining it for that dip under 10 seconds. And it’s already the quickest car made in India and a milestone in Indian motorsport. Sharan told me the idea for making this car came from a video game he and his father used to play. In that game was a car that had a Hayabusa motor in it, and I imagine they looked at each other and said, ‘Why not?’

What I also realised is that the RevaBusa, being the racing machine that it is, is a balance of man and machine. For example, they’re still having trouble getting off the line at races because there’s just too much power going to the rear wheels. They could program it not to, but Sharan said, ‘The human element is critical for us. Electronics cannot do everything, otherwise it’s not special. There’s no point.’ Spot on, I say. Let’s leave the self-driving cars to Google, Apple and Whoever, shall we?

Also, of late, some of Mantra Racing’s competitors have been complaining that the RevaBusa is not a real car because it has a bike engine in it. Well, I can assure them that it is very much real and very much a car, too. As far as I’m concerned, a motor is a car motor or a bike motor depending on where it finds itself. I think they’re just as scared as I was of it, only I was in the thing, while they watch its backside disappearing into the distance. If you think I’ve missed out on mentioning horsepower so far, well, I haven’t — even Jayaram and Sharan don’t know! ‘What’s the point of getting into horsepower-figure wars? We just need to get there first!’ Fair point.

Jayaram says he will build more examples of the RevaBusa if he gets a minimum of three orders for the car, at approximately ₹ 22 lakh each. How’s that for a speed-to-money ratio? For me, though, it’s a fitting end to a story that began in a dark garage and ended on a runway. I’m happy I got to do it. I wish I hadn’t. Time just won’t be the same again. ■



REAR VIEW

CALIFORNIA STATE ROUTE 1

CALIFORNIA LOVE

Driving down the most chilled-out road in the world

By Kartik Ware Photographs Sanwar Silas & Kartik Ware



Few things are as simple in intent as roads. Or as deeply ingrained in our species' collective consciousness. Even if motorcycles and cars didn't exist, we'd still need air, water, food and roads. The first roads began when ancient humans hunted animals along their paths of travel, and we've been using rough pathways on land for around 12,000 years. Research indicates that proper paved roads began around 4600 years ago in Egypt, and mankind hasn't looked back since. Today, according to the CIA website, planet Earth has 64,285,009 km of paved and unpaved roads. And California's State Route 1 is one of the best of them all.

I've long maintained that India has some of the best roads in the world across a variety of terrain and weather conditions, and there's no place I'd rather be on two wheels or four. But I know for a fact that the rest of the world has brilliant roads to offer, too, and when I found myself in the United States of America in September 2018, I already knew which road I'd point my sight at. No, it wasn't Route 66 or rather what remains of it. Instead, it was the equally historic State Route 1.

It traces its length along the Californian coast, passing through 12 counties as it does so; its northern end in Mendocino County, just outside Leggett, a

single-petrol-pump town with a population of around 150 people; it's southern end in Orange County near Dana Point, a surfing destination with a population of around 34,000 people. It goes through San Francisco towards the north and through Los Angeles towards the south, connecting two of the most important cities in America. It runs near a drive-through tree in Leggett, over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, through the Big Sur range, over flatlands, through Art Deco towns, over creeks, under Los Angeles airport's runways, right through Americana, and straight into the heart of anyone who loves being on the road. And it does all

this and more in just 1061 km that it spans each way.

So you see, this road is kind of a big deal, and everyone wants a piece of it; as we drove along, we discovered that it's not just called SR 1, but depending on which section you find yourself on, it's also called the Pacific Coast Highway, the Cabrillo Highway, the Shoreline Highway, the Coast Highway, the National Scenic Byway, the US 101, and many other names given by local towns. The entire highway is also called the Blue Star Memorial Highway in tribute to the US armed forces. It is also designated as an All-American Road. As you can imagine, picking out fridge magnets and other souvenirs along the way was thoroughly confusing.

To do full justice to the road and the story it would bring about, I'd originally planned to take along a convertible, and I tried to get everything from a Mustang to an S-Class Cabriolet, eventually even settling for anything that would hold two of us and our luggage. But nothing worked out. Apparently, it was too short a notice for car manufacturers to arrange for cars. Instead, I found myself staring at the rate card of Avis rental car counter



Bixby Creek Bridge, made in 1932, is a mix of concrete and Art Deco beauty



Just another mountain making way for the road

at San Francisco airport. Given how scarily numbers next to the \$ sign translate into rupees, I found my choices rather limited, and it didn't take long for me to pick a bright white Kia Soul. Mainly because of its name and the fact that it reminded me of the Suzuki Ignis, one of my all-time favourites.

And so we set out, driving from San Francisco airport to the town of Santa Cruz, some 110 km away via SR 1, to stop for the night. The plan was to drive as far down south as possible and head back to San Francisco to spend



...and it didn't take me long to pick a bright white Kia Soul





Just a handful of months before this photograph was taken, this section lay buried under a massive landslide

a couple of days there. Because we only had four days to drive, I knew that while it was possible to cover the entire length of SR 1, we wouldn't get to truly experience any of the places on the way.

I only had three rules for the drive: stay only at motels — because that's what you do on a road trip in America; visit a pub wherever we stopped for the night — because that's where you get to talk to the locals; and take lots of photographs. Oh, and not get fined for violating traffic rules, but that wasn't going to be a problem. You see, before we began the drive, I'd spent a couple of days blasting around the Californian countryside on the new Royal Enfield twins, so my need for speed was satiated for the next few days. Or so I thought.

You see, SR 1 is as enticing to the right foot as mermaids are to delirious sailors, and the

well-signaged speed limits took no time in getting on my nerves. It was like being constantly governed by an overbearing nanny, and from twenty minutes into the drive till I returned the car in San Francisco after four days, it was a test of my limited patience. Fortunately, I managed to scrape through with still some sanity left intact. Just barely, mind you. The first night in Santa Cruz, Google helped us locate a motel which turned out to be manned by an Indian chap. Coincidence, I thought, but it was just the first step of our discovery that all motels in California are run by Indians, specifically Gujaratis.

At least all the motels we stayed in on SR 1 carried the air of a Mumbai general store behind the counter. Left me scratching my head, that one did. One chap was nice to us, another in Pismo Beach was downright grumpy and looked

rather like he'd love to see an anvil drop on our heads, though he was plenty chatty and pleasant to a group of white men who walked in after us. Racism begins at home, as they say. It was kind of nice, though, that the only unpleasantness on the trip came from an Indian chap. Everyone else we met was warm and welcoming, especially SR 1.

Well, maybe not warm, because it was pretty cold all along the coast, so perhaps it was best that I didn't get a convertible and turn our heads blue in the cold Pacific wind. Sunny California seemed like a myth to be found only in songs and Hollywood movies. Right from San Francisco all the way to Pismo Beach and back, we marvelled at how fast the unpredictable fog would roll in from the Pacific Ocean and turn the





Sights like this one are regular fare on California State Route 1

already dull mood of the weather into something out of a Murakami novel. It was impossible to believe that this entire area was classified as a drought zone with severe water shortages when it seemed like the heavens were going to open up at any moment. Apparently, it's been like that for 10 years now. Wonder how all that greenery survives.

Santa Cruz is a lovely little coastal town with the charm of a carnival. There's the Boardwalk that juts out into the Pacific and its wooden structure is lined with small boats,

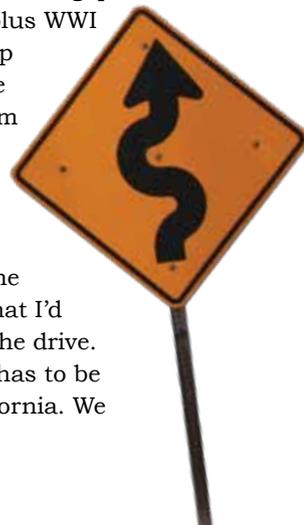
restaurants, souvenir shops and a low platform for seals to huddle noisily on. After a quick breakfast and a dive into a souvenir shop, we set out on the drive towards Monterey, and I hoped to visit Laguna Seca, the race track with the legendary Corkscrew corner. All along the way, we saw hundreds of Porsches of varying models and generations heading somewhere. Until Monterey, they were driving in the same direction, though after we passed Monterey, they were coming the other way.

A quick Google search revealed that a Rennsport Reunion was taking place at Laguna Seca. It also meant that we'd missed the turnoff to the track and overshot by quite a distance, so we decided to hit Laguna Seca on the way back. Hopefully, the Porsches would still

be around. We saw pretty much all models of the 911, the Boxster and the Cayman, most in various motorsport liveries, and even a 914 and a 944 on the road. We missed the turnoff on the way back, too, of course. Unfinished business is yet another characteristic of road trips, it would seem.

We rolled on, eyes always searching for speed-limit signs lest we have a run-in with Johnny Law. The good thing was, SR 1 mostly seemed to have people who wanted to be on the road. No one was in a hurry to get anywhere, and the road itself was the reason. You see, by now we'd gotten onto the Big Sur section, one of the earliest constructed stretches of SR 1 dating back to the early 1920s. Very often the road cut through mountains and I later learnt that these gaps were made using surplus WWI explosives, while cheap labour for building the road was acquired from prisons. War and crime combined to make one of the most beautiful roads in the world. And all along the road, I saw the cars that I'd originally wanted for the drive.

The Ford Mustang has to be the official car of California. We

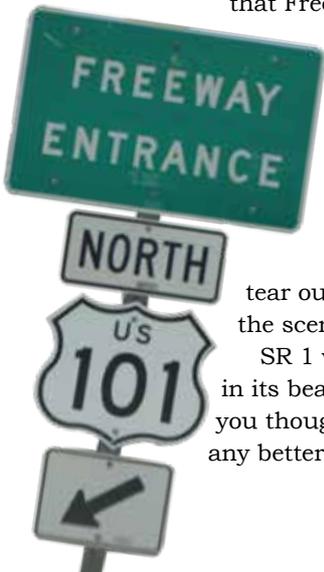


saw so many of them, our Soul felt like an exotic on those roads, though there were a fair few of those as well. Running behind the Mustang were the Chevrolet Camaro and Corvette, and the Dodge Challenger. And then there were various SUVs that'd make Mumbai houses look even more like matchboxes. Among motorcycles, almost all we saw were Harley-Davidsons, all marching along in rigorous formation, far too serious for their own good. No one was having fun pushing their machines, except this one guy on a KTM 790 Duke who wheeled past a line of Harleys plodding along. A row of helmets shaking in disapproval is a mighty funny sight, I tell you.

All along Big Sur, we had no network on our phones, so Android Auto wasn't any help. But the road is so well signaged, we didn't need it at all. Indeed, it is possible that the road is perhaps over-signaged. Really, it came to such a level that immediate roadworks, probably ten-minute jobs, had multiple signs placed from 200 metres before. After a while, I half expected signs for a leaf that had fallen onto the road five minutes ago. And just when I was making all sorts of jokes about the signs, we came across one that had a deer pulling a wheelie on its hind legs. Shortly after, we came across a car with its front end smashed and a deer lying dead in front of it. Subsequently, all signage-related jokes were reduced to nothing.

Except when one sign indicated that Freedom was 45 miles away, and another that asked us to take exit 46 for Hickey Boulevard. But that was only when we could tear our eyes away from the scenery.

SR 1 was unrelenting in its beauty. Just when you thought it couldn't get any better, it would take



Following a Mustang that's about to pass a parked Mustang. There was one in the rear-view mirror, too



Harley-Davidson groups a frequent sight. It's impossible to forget that South Park episode on this road



That which we seek. Maybe he's a judge. Maybe truth is just something you find only on a number plate



Night driving is stress-free. No high beams piercing your eyes & plenty of helpful signs. India, please note



Natural beauty is a constant and faithful travelling companion on this road



The Kia Soul flanked by two neo-retro icons, the VW Beetle on the left and the Ford Mustang on the right

things up a notch, and keep doing so until you ran out of daylight. Bixby Creek Bridge is one such example. Completed in 1932, it stands 280 feet high and looks like a gate leading into a mystical land. There are other similar arch bridges along SR 1, but none of them look as surreal as the Bixby Bridge. Then there's the road itself, winding along the coast like a tarmac ribbon placed along mountainsides by a divine hand, all with the purpose of providing the best possible views of the Pacific Ocean.

Words simply cannot do justice to it. And so it is necessary to pull over every few hundred meters to take as many photographs as possible with a DSLR, two phone cameras and an instant film camera, only to realise that they don't do justice to it either. The different moods of the road are far too many to accurately capture. Even the colours of the sky, road and water keep changing faster than you can appreciate.

Once we crossed Big Sur, we found ourselves on flatlands all the way to San Simeon, crossing



This cafe in Pismo Beach would look perfect on an Americana postcard. And it does. We bought a few, too

“ Or as the rest of the world calls it, the wrong football ”



The ol' stars and stripes are everywhere, almost as if people need a constant reminder of their own whereabouts



Following another Soul through a tunnel on SR 1



towns with populations less than the building I live in. A place called Harmony with 'Pop: 15' and even that had a sign to point out its existence. On the way, we passed the turnoff the Hearst Castle, a prominent landmark in the middle of nowhere as far as I could tell. It was William Randolph Hearst's home where he entertained the who's who of the time including Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo and Winston Churchill.

We didn't have the time to make a stop, but we did stop at a place nearby which offered the view of an endless sky. And as we walked

around, we caught sight of some cattle grazing beyond the fence that lined the road. I'd read that there are quite a few private ranches lining SR 1 all along the way, in addition to protected forests and government-owned land. So the cattle was entirely expected, but what I didn't expect were zebras milling about with the cows! It turns out that Hearst had a private zoo of sorts in his grounds, and after his death the carnivores were sent off to zoos, while some of the herbivores were allowed to live on the lands. Zebras, of all things. For a moment there, I swear I started looking for the inevitable lions.

It was already dark when we drove past Morro Bay, another small town which seemed spectacularly placed along a gentle rise next to SR 1, almost all buildings shimmering white in the night-time lights.

Finally at Pismo Beach, we parked the car for the night and walked to a pub called Harry's which showed up as a popular all-night place on Google. It was a karaoke night and apparently Pismo Beach's population is made up of singers who never made it to the big time. Every person except one lady seemed to be able to produce magic from their vocal chords, and we gladly sat in silence and took it all in.

The next morning, we went to the seafront boulevard for breakfast, and noticed that the town looks like the Riverdale in Archie comics. For every new apartment building, there seemed to be an old structure dripping with easygoing character. And, of course, every screen we looked at only showed NFL news. Or as the rest of the world calls it, the wrong football.

The entire SR 1 contributes

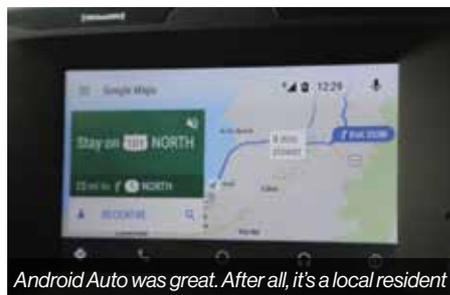




Old VW's everywhere except on the roads. Too bad



The same goes for these classic-looking models



Android Auto was great. After all, it's a local resident



The Soul looks out at the Golden Gate Bridge moments before the Pacific fog rolled in to cover everything

We weren't there for the attractions — we were there for the road

several billion dollars to the state's economy via tourism. I wouldn't have guessed it driving down Big Sur or over the flatlands of San Simeon, and wondered where all that money came from. Until I went shopping for souvenirs and contributed a fair few dollars to those billions myself. My debit card, fed on a diet of rupees, cried out of starvation. I also noticed an obsession with old air-cooled VWs all along SR 1, though this wasn't a surprise considering that California was the centre of hippie culture, and those laidback VWs made for perfect sedate companions in those heady times. The image is stuck; I can even imagine those air-cooled motors wheezing up Big Sur's inclines. It all comes together with beach motifs and neon signs to create an ambience of unforgettable Americana. What a vibe.

There are sand dunes at Pismo Beach where people take their dirt bikes, ATVs and 4X4s to throw sand in each other's faces. Or at least I imagine that's the case because we heard of the place on our way out of town. In any case, I doubt it's possible to absorb everything SR 1 has to offer even if you have a month. Look at the attractions between San Francisco and Los Angeles, and you'll see all the places we didn't see. In the end, we only drove up and down the most scenic part of SR 1, 200-odd untravelled miles bookending the number on the Soul's tripmeter on either side, one to Leggett and the other to Dana Point. But we weren't there for the

attractions — we were there for the road. And which turned out like nothing else we've ever seen. And anyone who's ever been on the road knows that the trip never ends. It just pauses for a bit, and stays there until you return.

On the way back, it was the same journey in reverse, and a completely different feeling to have the Pacific on our left. A bit like changing the riding position of a motorcycle, if you will. We kept stopping for photographs, and on one occasion we stopped at a place which sloped gently off towards the sea and towards a rocky hill in the water. I noticed the fenced-off ground had some gentle curves that didn't look





The Golden Gate Bridge's orange embrace

natural, even though there was grass growing on them. A few moments later, I realised I was looking at a bunker in the ground facing the sea and that the shore was swollen with many more of them.

The hill in the sea had several antennae pointing to whatever was in the sky. I don't know how many such places we passed or if there are any more such military installations along SR 1. But it brought another point to my mind. Even today, the Californian coast is mostly desolate

beauty for probably one important reason among others — if war ever arrived, it would be fought in this largely inhospitable region, where exist a lovely road, a lonely castle and the odd zebra.

Carrying on, we reached San Francisco before dark, and continued our tradition of visiting local pubs. This time it was a place called Tempest, and it quite reminded me of the shady bars we have in Mumbai. It came close to being the highlight of San Francisco, but then we went to Pier 39, saw the incredible steep streets of the city that had to be the inspiration behind those contorting roads in *Inception*, and then finally the Golden Gate Bridge across which SR 1 runs as US 101 and continues to its end in Leggett. San Francisco is a cultural hub of the USA and among the many things that symbolise it, the Golden Gate Bridge stands tallest.

Perhaps it was best that our trip across SR 1 ended at the Golden Gate, a 2.7-km marvel of human ingenuity that overcomes nature's obstacles, a bright-orange contraction of SR 1's essence itself. And also a popular place for people to jump to their deaths, I'm told. The cold morning made the Bridge seem to glow with warmth, as San Francisco



woke up in the background. It was yet another surreal sight, this giant structure standing guard over the city, cars passing like noiseless ants over it. It's almost impossible to believe that it was opened in 1937. That's 83 years ago. On the day we were there, it was a fitting

end to a phenomenal drive. What a road. Cracks, bumps and everything.

Still, I looked north up Marin County. I felt a pang of almost-guilt because the real end of SR 1 lay further up, 200 miles away in Leggett where a redwood tree stands carved out to allow people to drive through it for kicks. And immediately I felt better because I decided to not rob one of the oldest living things on the planet of its dignity by slotting a car through its trunk. That's not the sort of co-existence we need. What we need is more roads like SR 1, connections that highlight the world we live in, not ravage it. Expressways will take us there faster, but roads like the SR 1 will show us more. Our innate desire to explore will doubtless result in more roads, but we should pay heed to the lessons that old roads teach us. They still have stories to tell if we're willing to listen. And they're not running out anytime soon. ■



REAR VIEW

MAHINDRA MOJO, THAR
& ARJUN NOVO



OVER THE TOP

You're only given
a little spark of
madness. You mustn't
lose it. Robin Williams
was right, of course

By Sherman Nazareth
Photographs Kartik Sadekar



Sanity is a widely subjective matter. And even though society has tried very hard to create a certain set of guidelines about its definition, it ultimately depends on the perspective of the viewer itself. Not that I'm saying if you run around flailing a pickaxe while dressed up in hot-shorts and stilettos, randomly yelling profanities at strangers you'd be considered sane. Though you might still have a few fans out there, it's always about the reasons behind the act of madness that will allow you to better understand the reality

of things. However, that's certainly not the case here. Sanity was merrily dumped down the garbage chute as we very enthusiastically took three very different Mahindras and set about executing our act of insanity at the Mahindra Adventure Off-Road facility in Igatpuri, Maharashtra. How long that enthusiasm lingered is a different matter altogether.

What we had before us was a very well set up off-road track with loads of technical sections that are designed to test your vehicle's go-anywhere potential. What was

the Mojo doing there, you ask? Well, that's an answer I've been pondering myself without any luck so far. All I can come up with is it's a clever form of torture for an over-enthusiastic soul. Then there was the Thar, Mahindra's iconic off-road SUV that was born right here on this track. We also happened to have the Arjun Novo at our disposal. Yes, a tractor. But before you jump to any farm-handed parodies in your head, just hear me out. This is one of the most off-road-capable contraptions I have ever encountered. Ignore the



agricultural get-up of this vehicle and you'll soon find out that if this tractor is limited to just farm work, it is grossly underutilised. The recreational potential of this vehicle is limitless. See a hill, want to have a closer look at that animal hanging off a tree, forget searching for a trail, just go! Remember to take a gift, relatives love gifts.

Mahindra has equipped the Mojo with a set of Pirelli Diablo Rosso 2 tyres that work wonderfully on tarmac. But the moment you run out of the black stuff, mayhem ensues. It would probably take a good deal of wrestling with the Mojo to keep it upright if you ever choose to go explore some trails. The Mahindra Adventure track, on the other hand, is far from a trail. Out here in the dirt, every little kilo of motorcycle counts. And Mahindra seems to have thrown in a mighty extra for reasons beyond the outer reaches of my mind. Sure, that added weight might enhance high-speed stability, but it's certainly not doing me any favours out here.

What was especially nerve-racking was going downhill. There were



The most coveted part of the Thar

loose gravel, big rocks and gigantic ruts, courtesy of all the 4X4 activity around these parts. The amount of traction you have at your disposal is almost negligible. Touch the rear brake and you'll slip out. Touch the front brake and that entire load at the front end will make sure you slip out as well. And it's not like we were blessed with flat run-offs at the bottom of the slopes, either. So standing up and riding it out wasn't really an option. The only way I managed to get that Mojo to





The Mojo doesn't look very happy, does it? Well, time to get back to the highway

“...was I really struggling with this section on the Mojo?”



The perfect recipe for a slip and slide



the bottom of the slope was literally inch by inch. And let's not forget the sweltering heat that turned my riding gear into a portable sauna. Evidently, the winter in Maharashtra seems to have migrated to greener pastures. However fun the Mojo's torque curve is on the road, it takes a little getting used to on the dirt. Hit that 5500-rpm mark on the tachometer and what you have is essentially a sideways slip 'n' slide.

Great fun if you've got a flat surface at your disposal. Not so much if you're staring down a right hander with a three-foot drop right through the middle.

So after a torturous few hours on the Mojo, the Thar finally arrived a little after noon. Looks like someone answered my prayers and decided to offer me some respite. After spending a few minutes dangling my head in front of those glorious

A/C vents, looking positively like a mutt, it was time to go explore what the track had to offer in the comfort of a car. Here's where all that 25.18 kgm of torque was summoned for battle. The first thought that came to mind was, was I really struggling with this section a few moments ago on the Mojo? All the undulations and ruts suddenly appeared inviting while viewing them from high up in the Thar. The rear differential lock seemed to work wonders while climbing up or descending the technical sections of the track. And the independent front suspension just made the experience so much more manageable.

Just remember to pre-warn any rear passengers that they would soon be getting a first-hand experience of being on the inside of a tumble-dryer. Maybe a quick dip in the lake before entering the Thar would add more purpose to them being there. It's quite a pity all the ponds and streams around the track had dried up around this time of the year. I'm sure our photographer





“The engine is a part of the chassis and the chassis is devoid of any suspension”



Did you manage to catch the rabbit?



A brake for each side. Donuts, anyone?

would have jumped right in with the Thar. We did manage to find one section that was sort of flattish and Raunak switched the Thar into 2WD mode and seemed to be having an absolute ball drifting it around the corner. For the more adventurous sections, we had the 4H and 4L modes at our disposal.

Finally, the time arrived to step into the Arjun Novo. Now this was my first experience with a tractor and as I climbed up into it, I was completely overwhelmed by the amount of levers scattered all over the place. Not as straightforward as a car, but once you figure out what everything is for, driving it is an absolute delight. Luckily, I

had a specialised tractor driver to explain all of it to me. To the left of the steering wheel is a lever that is separate from the actual gearshift lever, but overrides the actual lever and puts it into forward, reverse and neutral modes. To the right of the steering wheel is a hand accelerator! That's right; life just became so much simpler after I figured out how to use it. There's also the conventional foot accelerator, but who needs that now? And there's also the 4H and 4L mode gear lever as in the Thar. A 4WD tractor! Brilliant!

What fascinated me the most was how this whole vehicle was put together. It's not your conventional layout, where you have an engine that fits into the chassis. Here, the engine is a part of the chassis and the chassis is devoid of any suspension. What you do have are rotating axles on the front and rear that give you a rather generous amount of articulation. While we put this torque monster through its paces, suddenly none of the sections around the track seemed to be even slightly intimidating. The only way I would realise how steep the incline or decline was was when I could feel the angle at which the gravity was coming from. The tractor seemed to defy all





place he had to sit was on the rear fender. Needless to say, as he got a mouthful of leaves and a rather sore backside for his troubles, I was almost splitting at the seams. It's quite fortunate he was a good sport about it. Soon, it was my turn to be a good sport and keep smiling while I went and got that rear puncture fixed on the Mojo. And suddenly, I'd forgiven the Mojo for all that torture. I had the pristine tarmac of NH-3 before me and I couldn't wait to ride it in its element. However, it's the Arjun Novo that stole the show. I feel it has so much potential other than for agricultural work. Imagine how it'd be on my daily commute. Goodbye, traffic jams. Hello there, obstacle course. ■

We at Motoring World would like to express our gratitude to the Mahindra Adventure Off-road Academy for giving us a whole day of access and the freedom to execute our juvenile acts



Who needs suspension? Not me surely

of that. It simply sailed through like it was just another bumpy road. I'm also quite sure those gigantic tyres had a lot to do with it. No wonder all those tractor-driving farmers look so happy all the time.

By the time the sun was ready to set I had a wide grin plastered all over my face. Partly because our photographer decided to come for a ride in the tractor and the only

MOTODATA

MAHINDRA MOJO

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	295cc, single
Max power	26 bhp@8000 rpm
Max torque	3.05 kgm@5500 rpm
Transmission	6-speed manual
SUSPENSION	
F/R	USD Forks/Gas-charged mono shock
BRAKES	
F/R	320mm disc, radial caliper/ 240mm disc, floating caliper
TYRES	
F/R	110/70 ZR17 / 150/60 ZR17
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	2100/800/1165.5 mm
Wheelbase	1465 mm
Kerb weight	165 kg
Fuel Tank	21 litres
PRICE	₹ 1.65 LAKH (ex-showroom, Mumbai)

AUTODATA

MAHINDRA THAR CRDe 4X4

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	2498cc, i-4, turbodiesel
Max power	105 bhp@3800 rpm
Max torque	25.1 kgm@1800-2000 rpm
Transmission	5-speed manual plus transfer case
SUSPENSION	
F/R	Independent with Torsion bar and Stabilizer bar/ Semi elliptical leaf spring
BRAKES	
F/R	Hydraulic discs/drum
TYRES	
F/R	235/70 R16 Tubeless
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	3920/1726/1930 mm
Wheelbase	2430 mm
Kerb weight	1750 kg
PRICE	₹ 8.25 LAKH (ex-showroom, Delhi)

AUTODATA

MAHINDRA ARJUN NOVO 605 DI-i 4WD

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	3531cc, i-4
Max power	57 bhp@2100 rpm
Max torque	N/A
Transmission	Synchromesh, 15 forward + 3 reverse
SUSPENSION	
F/R	None
BRAKES	
F/R	Oil immersed disc
TYRES	
F/R	9.5-24 8PR/16.9-28 12PR
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	3660/NA/2100 mm
Wheelbase	2145 mm
Lifting weight	2200 kg
PRICE	NA



THE PLACE TO BE

The Hyundai Venue is
a compact SUV that
packs a mighty punch

A year since its launch, the Hyundai Venue has dominated its segment. Stay with us as we explore just why we love the Venue as much as we do.

From the outside, the Venue is anything but your typical SUV. It features Hyundai's signature design language and continues to turn heads on the roads even today. Looking at it head-on, you're greeted with an imposing cascading grille with square headlights flanking it on either side. Square lighting elements are a recurring theme in the Venue's design which works well to create a very cohesive

design overall. The side profile of the Venue is like no other vehicle on sale in India currently; the crisp silhouette of the car is accented by a strong character line that extends all the way into the tail-lamps. It's definitely something we'd love to have in our garage.

Inside, the Venue is a seriously nice place to spend time in. One thing you can feel very satisfied about is the fit-and-finish levels. All the buttons, the controls, the touch and feel of the dash itself, they all ooze quality. The driver's seat offers you a commanding view of the road ahead and the steering is adjustable for rake





All controls are easily within the driver's reach



Touchscreen is the command centre for BlueLink



Accommodating three abreast is not an issue at all

and reach, so it won't take you long to get comfortable in the Hyundai Venue, even if you are very tall.

At the back, the floor of the Venue is flat, as is the seat bottom right across its breadth, so accommodating three abreast is not an issue at all. Perfect for a nice road trip out of the city, then! And when you do take that road trip, the Venue's boot space will come in very handy

indeed. There's 350 litres of it to use, which is excellent for a car this size.

Smack in the centre of the dashboard sits an 8-inch touchscreen. The touchscreen itself is ridiculously simple to use, it's got a great UI and the touch sensitivity is just right. It is on the touchscreen that you'll find the Venue's greatest feature — BlueLink.

Now, the Internet is a powerful thing

to have in your hand, but it's even more powerful when it's integrated into your car. The Hyundai Venue comes with the BlueLink connected-car interface which adds an additional layer of safety, security and convenience to your ownership experience. You can access BlueLink using voice commands inside the car and through an app on your phone when you're away from it.



“The turbo spools up quickly, giving you gobs of low-end torque”

BlueLink automatically alerts the authorities in case you ever have a crash, saving valuable time in getting first-aid. You can also use it to summon roadside assistance if you need it. BlueLink makes your car a lot more secure, too. You can set it to alert you any time the Venue is travelling outside a designated area, or above a certain speed, for example. You can even remotely immobilise the car in case it is stolen.

On particularly hot days, it's extremely unpleasant to get into a car that's been sitting out in the sun. Well, BlueLink has you covered there, too. You can set the car to turn on the engine and subsequently,

the air conditioning system, ensuring you'll always come back to a comfortable car.

Oh, the Venue also comes with a built-in air-purifier, which works well to reduce the Air Quality Index of the air circulating in the cabin. It's a boon for those with seasonal allergies. There are other niceties like a built-in wireless charger for your phone, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay on the dash. We've only just scratched the surface on all the features the Venue is available with.

You can have your Venue in four different BS6-compliant engine/transmission combos. There is the base petrol engine, a 1.2-litre unit which makes



BlueLink lets you monitor vehicle parameters right from your smartphone

81 bhp and 11.6 kgm of peak torque. This engine is available with a 5-speed manual transmission. It's peppy but fuel efficient at the same time. Then there is the 1.5-litre diesel engine, which makes 98 bhp and 24.5 kgm of peak torque mated to a 6-speed manual transmission. The Venue is one of the few compact SUVs that still offers a diesel engine in the BS6 era. Finally, there is the punchy 1.0-litre turbo-petrol engine which makes 120 bhp and 17.5 kgm of torque. You can have this with either a 6-speed manual transmission or a quick-shifting 7-speed dual-clutch transmission.

If you haven't read it already, the

turbo-petrol is our favourite engine in the line-up. The turbo spools up very quickly, giving you gobs of low-end torque, and it keeps delivering torque almost all the way to the redline. We're pretty sure there's voodoo somewhere between the throttle and the wheels. The best part is that it does all this while sounding glorious. It's an engine that perfectly suits the character of the Venue.

And finally, our absolute favourite thing about the Venue is its handling and body control. There is simply no other SUV in its segment that handles direction changes as well as the Venue does. The body is taut and body roll is very minimal.

The turbocharged engine eggs you on to take the next curve just a little faster, and the chassis dutifully obliges, taking you around corners at speeds an SUV has no business going. With handling chops like this, you'd think the ride quality was compromised, but then, you'd be wrong. The Venue makes quick work of bad roads, steamrolling them into submission. Low and high speed bumps are dealt with without ever breaking a sweat.

To be honest, these are only a few of the reasons why we like the Venue. To really understand why we love it so much, you need to get behind the wheel of one and find out for yourself.

REAR VIEW

PORSCHE 912



PLUS ONE

We drive the original 'poor man's' Porsche, the 912

By Rohin Nagrani *Photographs* Kartik Sadekar



The thrum from a boxer motor has a metallic timbre to it, the kind of sound motoring orgasms are made of. The only boxer-four motor I'd previously experienced was the one on a Subaru Forester and it had the automotive equivalent of a whooping cough. I can't quite recollect what the reason was — a misfiring cylinder or something less dire — but I never quite got to grips with what a horizontally-opposed four-potter was like.

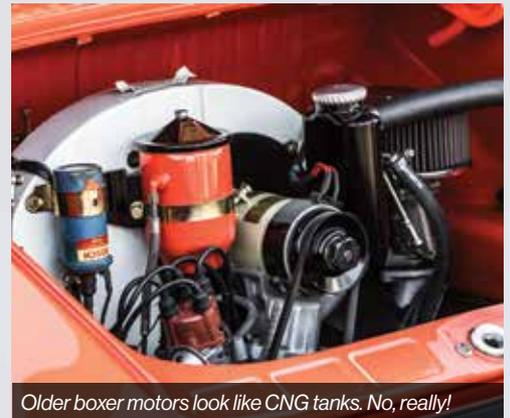
It would take November 2015's 41-degree searing heat of Dubai to find answers. The reference to the bruiser is even true in auditory terms, the heavy cast-iron block with the pistons pushing against the opposite ends felt just like a boxer's fist sitting snug in a glove filled with iron pellets. With the motor sitting right behind the transaxle, it pretty much sounds like a 356, which it is, but also isn't. Welcome, then, to the Porsche 912, the black sheep and forgotten hero of Porsches, the one that resided in the large shadow of the 911. And yes, it was no pumpkin wagon.

Let's answer the tricky bit first: the 356 connection is strictly the motor and some ancillaries. The rest of the body shell and mechanicals are the 911. It was still very much a Butzi design, but it was also a stroke of marketing genius, which Porsche continues to be to this very day. When Porsche launched the 911 in 1963-64, the successor to the 356 was not only quite modern, it was a good 60 per cent up on the sticker price and that was enough to send many Porsche loyalists in other directions. Porsche knew it couldn't afford to keep things that way, so in 1965, as it wound down 356 production, it quietly discarded all its dyes and tools, kept the motor around, stuck it in a 911 shell and changed the nomenclature.

On came the 1582cc, 90-bhp motor, mated to a five-speeder in the true reverse dog-leg format. It had everything that most Porsche owners wanted — an engine in the wrong place, pedals offset to the right, a 5-speed gearbox and five dials with the tacho staring at you in the centre. It was loud, heavy and,



Karmann and Porsche association lasted four decades



Older boxer motors look like CNG tanks. No, really!





New pedals on a classic Porsche are an oxymoron



“It was still very much a Butzi design, but it was also a stroke of marketing genius”



It's still one of the most evocative set of gauges since the dawn of the industrial age. No?

by 1966 standards, rather quick. And the car you see in the pictures is possibly one of the finest 912s in this part of the world, even if it's not the purest. The Porsche stickering on the flanks is RS-inspired, while the aluminium floor and bucket seats borrow from the same thought process, too. The owner was out to create a Carrera RS 2.7 replica, but stopped short when he realised that it'd be rather foolhardy to do so. He's also a bit of a Porsche nut; his other car is a 993 Carrera 2 with the famous Turbo wide-body (wider rear haunches and the ilk) and is the proprietor of Dubai's best known classic car restoration workshop — Max Garage.

Part of a barn find in California many years ago, bringing it back to order was a tough task. Boxer motors are particularly notorious if they aren't in the pink of health and years of disrepair can make it

a bit tricky to bring them back to order. To bring up a rusting 911/912 from the classic era and restore them requires some pretty in-depth knowledge, not unlike Volkswagen Beetles or Transporters from the same era. There's still a fair chunk of original parts on the car; the Fuchs wheels, though, were an option on 912s and Vijay, the man at the helm of Max Garage, picked up a fresh set to lend it some character.

What never fails to still amaze me is how spacious the 911/912 truly is. Its small dimensions belie its capaciousness and an appetite for large-built individuals. It smacks at similar-era sportscars with disdain; the large American muscle cars, for example, may have boasted big motors and huge horsepower, but were thoroughly outclassed by the Weissachian around a track. Or even in terms of practicality. Five dials with the tacho in the centre and a



speedo on the right that's hidden by your right hand; it was probably Porsche's idea of the middle-finger to the men in blue. Visibility is excellent and because the car wraps so well around you, you feel like filling material in a cast. Ah, the reverse dog leg. I always felt that they were the biggest hindrance to smooth gearshifting, but with time you kind of adapt your driving style to suit it. The 5-speed 'box's ratios are nicely spread out — two short ratios, followed by two long-ish ones and a final ratio to make cruising easy.

Off the lights, the 912 can keep up with modern machinery if you give it some stick and keep revs upwards of 4000 rpm. In Dubai, where every second or third car has a massive V8 under its hood or at least 250 bhp, it still feels evergreen. Since the motor is nearly 115 kg down on the boxer-six, its lightness makes up for lack of horsepower. With a power-to-weight ratio of

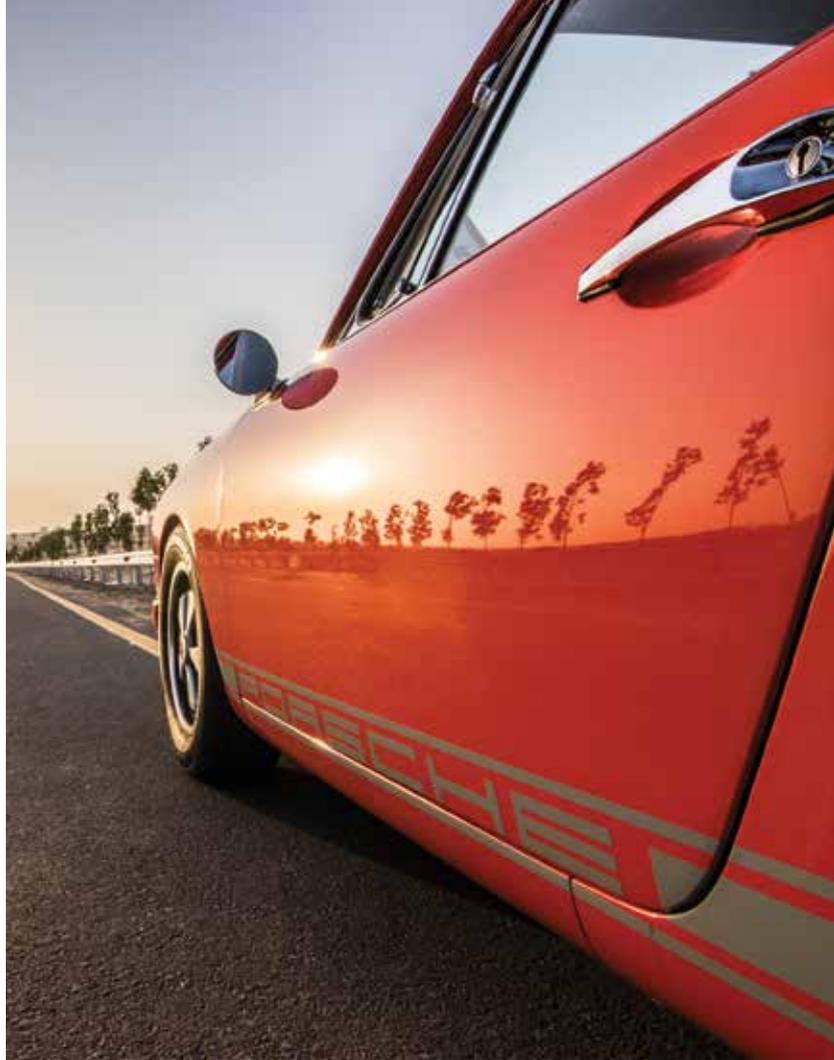
91.75 bhp/tonne, the 912 is rather quick on the uptake. Once you get a hang of the gearshifts, the 912 starts to sing, the heavy mechanical rumble of the boxer-four makes it feel much louder and more raw than its larger-engined brother. Maybe the Solex downdraft carbs have something to do with it.

If you want to drive a slow car fast, the 912 probably ranks among the elite few through history. Allow me to explain; the six-cylinder boxer, though quick, was prone to oversteer, largely because of the weight shift to the rear. With the lighter four, the 912's weight balance was more even, though the narrower tyres on the original meant its lack of grip was not mechanical in nature. It didn't seem true with our specimen over the handful of curves we got a chance to push it around thanks to modern rubber with their better construction techniques and materials that tend to reduce or nearly eliminate unwanted

dynamic behaviour.

Then, there's the steering. With modern Porsches struggling to get steering feel in place, this one simply oozes with much of it every time you turn, down to the tugging of the tie-rods, too! And with the independent suspension all around, the ride is what distinguishes it from many of its modern contemporaries. Built at a time when the posterior was the best device to sort out ride, the 912 is so resolved that you find the odd magic eye strip hardly upsetting.

Saturday evening's setting sun proved to be the perfect time of the week to drive the 912, however brief the escapade may have been. What the 912 really is, is a classic equivalent of a modern Cayman — light, quick, agile and rather endearing. It's fate, then, that in the month of the 718 Cayman and Boxster's announcement, we've driven a rare production, rear-engined boxer-four from Porsche. Life, full circles and all that jazz. ■



MOTOFOCUS

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KITBAG BAGGING IT

GET SET, KIT!

Want to shoot your rides, protect yourself, and wear a cool backpack? Here's some new gear to check out!

What is it?

Alpinestars Tech-Air 5

Is it any good?

Raising the bar in terms of safety standards for motorcyclists, Alpinestars has introduced the new Tech-Air 5, an airbag vest that can be worn under any textile riding jacket with 4 cm to spare around the body. The vest is also compatible with leather jackets that have a built-in expansion panel to allow airbag inflation; since it's worn inside the jacket, you won't look weird. And if the unfortunate does come to pass, the vest will protect the rider's shoulders, chest, ribs and the spine. And for those asking too many questions about the price, how much do you think those body parts go for?

How much?

₹ 53,839

Where?

www.alpinestars.com



What is it?

GoPro HERO7

Is it any good?

GoPro is now synonymous with action cameras like Cadbury is with chocolates. The HERO7 has been around for a while and is still a great camera despite its successor, the HERO8. It comes equipped with a 12MP 4K ultra-HD camera, advanced video stabilisation, voice control, live

streaming, GPS and connectivity options of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth. The camera also has a removable battery and is waterproof up to a depth of 10 metres. Rain? What rain?

How much?

₹ 26,500

Where?

www.amazon.in



What is it?

Nelson Rigg Hurricane

Is it any good?

Available in 40-litre and 20-litre capacities, the Nelson Rigg Hurricane is a rugged backpack that also doubles as soft luggage that can be easily strapped onto a motorcycle. The main compartment, that can easily accommodate a 15-inch laptop and other items, is fully waterproof with a dry-bag roll-opening design. It is also UV coated with a tarpaulin PVC outer layer with seams that are heat-welded for maximum strength and durability. The shoulder straps, although basic, are beefy and provide enough support to hold the bag around the chest and waist. Oh, and it looks pretty cool as well.

How much?

₹ 10,777

Where?

www.amazon.in



TALK WRENCH

REAYING YOUR MOTORCYCLE POST THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

BACK ON THE SADDLE

How to get your bike back on the road post the COVID-19 lockdown.

The COVID-19 lockdown has been hard on all of us. Although this article was written keeping in mind that the 3rd of May was the date the lockdown was to be lifted, there is every possibility that it might continue. If that happens, please maintain the lockdown as per the stipulations of the government and only carry out the following instructions post the lifting of the curfew.

Please note that every precaution must be taken to sanitize yourself

before entering your home to prevent exposing your family members to the virus. Thus, please wash your hands, and preferably have a shower, as soon as you re-enter your home after carrying out the following tips.

- Wash the bike yourself with water and some clean cotton rags. Look out for any fluid leaks and the like. After the bike is dry, clean and lube the chain.
- Check the fluid levels. Only if all are within spec, start the bike and let it idle.
- While it is idling and getting up to operating temperature, gently pump the clutch lever and the front and rear brake levers. If any of the levers feel limp, there is a cause for attention and it must be rectified before the bike is ridden.
- Check whether all the electricals are functional.
- Get the tyre pressures checked and inflated if found to be lower than what the manufacturer recommends.
- Kit up and go for a slow ride. Before you go mental, ride around your house, paying attention to look out for any strange sounds emanating from your bike. If all is well, you're



DEAD IN THE WATER

Hi,
My name is Sagar and I own a Royal Enfield Classic 350. I parked the bike two weeks before the lockdown and haven't started it since. The other day, I tried to start it but it refused to do so. The electric starter won't engage and even when I tried kicking it several times, it didn't start. What could be the problem?

Sagar Gada

Hi Sagar,

I suspect that the battery of your motorcycle is dead. That being said, make sure you check if all the fuses are unburnt. Try push starting the bike. Engage the second gear, turn on the ignition and have a friend push you while you pull in the clutch. When the bike gets rolling to about 8kph, release the clutch and it should turn the motor over fast enough to get it started. Try this a few times and if it still doesn't start, you'll need to take off the battery and have it charged at the shop. When you reconnect it, make sure that you don't get the polarities wrong because that could prove costly!

ready to rock and roll on your motorcycle.

- After the bike has cooled down enough to touch the silencers, cover the bike up and return home. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before you touch anything at home which your family members may come in contact with. ■

PRESSING MATTERS

We look at what ‘squish band’ means in engine parlance and what it does for two strokes

Imagine – and do not actually carry out what you have imagined for obvious reasons – that you have a lit matchstick in the middle of a circular room that is filled with copious amounts of oxygen and petrol vapours mixed together in the ratio of 14:1 in equal measure all across the space. It is quite easy to grasp what the inevitable result would be; the fuel closest to the lit matchstick would ignite and create a huge fireball in every direction that moves outwards away from the centre, in turn igniting the other unburnt fuel it encounters, as it proceeds to the walls of the room and resulting in a rather phenomenal explosion.

What if for the second scenario, the conditions are the same but for one difference. Instead of the petrol vapour and oxygen mix being present all around the room in equal measure, it is somehow more in density near the walls of closed space and less near the lit matchstick. Again, it is quite easy to see that the lit match will light up the petrol vapours and oxygen nearest to it first in the centre of the room, but it will create a fireball that will take longer to build momentum



as it progresses towards the extremities of the space.

In two strokes, it is the squish band that prevents the second hypothetical scenario that we just spoke about from occurring.

Within the two stroke motor, the room is the combustion chamber, the lit matchstick is the sparking plug and the 14:1 mixture of petrol and oxygen is the stoichiometric ratio which is the ideal amount for optimum fuel burn. The fireballs are the flame fronts that move outwards and away from the plug towards the cylinder walls.

The squish band is simply the outer circumference of the head within the combustion chamber that forces the unburnt charge towards the

dome, at the pinnacle of which the spark plug electrode resides. The piston approaches the top dead centre during the compression stroke, the squish band - designed to be tapered with the widest end pointing towards the combustion dome – squeezes the air-fuel mixture from the extremities and shoves it towards the pocket with the plug so that most of the charge is closest to the spark, insuring quicker combustion and faster flame front propagation.

This squish band must be designed precisely to funnel the charge at the right velocities because if it is too quick, it could cause detonation (abnormal and untimely burning of the fuel that causes pressure waves to ricochet off the cylinder walls) and if it is too slow, then the charge will not be burned completely in time which would result in high fuel consumption and lower performance.

Thus, if you intend to squeeze some more juice out of a two stroke, tweaking the squish band can do wonders for engine performance. But remember, knowing just how much to alter is a science and worth reading up on! ■

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SCAN FOR PAYTM

THE GRAPEVINE

BENCHMARK TERRITORY

Taking the game a level up in the middleweight-naked sports segment, Triumph has launched the new Street Triple RS. Demanding the same price tag as the outgoing model, ₹ 11.13 lakh, ex-showroom, the motorcycle now packs even more performance, tech and top-spec equipment. It now has an improved 765cc inline-triple developed under Triumph's Moto2 engine programme that promises a more responsive experience. The bike also features Bluetooth connectivity with an integrated GoPro control system, updated two-way quickshifter and a TFT console. This is a motorcycle we just can't wait to get our hands on.



SWEET ACQUISITION

If you are a fan of Nortons, you'll be happy to know that TVS Motor Company has acquired the British motorcycle brand in an all-cash deal summing up to ₹ 153 crore (GBP 16 million). With this purchase, Norton will be able to leverage TVS's global reach and supply chain capabilities thus allowing it to venture into new markets. On the other hand, TVS is eager about the existing and upcoming motorcycle in Norton's product portfolio which currently comprises the Commando, Dominator and V4 RR. Read the Norton Atlas story in a few pages' time!

LOW AND BEHOLD

Need a seat that's easily sat on? Harley-Davidson, besides updating its current product portfolio with 2020 models, has also launched the new Low Rider S in the country carrying a sticker tag of ₹ 14.69 lakh, ex-showroom. Design-wise, the

silhouette of the Low Rider S is similar to that of the standard model; however, it gets a blacked-out theme, with matte dark-bronze alloy wheels, a body-coloured cowl for the headlamp and a flatter wide-style handlebar for an aggressive riding triangle. Displacement-wise, it gets a larger motor in the form of the Milwaukee-Eight 114 unit which is a 1868cc V-twin that punches out 15.3 kgm of peak torque. Besides that, it gets an inverted fork as opposed to the telescopic one on the normal variant and a twin-disc setup at the front and a single disc at the rear. It might be called the Low Rider, but it'll keep your spirits high, that's for sure.





HOT BOXING

Remember Pierce Brosnan's James Bond wrestling a BMW R1200C while being chased by villains? That was the German company's last attempt at making a motorcycle for people who wanted a cruiser but didn't want a Harley-Davidson. And now, 16 years later, BMW has launched the new R 18, a boxer-powered cruiser that could become Motorrad's own version of the Harley-Davidson Fat Boy. Drawing

inspiration from bikes like the R 5, the paint scheme, double-loop chassis and open driveshaft are some of the elements that the R 18 borrows from the past. The hulking motor is a 1802cc unit, an air-cooled beauty which delivers 91 bhp and 15.3 kgm. It comes with three riding modes — Rain, Rock and Roll; yes, that's true. Presumably, Rock is the sportiest of the modes, while Roll allows you to do just that. US prices start at the equivalent of ₹ 14.5 lakh, so we can only tremble at the thought of the R 18's price in India. But hey, it'll be perfect for those who want a stonking boxer but can't swing a leg over the tall R 1200 GS. Wonder if the new James Bond would pick this.

WE-NO-GO

Introduced well ahead of its time, sporting nifty features like 12-inch wheels and a centrally positional centre of gravity for better handling, the Wego has lots of fans to claim for itself. However, with the onset of the BS6 emissions norms and the gradual drop in demand for the scooter, TVS has decided to pull the plug on it.



The company folks are calling it a move to streamline their product portfolio in order to enhance dealer profitability; in other words, avoiding product cannibalisation over the success of the Jupiter. But we don't mind. Want to know why? Well, TVS is a clever brand and positively has got something up its sleeves for the Wego. A zippy fuel-injected scoot with all-new styling and fancy features doesn't sound bad, eh?

VYRUS OUTBREAK

If you've never heard of Vyrus, well, it's a brand that deals in nothing but exclusivity. Remember the Vyrus C3 series? No? Google it, then. Meanwhile, the Italian brand is back and this time with a motorcycle that has a perfect name — the Alyen 988. Like Vyrus motorcycles, this one too is completely built by hand. And it all starts at the heart of the matter with Ducati's Superquadro 1285cc V-twin motor, complete with the Desmodromic valve layout, last seen on the 1299 Panigale. Beyond that, like every Vyrus built till date, the Alyen packs a pair of swingarms to hold the wheels at both ends and is paired with top-of-the-line Brembo GP4 braking units and a



unique pushrod suspension system. The bike has a carbon-fibre composite body that extends to the wheels too. All this is held together by a double-omega frame that is made from magnesium for the maximum possible weight reduction. The price for such an exclusive example of engineering? Well, Vyrus is yet to reveal that bit, but rest assured it will be as outrageous as the Alyen's appearance, and will probably be sold out before we even realise it.

SHORT BURST

SMARTY PANTS



Hero has launched the BS6-compliant Splendor iSmart in the country, which now retails at ₹ 67,100, a hike of ₹ 2200 over its BS4 model. It now gets a slightly larger 113.2cc mill but with fuel-injection. It also gets a front disc brake as standard while continuing to feature Hero's i3s start-stop tech.

BRAKE BITE



Bajaj Auto has updated its fully-faired RS200 with dual-channel ABS beside the mandatory BS6 update. While the new emission compliance has resulted in a 2-kg gain in kerb weight, the motor still registers the same figures, which should result in a marginal drop in performance.

COMMUTER HIKE



TVS's youngest 110cc commuter, the Radeon, has been updated to comply with BS6 emissions. Now featuring fuel-injection, prices of the motorcycle have shot up by ₹ 6632 to ₹ 8632 depending on the variant. The bike now weighs 4 kg more, while the motor is now 15 per cent more efficient than the BS4 unit.

TANK SLAPPER

BAJAJ DOMINAR 400 &
KTM 390 ADVENTURE





INTENTS TALK

Is the dual-sport motorcycle the new cruiser?

By Kartik Ware Photographs Kaustubh Khare

This is not a comparison. Funny thing to say about two bikes that share a LOT of components and are made in the same place, yes? And while I will inevitably state each motorcycle's qualities, it's not meant to be a contrast to each other, rather to what each stands for — the cruiser and the dual-sport motorcycle. I run the risk of knitting a few brows at Bajaj by calling the Dominar 400 a cruiser, but I am in a reasonably safe position because I'm pretty sure even Bajaj doesn't know what exactly the bike is supposed to be. The KTM 390 Adventure, on the other hand, does exactly what it says on the label. Or at least it looks like it will.

That cocky comment up there

about the Dominar isn't without reason. Bajaj launched marketing campaigns to the four winds to make sense of the motorcycle, from 'dominating the night' to 'hyper riding' to making fun of 'elephants', all in quick succession, but none satisfactorily explained what the Dominar is. If there is a focus to this lovely all-rounder, it's the sportiness with which it does everything. However, its proportions firmly dictate that it falls into a category called 'power cruiser' (coughDiavelcough). In our scaled-down Indian context, of course. That KTM-derived motor is fully capable of delivering on the 'power', while the rest of the motorcycle can handle

everything, including the 'cruiser' bit.

The 390 Adventure doesn't shoot marketing arrows into the dark like its Bajaj cousin, but it's far from perfect itself; I've had to suffer a minor heart attack when, loaded with a 100-kg pillion, my own 390 Adventure hammered its underside into a speed breaker. Even my 52-year-old Rajdoot doesn't do that. And as has been amply clear since the KTM's first ride, it's not really a hardcore off-roader; calling it one is like claiming I can lift 200 kg, but only 10 kg at a time. However, both the Dominar and the 390 Adventure provide excellent homemade platforms with which to see our country. Even if we end up mostly

... the 390 Adventure is the first proper lower-displacement attempt at the dual-sport motorcycle

seeing the buildings on the way to the office.

There was a time when dual-sport motorcycles could go anywhere except India. And this, despite our country's desperate need for this breed of motorcycles for the longest time. Traditionally, India has been staunchly opposed to dual-sports; even in recent times, it's only the RE Himalayan that's carved out a name for itself, battling terrains as well as mindsets. The Hero Xpulse has been doing its bit, too, while the BMW G 310 GS could do little but watch from showroom floors, it's





Two worldviews to pick from, high and low



LED faces that show you lots of new places



Numbers and colours, ideas for the same goal

price tag shooing away well-meaning riders. And yet, none of these bikes come close to being as important as the KTM. All of these bikes are great machines, but the 390 Adventure is the first proper lower-displacement attempt at the dual-sport motorcycle. Yes, because 43.5 bhp.

The Dominar and the Adventure both share the same motor, albeit with the former employing enough spark plugs to make Nikola Tesla proud. That motor is an example of what makes KTM the master of single-cylinder engines and also of what Bajaj can produce if it has the knowhow, and it has widened the grins of every Indian enthusiast who's ridden it. In the Dominar, it sits low and makes a respectable 39.45 bhp, while it produces altitude-sickness-inducing wheelies in the Adventure. And it actually feels better in the Dominar to me for one outstanding reason — its sound. The Bajaj's exhaust makes music, much like a cruiser should, although with many more rpms and enthusiasm involved.

The cruiser is a format of motorcycle that has always been successful in India, mainly because

everyone wanted a Harley-Davidson, never mind the number of cylinders. We've even had a popular 125cc cruiser, the Yamaha Enticer, and Bajaj's own Avenger series is still going strong. However, you don't see young people on cruisers all that much. Given that the Indian population's average age is 29 years old, and that young people are more energetic than middle-aged ones, an overwhelming majority of riders will want a motorcycle that can keep pace with an active lifestyle. This makes a cruiser the bull when you need a horse. How about a power cruiser, though? Does a faster bull make sense?

Actually, it does. The Dominar, like I mentioned earlier, does everything with a sporty eagerness. It grips, accelerates and brakes with determination, and eats corners like a dog at lunchtime. Its riding position is a sporty hunch, though after the roomy Adventure I was very aware of the lack of real estate and it brought back memories of an adult me trying to fit into a toddler's tricycle. However, this tightness also helps the rider be one with the bike and that is a big contribution to its

“The word ‘adventure’ is overused from Kerala to Khardung La these days...”



sporty nature. As a riding experience, the Dominar is certainly unique and fun — though I’m not sure that’s enough to save it.

The 390 Adventure is tall and so it fits a six-foot me rather well. Forget standing on the ‘pegs and all that nonsense, there’s simply no need to. If you insisted on pretending to be Malcolm Smith, you’d find that the handlebar isn’t really at the right height and reach for banging your head into branches. The KTM gets traction control, cornering ABS that’s switchable, and a quickshifter. But all those things only cause delays because I have to remember to switch them off. Despite the fact that

the TC and the cornering ABS work really well, I think they take the edge off the bike. Though I’m certain that I’ll be thankful for them in the rain. The quickshifter, though, has been a clunky and snatchy pain from day one, and it’s permanently off on my bike.

Also, I don’t like the KTM’s unimaginative name. The word ‘adventure’ is overused from Kerala to Khardung La these days; it should’ve had a sticker with a less generic word printed on it. And it sounds like KTM employed deaf people to design the exhaust and hoped that riders wouldn’t notice. In the long run, along with comfort, it’s

the sound that endears a motorcycle to its rider. At least KTM should’ve paid attention to this because it’s not like the Adventure is much of a looker in the first place. But all is forgiven on the move. Well, all except that quickshifter, of course.

The 390 Adventure is very nearly the perfect all-round motorcycle. I could leave mine the way it is and it’d be perfectly fine (I won’t, of course). It’s nimble, comfortable, and gives its rider a commanding view from which to plot mayhem with that mental motor. The riding position is comparable to a Mumbai apartment’s terrace, high up and the most spacious thing for miles. It’s a tautly



MOTODATA

BAJAJ DOMINAR 400

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	373.3cc, V-twin
Max power	39.45 bhp@8650 rpm
Max torque	3.56 kgm@7000 rpm
Transmission	6-speed
CHASSIS	
Type	Beam-type perimeter frame
BRAKES	
F/R	320-mm disc/230-mm disc
TYRES	
F/R	110/70 R17 / 150/60 R17
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	2156/836/1112
Wheelbase	1453 mm
Ground clearance	157 mm
Seat height	NA
Kerb weight	184 kg
Fuel capacity	13 litres
PRICE	
	₹ 1.91 LAKH (ex-showroom, Delhi)

sprung thing, this bike, and there's a huge sense of control to it. All inputs, as befits a KTM, are dealt with sharp precision. The tyres, though good for a dual-purpose pattern, could be better. Or maybe it's just me that wants a 390 Supermoto. But that's a different genre altogether.

Between the cruiser and the dual-sport lies a tale of two distinct two-wheeled cultures. And I'm afraid the former might be on its way out, along with the generations that rode it. I'd be happy to be proved wrong, really; I still hope to acquire an old Fat Boy at a later stage in life and it'll always be one of my favourite motorcycles. But that's still some time away, and I

have a lot of depreciation of used Fat Boys to look forward to.

Today, though, the dual-sport motorcycle is the new cruiser, or perhaps it'd be more accurate to say that it's a new kind of cruiser. KTM itself certainly thinks so, given that it lists its Adventure models, smallest to the biggest, in the 'travel' tab on its website, away from the 'MX' and 'enduro' ones. For sure, this is just the beginning for proper dual-sport motorcycles in India, ones that deliver on the 'sport' part, not just the 'dual' promise. For now, though, with bikes like the Dominar and the 390 Adventure, there is no losing. You win some, you win some more. ■

KTM 390 ADVENTURE

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	373.2cc, single
Max power	43.5 bhp@9000 rpm
Max torque	3.78 kgm@7000 rpm
Transmission	6-speed
CHASSIS	
Type	Steel trellis frame
BRAKES	
F/R	320-mm disc / 230-mm disc
TYRES	
F/R	100/90 R19 / 130/80 R17
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	NA/NA/NA
Wheelbase	1430 mm
Ground clearance	200 mm
Seat height	855 mm
Kerb weight	172 kg
Fuel capacity	14.5 litres
PRICE	
	₹ 2.99 LAKH (ex-showroom, Delhi)

HOME SWEET HOME

Just another town. Or the centre
of the motorcycling world. It's
all a matter of perspective

Text & Photographs Kartik Ware

the car and walk a little, hoping to breathe some life into my phone's signal when I see the signboard announcing the town just a little down the road. I feel compelled to run up to it and deliver a bearhug, but decide against it. Instead, I only mutter, 'Hmm. Wow,' and my profound eloquence momentarily hangs as ghostly vapour in the cold air before vanishing into the night. I have indeed arrived, it seems.

Long before I even got here, an exchange of electrons via a piece of glass and plastic had ensured that I have a place to stay. It belonged to a gentleman called Alberto Bartolucci, I chose the place because the bed has a Rossi flag over it, and all that remains now is to find it. Of course, my lifelong tradition of blundering around prevents me from finding it right away. Instead, I find myself driving into the heart of town, with eyes as wide open as they'll ever be. The number is everywhere; on flags mounted on light poles, on shop windows, on doors, on cars — but it doesn't look tasteless at all. It looks like it belongs. Well, of course, it does.

The most amazing sight, though, is that of a gigantic poster of Rossi outside the Valentino Rossi Official Fan Club headquarters and his bar, da Rossi, on a big stone facade. It's only been a couple of weeks since the nail-biting finale

of the 2015 MotoGP season and the message that signifies the support that rose worldwide still hangs above the huge image of Rossi on his Yamaha. It says '#IOSTOCONVALE'. '#IAMWITHVALE'. There's not a soul in sight thanks to the cold night, so I take it as a sign of welcome meant especially for me.

I finally make my way to Alberto's place and find myself parking in front of a lively place called Cafe Soleluna, the name being a tribute to the sun and moon design theme of Rossi's racing leathers and helmets. And hence the basis of a very robust merchandise collection as well.

I don't have to look around for Alberto; he wafts right over dressed in a long, black overcoat with a head that holds white hair. He looks like a

wizard who's lost his wand, with an arm outstretched for an enthusiastic handshake. It takes about five seconds for us to hit it off and I proceed to tell him what my plan for the duration of the stay is — to meet as many people from Tavullia as possible. He asks whether I intend to meet Rossi and when I tell him that I don't, the transition of his face's expression instantly reminds me of the comedy and tragedy masks of ancient Greece. I then explain to him that I want to write about the town itself and the places and people it contains, except for its most famous export, Rossi. He straightens out and with a determined look on his face he says, 'Okay! I will take you on a tour!' He reminds me of someone I know, but I can't quite remember whom.

“**#IOSTOCONVALE'.
I take it as a sign
of welcome meant
especially for me**”

THE TOWN

The next morning Alberto stuffs me with what he calls 'a great Italian breakfast', essentially a lot of croissants, toast, butter, juice, frozen yogurt and about 5 litres of coffee. The last one goes a long way in explaining why the cheerful Alberto is always bouncing off the walls. I ask him where we're headed and begin to list out the places I'd like to see when he says, 'Keep quiet. You will see.' Well, he keeps his word. We get into his old Volvo (I really like Volvos) and drive off into a gloomy and cold morning. I doubt his passenger seat has ever contained such a massive amount of fervent anticipation, though.

The first stop is significant enough to reduce me to a puddle of dreamy fanboy-ness. It's where Graziano Rossi lives and outside

the house is the Piaggio Ape that Rossi used to drive the wheels off as a teenager on public roads along with his friends. More often than not, such drives turned into races and then into all out bumper-car matches, with the police often ending the 'enthusiastic' drives. Here, then, stands one of the most important hooligan machines of all time, a humble three-wheeler built to carry daily provisions. Amazing what legacy can do to a machine. The Ape seems to be permanently installed in place with its front wheel in the air, with a mould-ridden mannequin in the seat. Alberto asks a neighbour who is either planting or uprooting plants if Graziano is at home, but from what I gather, the neighbour isn't too keen on





Claudio Moretti and Cesarino Salucci just moments before they warily backed away from our guy



with them.

Out comes Claudio Moretti, Rossi's old friend and founding member of the Fan Club, with salt and pepper hair and a look of curiosity on his face. I explain to him what I'm there for and even though there's a Italian TV crew inside the office, interviewing the members, he takes time out for this strange Indian chap.

You should have seen this place on the day of the last race. There were thousands of people in the street outside the Club. It's the same street that Vale used to ride on as a youngster. The police that sometimes caught him then, now had to close off the road that leads through the town. It was an amazing atmosphere. People walked for kilometres to get here.' I can only imagine what would've happened if Rossi had won the title that day. He'd led all season long only to lose at the very final round. I could almost see the disappointment still hanging thick in the air.

Before I can voice my lamentations, though, a gentleman with what seems like a permanent grin joins us. A round of introductions later, I learn that he is Cesarino Salucci, president of the Fan Club and father of Rossi's best friend, Alessio whom everyone calls by his nickname, Uccio. Uccio is now famous for accompanying Rossi to every race, and I'm hoping to

divulging such information. Just as well, because I don't know what I'd say to him, really. So it's back into the Volvo and off to the next stop — the VR46 Ranch.

We pull over at a spot where the Ranch is clearly visible. It's the place where Rossi trains and rides with his friends and members of the VR46 Riders Academy, a project started to help young and upcoming Italian motorcycle racers. It's a gravel course on which they ride flat-track style — best for developing all the controlling skills you need on a motorcycle. Alberto says, 'Nobody gets to go in there without permission from Rossi himself, of course. People who live around here complain about the noise his motorbikes make... can you believe it?!' I nod along, half listening, half

looking for the fastest lines around the multi-layout track. From here, it looks like a sandy and fast oasis in a disinterested dull green valley. Just as I start imagining shapes of the sun and moon in the track's lines (I might have looked worryingly like I was about to make a run for the track at this point), Alberto says, 'All right. Let's go!' Next stop, the Fan Club.

I'd decided that the first thing I'd do in Tavullia was become a member of the Club. You can do it over post, too, of course, but doing it in Rossi's hometown only seemed right. Unfortunately, membership for 2015 is closed and the one for 2016 only begins in January. Sigh. Alberto walks into the office and announces my arrival to the people there, requesting a few minutes to speak





run into him later. In the meantime, though, the senior Salucci ducks into the office for a moment and comes out with a bright yellow VR46 cap and hands it to me. I'm quite grateful for the gift, but I keep myself from proclaiming my strong aversion to caps, and try to think of someone else who deserves it. Oh, I also avoid asking for a Rossi replica AGV Pista GP helmet instead of the cap.

We stand around chatting for longer than I expect. I get the distinct sense that Rossi's circle rallies around him, to protect his privacy and peace of mind. Not like I intend on prying, but it's just that I don't learn anything that I already didn't know, really. So I soak in the atmosphere, listening to these jovial Italians talking animatedly. Over the next few days, there are to be many such conversations in which I'm totally clueless.

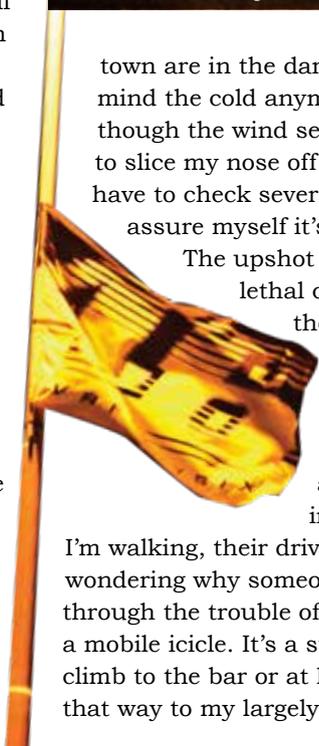
THE SIGHTS

Night falls quite early in Tavullia, so a lot of my walks through the



Not once did the thought of stealing the sign cross our guy's mind. Not once. Nope. Really

town are in the dark. I don't mind the cold anymore, even though the wind seems to want to slice my nose off my face. I have to check several times to assure myself it's still there.



The upshot of the near-lethal cold is that there's no one on the streets.

The odd car comes along once in a while as

I'm walking, their drivers no doubt wondering why someone would go through the trouble of becoming a mobile icicle. It's a steep uphill climb to the bar or at least it seems that way to my largely sedentary



Uphill and gloomy day. Cheery yellow, though

physique. But the 46 flags on the light poles flap wildly in the wind, egging me on.

I come across a roundabout, almost all out of breath, and notice the 'give way' sign. It's no ordinary sign, of course — it has a silhouette of Rossi sliding completely sideways on his flat-track Yamaha — and I stand there laughing out whatever little breath my lungs hold. I'm glad no one is around to see this. If anyone did, I'm sure they locked their doors and windows, and armed themselves adequately.

Almost everywhere I go, I seem to be heading uphill, like an ever-ascending version of the Penrose stairs. I nod approvingly at every 46 I see. The voices of excitedly hoarse MotoGP commentators over the years echo faintly in my head, the background score for my lonely trudge. They're chased away by the tolling of bells, the very same ones that ring out every time Rossi wins a race. Indeed, every morning I'm woken by those bells thinking, 'What... did I miss the race?' It is,



See the bells in the tower? They announce Rossi's victories in Tavullia. Place of worship? You bet



The VR46 Ranch. Oh, what we'd give for a go at those corners!

without a doubt, the best sound in all of Tavullia and one of the best sounds that have ever reached my ears. The frigid gale seems to agree, too, carrying the sound as far as it can, taking along my nose for company. Oh, wait. It's still here.

I can't help but notice how nice the roads are in and around Tavullia. They're a tad narrow for cars, but perfect for motorcycles. It appears as if a heavenly hand poured thick and black tarmac all over the countryside with maximum fun in mind, practically inviting people to test their metal and mettle on it. No wonder this particular part of the world turns out so many racers, eh? Other than the racers, though, even the normal folk of this region are brilliant, with their warmth and friendliness.

Even though
communicating
with them

can be a bit of a problem most of the times.

Their English is like the proverbial china shop that the bull visited, but I got by just fine by repeating myself very slowly. Over and over again. Most of them seem surprised by the fact that I speak English. 'But you are Indian, no? How you speaka English?' My response is a well-worn 'Ah, we have the British to thank for that', an attempt at humour which usually falls flat on its face, after which I have to tell them that Inglese is prima lingua for most urban Indians, to which their response is a shrug. Too cool, these Italians are.

One night at Cafe Soleluna, Alberto and I join some of his friends to empty a few glasses. There's a policeman named Nico, an elderly gentleman called Fabrizio and a DJ whose name I've forgotten. And there's Barbara who keeps giving us glasses to empty. We raise our cups and glasses, and I hail, 'Quarantasei!' and they do the same, only louder. Nico, looking quite indulgently pleased, asks me,

'So you're obsessed with the 46, eh?' My not-so-modest reply, to which half

the bar starts laughing, is, 'I'm afraid it went very far past that

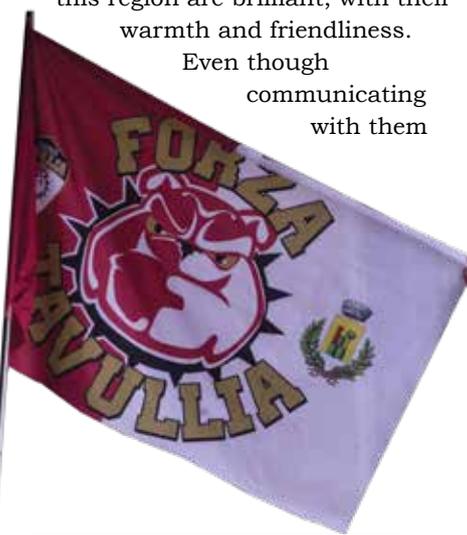
stage a long time ago.'

'Rossi is in town. You should meet him,' Nico says. When I say, 'Not this time,' the puzzled look on his face is priceless. Maybe it's all those glasses. Fabrizio, it turns out, stayed in India for a few months 'some years ago'. I ask him exactly when and he thinks a while before saying, '1980.' That was three years before I was born. I wonder what he'll think of the place if he sees it now. Everyone in Tavullia seems to be cheerful and welcoming. It's a pity I didn't see all the places there and instead parked myself dutifully at the only place in Tavullia I found fascinating — da Rossi.

BAR TALK

Indeed, if my monthly column in this magazine ever sprang to life, it'd look like the place Rossi owns. Its name simply means 'Rossi's', an unassuming name for some, perhaps, but that's all it needs to be called, really. There's the Pizzeria right next door, too, but I walk into it on the first day only by mistake. But it's at the bar that I sit for two nights in a row and re-read Rossi's autobiography, *What If I Had Never Tried It*, sitting at tables that have a carbon-fibre finish.

At least to me, it's an 'achievement unlocked' kind of thing. I frown at all the typos all over again. I wince at the thought



Alberto makes a statement of purpose

of Rossi occasionally sounding like an Englishman, no doubt the work of an overzealous copy editor at the publishing house. But largely, it's exactly like he would talk, only in cleaned-up and edited English. Pity. I'd have rather transcribed what he said exactly in his musical Italian accent, word for word.

Between massive swigs from a tall golden glass and turning the pages, my mind wanders to the memories of meeting him. The first time I met Rossi was in Delhi in 2010 and I was in a state that bordered on being delirious. One of the opening pages of the book has a photograph of Rossi about to torpedo Sete Gibernau out of his way at the final corner at Jerez in 2005. I'd asked him to write what he was thinking



The number is quite literally everywhere. Hope he doesn't drive with it on his windshield, though

my friends waiting with similar expectations and decided that I'd give him my autograph instead. And so I did. I wonder what he'll say if he happens to walk into the bar right now. People tell me he often comes in when he's in town and it's late



at night and he can sit in peace.

In any case, I'm so lost in the book and in my head, he might come, perform a series of somersaults and leave, and I wouldn't know. My reactions to the book are sometimes audible, too, so if people walk in they usually keep a substantial buffer of distance. I'm sure he'd have done the same. Virtually every person that walks in is wearing a VR46 something or the other. A toddler stumbles in with a VR46 pacifier in his mouth. It's perfect, really. The chaps who run the bar, Luca, Mattia and Marco, and a young girl named Martina, are fun people to be around when it's a slow night. On one occasion, we even lock up and hang back to talk about mostly everything under the sun as happens when there's been one too many glasses that needed emptying.

One night, Uccio walks in with his little daughter. I'm torn apart like flimsy restaurant-grade tissue paper. I don't want to bother him on his time out, but if I could get a few anecdotes from him, it'd be priceless for the story. I mean, he's Rossi's best friend, right? Unfortunately, that's precisely why I don't get much. I walk up to him and introduce myself and ask for five minutes of his time, confident that time won't be a limitation once we start talking. 'You can have two minutes,' he says, before displaying a polite grin.

We laugh and talk a bit peripherally about the VR46 Riders Academy and a bit more about



Alberto checking if the coast is clear. Or he's waiting for the bar to open. Early starts matter, you see

at the exact moment, to which he mischievously hid the page from the sights of others and wrote a word that cannot be printed here. But I can tell you that it rhymes with 'Duck!'

One other time was in Malaysia at the Sepang GP in 2012, his final of two miserable years at Ducati. I'd wanted another autograph on a photograph of ours from 2010, but thought, 'Why am I getting another signature? It's not like it'll have changed, right?' I looked around at



Uccio, the model of reluctance, in a polite pose



A celebration of life, long after it's ended. It's a beautiful way of never forgetting an amazing man

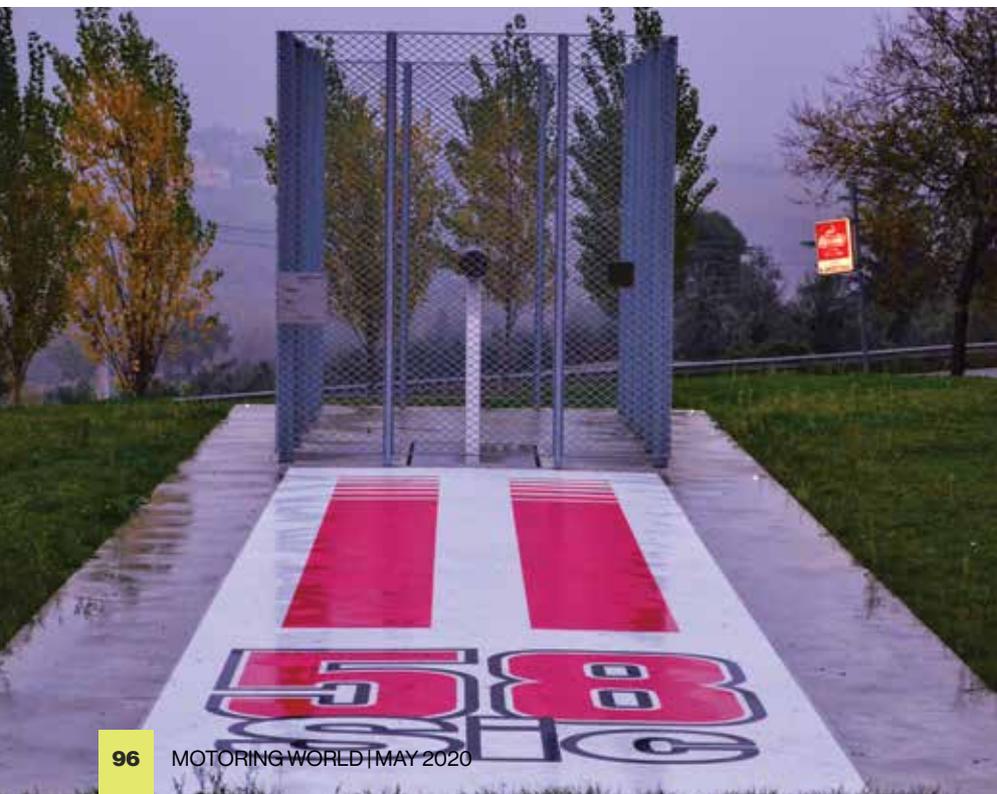
Rossi's life — which I've re-read over the past two nights — but that's about it. Between the broken English and a general feeling that he'd like to see the back of me as soon as possible, it's clear that I won't learn anything new. So I leave him to it and go back to my table, wondering how I could convince him that I'm not a headline-chasing scribe. But of course, I don't persist. Rossi is a big deal in this part of the world, after all, and his close circle might be understandably wary of people who carry cameras and put words together for a living.

THE FRIEND

One evening, I decide to make a visit I promised myself some time



The picture that will be forever incomplete



ago. The place is called Coriano, 20-odd kilometres from Tavullia. It was home to the late Marco Simoncelli, one of MotoGP's fallen heroes and Rossi's friend. Now, I don't think there can be such a thing as friendship between two racers of the highest level. But Rossi and Simoncelli's relationship came closest to such a thing. Both were jovial Italians with a killer instinct on the track. Many saw Simoncelli as Rossi's successor as a beacon of

Italian motorcycling.

Rossi was languishing at Ducati just as Simoncelli was beginning to win over people on his Gresini Honda. And at the Malaysian GP in 2011, Rossi's was one of the bikes in the accident that killed Simoncelli. Rossi was a part of his life and sadly a part of his death, too, though certainly not a reason for it. Racing is a sport in which life wins over death, but not always. It's true for all of us who ever get on a motorcycle. Simoncelli's star, it seems, was destined to shine short but brighter than most.

Coriano has a museum dedicated to Simoncelli right opposite the church in whose graveyard he's buried. A small group is leaving just as I enter. I buy the ticket and walk

around the museum all alone with a helmet-sized lump in my throat. His bikes, from the minibikes to the MotoGP Honda, are all there. The MotoGP bike is displayed in a replica of a pit box. His gloves lie on a chair; his torn leathers, probably from one of the many crashes he was famous for, are thrown over a stand; the helmet along with them. It feels like any moment now he might walk out, get kitted up and jump onto the bike.

There are medals, trophies, champagne bottles and other parts from his racing life that are displayed in simple cases, the achievements of a life cut short too soon. There is also an Aprilia RSV4 Superbike that he raced once as a wildcard and finished on the podium. It's displayed next to a photo of him stuffing it up the inside of Max Biaggi, the other Aprilia rider and then reigning world champion. Never took any prisoners, this chap. And all through my visit at the museum, Pink Floyd's Wish You Were Here keeps playing on loop on the speakers. It's a miracle tears don't flood out of my eyes and it's also the reason why I decide against visiting his grave, because I'm certain my eyes will put firehoses to



Time for matters to come to a head. We thought he likes to keep his head down. Okay, we'll stop

shame if I do. 'There's always a next time for those who are still around,' I think to myself.

THE MEANING

On the morning of my last day in Tavullia, I find myself being scrutinised by a sharp pair of eyes. The voice that belongs to the person with the eyes is a firm but soothing one. Alberto, ever the willing guide, announces me, probably for the 46th time in all these days, and we're gestured to enter and granted an audience. The lady is Stefania Palma, Valentino Rossi's mother.

I wasn't really expecting this meeting, but thanks to the dogged Alberto, here we are and I'm a bit

lost for words. Mind you, Alberto and I have barged into her office first thing in the morning, so her demeanour is completely understandable. She understands English, it seems, but prefers to talk in Italian instead of fumbling for words in English. Through Alberto she asks me, 'So you want to meet Valentino?' When I say that I have no such intention, she says, 'You're the first person to come to Tavullia and not want to meet him!' With this, I think she's decided that I mean no harm and relaxes.

I'm still sweating, though, waiting for her to call a guard to throw the two of us out, but it surprisingly doesn't happen. Encouraged, I ask her what it's like being the mother of a legend and instantly regret asking such a foolish question. She replies anyway: 'To me, it's not about him being a legend, but about being a professional in the true sense. He's very particular about his daily schedule, he's like a Swiss watch. He was not like this before. But now, since he is older and facing much younger competition, he is very dedicated about doing things the right way.' After that, she pretty much keeps talking on her own and I keep listening. I know most of it anyway, but her voice is enchanting to listen to.

'He takes care of his friends. They make him happy. When he became successful, he made sure they were happy, too.' I mention that I met Uccio a couple of nights ago. Perhaps she knows what her son's best friend is like, which is why she says to me, 'Uccio was like his bodyguard in school.' I'm



Stefania Palma beams for the camera. Moments before warily backing away from our guy, of course



sure,' I briefly respond. She suggests that I speak with Valentino's father, Graziano, since he loves talking to people and speaks better English. I ask her if she'll oblige me with a photograph and she instantly agrees.

She makes faces as I take a picture, reminding me instantly of Rossi's goofing around. She says she always feels awkward in front of the camera which I don't buy for a moment. I can't help but feel that this is where Rossi's charismatic personality and playful behaviour comes from. As I shake her hand with two of mine, a sudden

“ Perhaps the place itself is a big part of the motivation Rossi needs to do what he's doing at his age ”



realisation dawns on me and I say, 'Valentino has your eyes!' She says, in Italian of course, 'Yes. And the nose, too!' Like mother, like son? Above anything else, it's the warmth she exuded that reminded me of her son, so it very well could be so.

Speaking of warmth, there is Alberto. He doesn't ride a motorcycle, but adores Rossi and everything to do with him. He is a living reminder of the fact that there is a certain freedom in having unconditional faith in things. After that, things simply seem to fall into place one after the other, seemingly without any noticeable effort. Which is pretty much the effect his presence had on my stay in Tavullia. Nothing would have happened without him. If there is such a thing as God, I wish all of his blessings upon this lovely Italian man. And he, along with every other person who took the time out to talk, reminded me how much of a difference just being nice to others can make. No wonder Rossi is as nice a person as he is, no matter what the Lorenzos and Marquezes of the world might say. No wonder the world likes him more than any other rider in history.

I see the niceness in my friends who are my family back home. I see it in my team at Motoring. And it's something I always knew, too. But sometimes, to be reminded of and truly understand something closer home, it's necessary to go to a faraway place, I suppose. On my last day there, I ask Alberto how old he is and he said he'll be 50 next July. Since it's the month of my own birth, too, I asked with more curiosity than normal what the date was and my eyes widened dramatically (I had no other way of expressing my surprise. My hands and mouth were stuffed full of food by the time) when he said the date. Yup. Same birthday. Turns out, he was reminding me of myself. Perhaps it's the common obsession with the magic number.

With Tavullia, I saw a place that, with its people and its roads, is exactly where a living legend might want to live. Its people are quite vocally proud of their hometown hero, but in a dignified way — at least in front of a stranger. And perhaps the place itself is a big part of the motivation Rossi needs to do what he's doing at his age; when he starts the 2016 season, he will be

37 years old, far older than anyone else on the grid. Maybe he lives there because for him time stands still in the place... and it does. It's always 46 o'clock in Tavullia, and it's exactly how I imagined it'd be.

Before I left my own home for Rossi's, I didn't know what I'd come back with. As I drive into my parking lot back home, I heave a sigh of utmost relief. There have been no profound philosophical revelations for me to ponder over — just timely reminders of things that matter. Events transpired in a way that the trip is now the most memorable one in my life thus far. I climb up the stairs to my house, dragging my bags behind me with a satisfied smile on my face. As I reach my door, I'm thinking about signs, how I see them everywhere and their importance or lack thereof, when I see something on the door that's never been there before. It's a clay half-sun, half-moon. Soleluna. The signs have followed me home. Well, actually, my sister happened to hang it on the door. Perhaps it's the stars welcoming me back or maybe it's just a coincidence. Deciding not to ask, I open the door and go in. ■



TAKING SIDES

Generations apart, but are these two sides of the same coin?

By Ruman Devmane Photographs Suresh Narayanan

Everything with wheels aspires to be a motorcycle. No, there's no point debating this because, at the very core of it, this is the ultimate truth. I'm no automotive Nietzsche, but the evidential history of anything with two or more wheels suggests this to be the only conclusion of it. How so? Well, a motorcycle, sort of like men in their thirties, is a prime example of insight, involvement, stability, liberation and, to varying degrees, functionality. It's neither too young to be trustworthy nor too old to be rigid. Men in their thirties are also least likely to get involved in skateboarding incidents, for instance, just as they are to invade countries. And it's this balance that everything with wheels eternally aspires to achieve.

This is why bicycles have sprouted gears and supercars have been shedding weight like Latvian supermodels. It is, therefore, obvious that the two automotive entries closest to motorcycles want to be exactly like them, too. Both aren't scooters but both certainly want to be motorcycles. Or, rather, enticing alternatives to them. In a country that figures as the largest

two-wheeler market in the world, it's easy to see why as well. The fact is, we are not an extravagantly affluent country and our primary need is always going to be humble, mass-produced transportation. This explains why over a lakh units of the TVS XL and the Honda Navi (combined) are sold in India, month after month. You don't need a German philosopher to decipher what this means, right?

So, what exactly are two humble machines doing in an issue that's meant to celebrate power? Exactly that! Power play is a celebration not of excess, but of power itself. And the kind of power that these two machines possess can be more than enough, if you get the attitude towards riding right. It's why Kyle and I set out, one muggy summer's morning, for a ride down the highway, the domain of large-displacement motorcycles. Our enthusiasm to ride both of them, in a way as distinctly apart as we are, wore a high-visibility jacket that morning. And it was infectious.

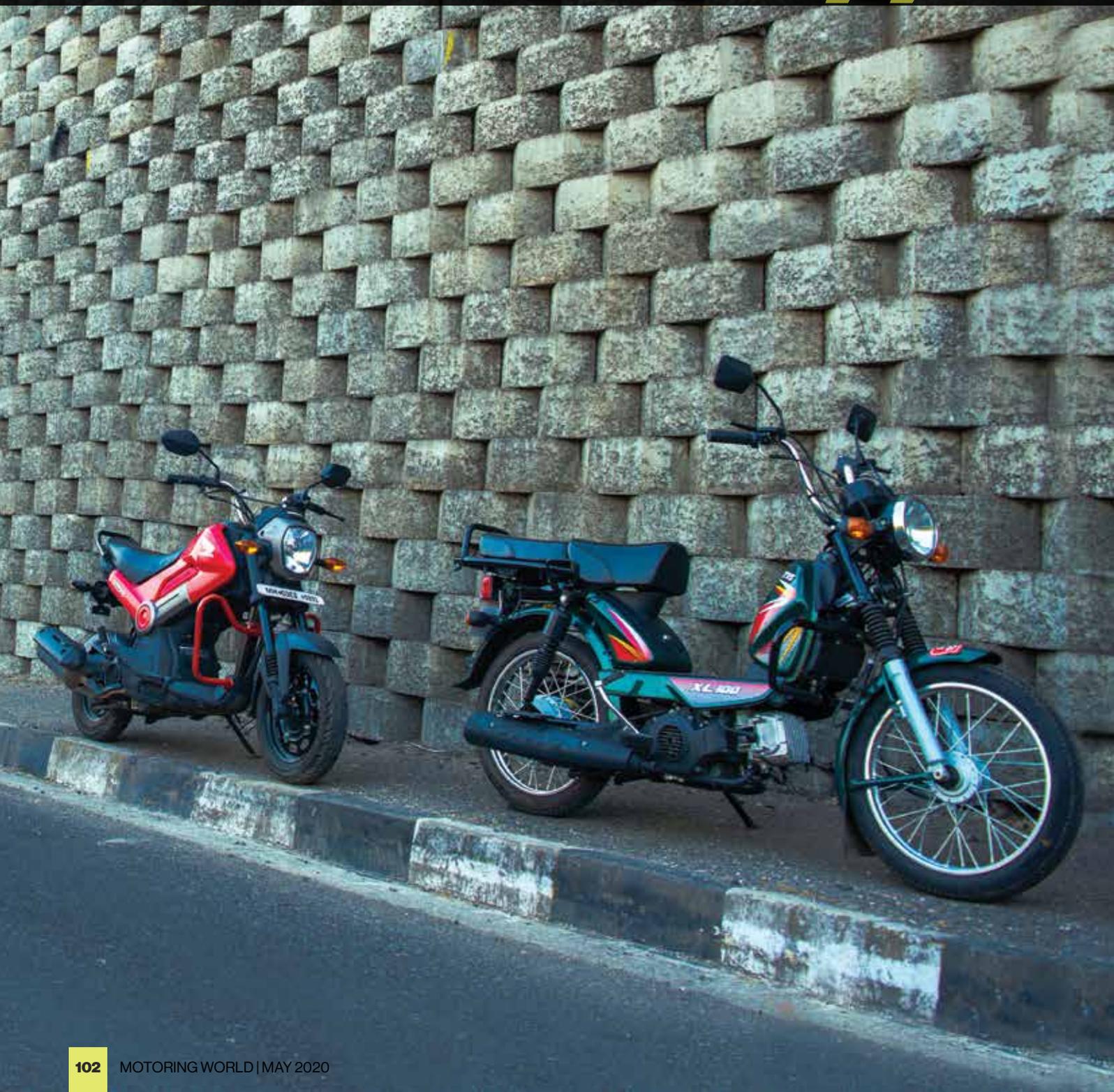
I must formally introduce the TVS XL 100 to you before I proceed because I'm certain of the fact that

you've read just about nothing on it in any other automotive publication. The XL 100 is a bare-basic step-thru, as honest and humble as they come and that itself is the reason behind its success. It's powered — I advise you to consume that term with a pinch of salt — by a 99.7cc four-stroke motor paired with a single-speed gearbox that employs a centrifugal clutch. In other words, it's like a motorcycle that's permanently stuck in first gear and without a clutch. The 4.2 bhp it produces is sent to the rear wheel through a roller chain, along with 0.6 kgm. That makes it the least powerful mode of transport on sale in India, at least of the internal combustion tribe.

The Navi, of course, needs no introduction because you've read about it in these pages when we, erm, compared it to the Royal Enfield Himalayan (don't even ask) and then took it off-roading with a bunch of motorcycles in the monsoon (yes, we're full of questionable ideas). It's a cool pint-sized take on scooters with mainly Activa underpinnings and to say it has captured the imagination of the



**Astride either of these,
you feel exposed, extremely
vulnerable to the world**





Most wristwatch dials are bigger than the XL's speedo; Navi's unit is similarly basic but not as cool



Navi's wannabe-bike fuel tank is tiny, cheeky



The choice between handling and stability is yours



Small on displacement and power, but a lot of fun!



yuppy urban college-goer would be an understatement. All right, so it isn't motorcycle enough to replace those orange-wheeled Austrians or even that faired two-storey Jap 150 everyone rides around on, but it has cheekily made room for itself in a very image-conscious market, so full marks to it for that. Its 109cc mill produces a relatively nicer 7.8 bhp and 0.9 kgm, all of it laid down onto the tarmac through a variomatic transmission.

Where the numbers cease to matter, however, is on the highway. That's simply because neither, in even the slightest way, belongs to the long, winding road. Astride either of these, you feel exposed, extremely vulnerable to the world. Crosswinds threaten to fling you off entirely and every time you get overtaken (which you do a lot), you have to hold on to the handlebars tight so as to not be unsettled uncontrollably. And just in case you hit a dog, well, you don't. The dog hits you. There's no possibility it couldn't have seen you, given the pitiful rate of your progress. All of this, despite how miserable and agonising it sounds, is irrelevant.

The truth is, both of these machines compel you to ride. Or at least that's what they did to Kyle and me. Astride the XL 100, with Kyle on the Navi a small distance ahead, its tiny ape hanger handlebar transmitting a consistent buzz to my gloves at 65 kph, I hadn't a care in the world. It didn't matter if we took fifteen minutes to travel 10 km. It was the spirit of motorised travel that kept us going, with a grin plastered firmly across our helmeted faces. I haven't had this romantic an experience of being on two wheels on, dare I say it, motorcycles even twenty times as expensive.

This, I believe, is because of the lack of any barrier, whatsoever, on machines like the XL and the Navi. There isn't any electronic gimmickry that's going to fail on you and neither any expensive, exotic

component to be cautious about. There is no possibility of a crash either because, at these kinds of speeds, you have the opportunity to step off and simply run alongside, if only a bit quickly. Every single component of either machine communicates with you and with every bone in your body and there is nothing intimidating about their mannerisms either. Speaking of which, you are certainly never going to get into trouble with power delivery in the wet, dry, sand or snow. Because they simply haven't got any power in the first place. This is beautiful.

On the XL, you can simply relax and read a book (okay, probably not) as the miles go by, and it will chug along, hanging on to the most elemental principles of internal

Two sides of the same coin? Quite

combustion. Nothing, ever, goes wrong with it because there is nothing to go wrong at all. Every mechanism on the XL is of such a tiny scale that it's laughable but incredible at the same time. Even just its speedometer is smaller than the dial of most wristwatches you can buy these days. The barrier I have tried hard to digest all these years — my inability to comprehend more than a basic set of mechanical

principles — disappears on it, too. The XL effectively makes me feel like I can be of some use with a wrench after all. This may be a figment of my imagination, however.

The Navi does isolate you in this aspect. It feels quite 'digital' and since its motor is cleverly tucked away under its tail, it comes across as a little difficult to get personal with. On the Navi, you have to discount the joy of quickly peeking down at the flaming rays of the setting sun lighting up a humble sloper engine. Also, there is something still quite unnatural about its 12/10-inch pressed steel wheels which, unlike the XL's 16-inch wire-spoke wheels, fall short in delivering a motorcycle-like feel, despite being stronger in the area of stability thanks to a longer





wheelbase and heavier dimensions. Even the horizontal placement of the fuel tank between your knees, as opposed to the XL's vertically mounted unit, doesn't make the Navi as motorcycle-esque as the XL. It's probably the Navi's refinement and perfection that deprives it of the XL's 'poverty-stricken motorcycle' appeal.

This is important, because it's symbolic of the distinction between the two machines separated by generations. The XL sells, and will continue to in the years to come, because India is perennially an audience that needs basic, cheaper-than-walking transportation. People who buy the XL aren't as interested in its power output, or indeed its looks, as they are in its 130-kg payload, which is interpreted as roughly twice as much, always. The XL is the messiah of the grass root-level working class and as long as this indispensable layer of society is here to stay, so is the XL. To be honest, this audience doesn't even care if the XL feels analogous or motorcycle-like — it could feel like a '90s kitchen appliance (er, it does) and that would still be perfectly all right. It's here that the Navi differs, because it's trying to rub its magnetic appeal off on the urban commuter, by promising visions

of a cool social circle, unstressed commuting and immunity from the growing virus of vehicular congestion. The intentions between the two are similarly noble but the audience they address is vastly different. Two sides of the same coin? Quite.

So, there is no real ground for a comparison, is there? Not true. The reason we really wanted to try taking the XL and Navi out on a ride was because, of late, we have been spoilt for choice when it comes to motorcycles. Nobody today thinks of riding the highway on anything less than a Himalayan and even the Bonnevilles and Fat Boys of the world have, somehow, become commonplace. Personally, it had become important to remember that motorcycle travel was never about getting there quickly, or more comfortably. It wasn't, in fact, about getting there at all. All forms of technological aids are meant to simplify things but life has transpired rather inversely, be it in the arena of communication or even travel. The more you have, the more you are worried about losing and this can be said about power as well. It's much better, sometimes, to just not have any at all. That's one way to celebrate power, isn't it? ■

MOTODATA

TVS XL 100

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	99.7cc, single
Max power	4.2 bhp@6000 rpm
Max torque	0.6 kgm@3500 rpm
Transmission	Single-speed
CHASSIS	
Type	Tubular steel beam
SUSPENSION	
F/R	Telescopic fork / twin shock absorber
BRAKES	
F/R	80 mm drum / 110 mm drum
TYRES	
F/R	2.50-R16
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	NA
Wheelbase	1215 mm
Kerb weight	80 kg
Fuel tank	4 litres
PRICE	₹ 31,192 (ex-showroom, Mumbai)

MOTODATA

HONDA NAVI

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	109.1cc, single
Max power	7.8 bhp@7000 rpm
Max torque	0.9 kgm@5500 rpm
Transmission	Variomatic
CHASSIS	
Type	Steel underbone
SUSPENSION	
F/R	Telescopic fork / monoshock
BRAKES	
F/R	130 mm drum
TYRES	
F/R	90/90 R12 / 90/100 R10
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	1805/748/1039
Wheelbase	1286 mm
Kerb weight	101 kg
Fuel tank	3.8 litres
PRICE	₹ 45,318 (ex-showroom, Mumbai)

REAR VIEW

TRIUMPH THRUXTON & T120

PARALLEL LIVES

Two guys, two bikes, same hearts

By Kartik Ware Photographs Suresh Narayanan



The more things remain the same, the more they change. Do excuse the rather languid restructuring of the cliché, but I couldn't think of a better way to describe these two motorcycles. The Thruxton is still a café racer and the Bonneville is still a classic standard street bike, but they couldn't be more different, both from their past incarnations as well as from each other. Inescapably, however, the fact remains that both still do share the same 1200cc heart; they're cut from the same cloth, as it were, though it's funny how one

seems to demand slider-shod leather riding pants, while the other looks happy between a pair of oil-stained jeans.

Speaking of differences and similarities, there's Kyle Pereira and me. Both of us are 33 years old, both have a congenital and terminal love for motorcycles, both began truly living their lives in the pages of this very magazine in 2008, and both might one day face exile from society due to our shared fondness for unpolitical correctness. But that's where the likeness ends. You

see, when we started out being the motorcycle guys at *Motoring*, it was the differences between us that defined us. Or rather, we let them.

Kyle was and still is the wrencher, while I liked to believe (still do) that I was the faster guy. He liked solving problems in his garage, while I had a tendency to create them. The resulting friction wasn't always welcome, but motorcycles and *Motoring* formed a bond between us that is far better than what Kyle can manage with a welding machine. We're closer friends now than ever.



Our digs at each other, though, haven't improved much. Or at all.

When we first saw the Thruxton 1200 R and the Bonneville T120, to use their full names, next to a waterfront at our awards' jury round, we were both transfixed. We spent a day riding them up and down a twisting road, but that barely scratched the surface of our collective greed. I'd fallen for the Thruxton, while Kyle didn't get off the T120 even when it was parked. So a plan was instantly hatched to borrow the two Triumphs again and get lost down NH 17 (no, I still refuse to call it NH 66) for a few days.

Triumph is a company pretty close to Kyle's heart; he has this massive thing for old British bikes

and even has a couple of pre-war Triumphs in his garage. I have no historical affinity for the marque except for the fact that they make some lovely motorcycles. I doubt he'd ever want one of these in his garage for too long, since they probably won't break down often enough to earn his hard-won affection. That didn't deter him from bringing his tool kit along for the ride, though. We never needed it, of course.

The best use of said tool kit I could imagine was to unbolt that fairing from the Thruxton and hang it on my bedroom wall. And the meters, the triple clamp, the clip-ons, the tank and the seat along with its cowl. And the pair of

Arrow exhausts. In the Thruxton, Triumph has made an extremely accurate representation of the idea of a motorcycle in my head for the past decade. It is as sensuous as a motorcycle can be to me. Even Kyle couldn't disagree, though he immediately pointed out the T120's comfort-first ergos. Even I couldn't disagree, though I immediately pointed out in return that he was looking at the Thruxton as he said that. You just can't take your eyes off the thing.

On the other hand, the T120 is a model of understatement.

And the silver Thruxton with its golden suspension bits renders the T120 even more anonymous than its simple black and chrome



composition might set up. That's not to say it's not a handsome motorcycle, though. Actually, it almost looks like it enjoys the fact that the spotlight is permanently fixed on its superstar sibling, preferring to be left in peace with its larger front wheel and pea-shooter exhausts bolted onto a more normal, real-world appearance. In fact, the more you look at the T120, the more its homely charm starts growing on you. This is a real 'supermodel versus girl next door' situation and then some. And there's no right answer to that particular question.

In fact, as we set off seeking meandering backroads with our individual theories and prejudices for company, I couldn't help but





already feel that there were no right answers waiting for us when we returned. What we had in store, I had no idea of, so I settled for listening to what the Thruxton's 96-bhp motor had to say. And boy, does it make an Arrow-aided point or two. It's not a shy motor, this one. It needs little provocation to launch into a riot funded by the 11.42 kgm its big-bore motor generates.

The Thruxton makes its intentions clear right off idle and turns its low-rev rumble into a full-throated roar as the tacho needle climbs towards the business end of its scale. The front wheel behaves in a manner that I never expected from a British twin, though it still makes complete sense with the Thruxton. Throughout the extent of its 6-speed gearbox, the motor sends big fat sacks of torque at the rear wheel requiring rather frequent interventions by the traction-control

system, especially in the lower gears.

I found myself switching off the electronic aid, not because of any illusions of skill, but just to see how it'd behave, and it was even better. The Thruxton simply transformed into more of a torque-guided missile with that beauty of a fairing as its tip. No more annoying cuts in power, lots of friendly wheelies, and one gigantic grin in my helmet. The sheer gratification that the throttle provided ensured that I arrived everywhere going almost too fast than was prudent. That in turn meant that Kyle and the T120 got left behind every time the Thruxton decided to take off. And while it was fun, Kyle's prophetic doubts about the clip-ons' long-distance suitability kept coming true at regular hour-long intervals. Not that I admitted it. Instead, I proposed a change of bikes at the next stop, declaring journalistic commitments to the

reason. It was like walking out of a Led Zeppelin concert into a Pink Floyd one.

The Thruxton is impressive in its polished rabidity, but the T120 is simply mind-boggling in its calmness. Make no mistake, its 79-bhp motor is still fast enough to turn the world into a three-digit blur sooner than you can say, 'This thing is not slow!' But other than the obvious potency of its equally big-bore motor, it's the nature of the T120 that surprises. It doesn't amplify your surroundings like the Thruxton does, but softens the blows of the world. Even while doing 140 kph, it feels as composed as it did at 100 kph. Soon, speed stops mattering at all. Just in time for the twisties, which is a good time to get back on the Thruxton, too.

A convenient bike-swap stop later, I'm away on the Thruxton which seems to be making it a

“This is a real ‘supermodel versus girl next door’ situation”

point to welcome me back in the best possible manner. ‘Back for my Öhlins and Pirelli magic, eh, old chap?’ it seems to shout in every corner. This bike handles as well as it looks, perhaps becoming the best production interpretation of the concept of café racing. It stops, steers and corners... well, not like a sportsbike, but damn near close to one. It uses its modern, high-quality parts to give life to an old idea, one which had clip-ons, long tanks and bum-stop seats. And still very much does. All this while, the T120 is playing catch up.

You see, the Bonnie doesn’t have the Thruxton’s fancy bits — and it doesn’t seem to want them, either. Mind you, again, the T120 will eat everything in its path on a set of twisties, but it’ll do it with its pinky finger sticking out, not all claws-out like the Thruxton. It displays

a composure that’s a reflection of its relaxed outlook, much like the scenery bouncing smoothly off its chrome bits. Being smooth and confident paid off massively on the T120 as it traced a graceful line through corners. It’ll do a great job of swinging over mountainside tarmac, but with decidedly more serenity. The brakes and suspension might get a bit soft when you start pushing it, but you have no business riding this elegant motorcycle like a hooligan. I didn’t. Instead, I swapped bikes whenever I felt like it. And that brings me to an important point.

How can the same motorcycle be so different? Triumph has been the master of carburettor impersonation for some time. And now, seemingly, it’s nailed the art of making two very different motorcycles out of one, too. The Thruxton, with its handfuls of throttle, stunning looks and the





intense satisfaction of pointing that unbelievable fairing at corner after corner. The Bonneville, with its letting the sun on your back and the wind swirling inside your helmet, is as peaceful a combination of man and machine as there will ever be.

These are motorcycles that have become more of what they were always meant to be. They've gained greater focus in their own very different ways. And in doing so, both have become motorcycles with whom every ride, every single encounter

becomes an indulgent memory, whether it was trying to tuck behind the Thruxton's fairing visor or reclining lazily on the T120's tank as it was parked on its main stand. Time, if you're paying attention to things, fosters inclusivity. Two 33-year-olds can attest to that fact. If nothing else, that gives us enough reason to not judge the person who has both of these Triumphs in their garage. After all, you have to be similar in order to be different. And the other way around, too. ■



REAR VIEW

1976 KAWASAKI KZ900 & Z900



Z AND THE ART

Separated by four decades, united by good times.
An icon meets the new Z900

By Ruman Devmane Photographs Suresh Narayanan



It's been a long, long time since someone crafted a motorcycle you could call 'holy'. The motorcycles of today are freakishly fast, astonishingly reliable and simply staggering in every aspect of their performance. Holy, though? I just can't think of one. No, there's no conspiracy theory to this (or is there?) but is instead the simple matter of making motorcycles more inclusive — a predominant requirement of any big business. That's fair, because everyone should have a shot at riding motorcycles. Riding a motorcycle, in most cases I can vouch for, makes you a better, happier person. And that itself makes it worth everything.

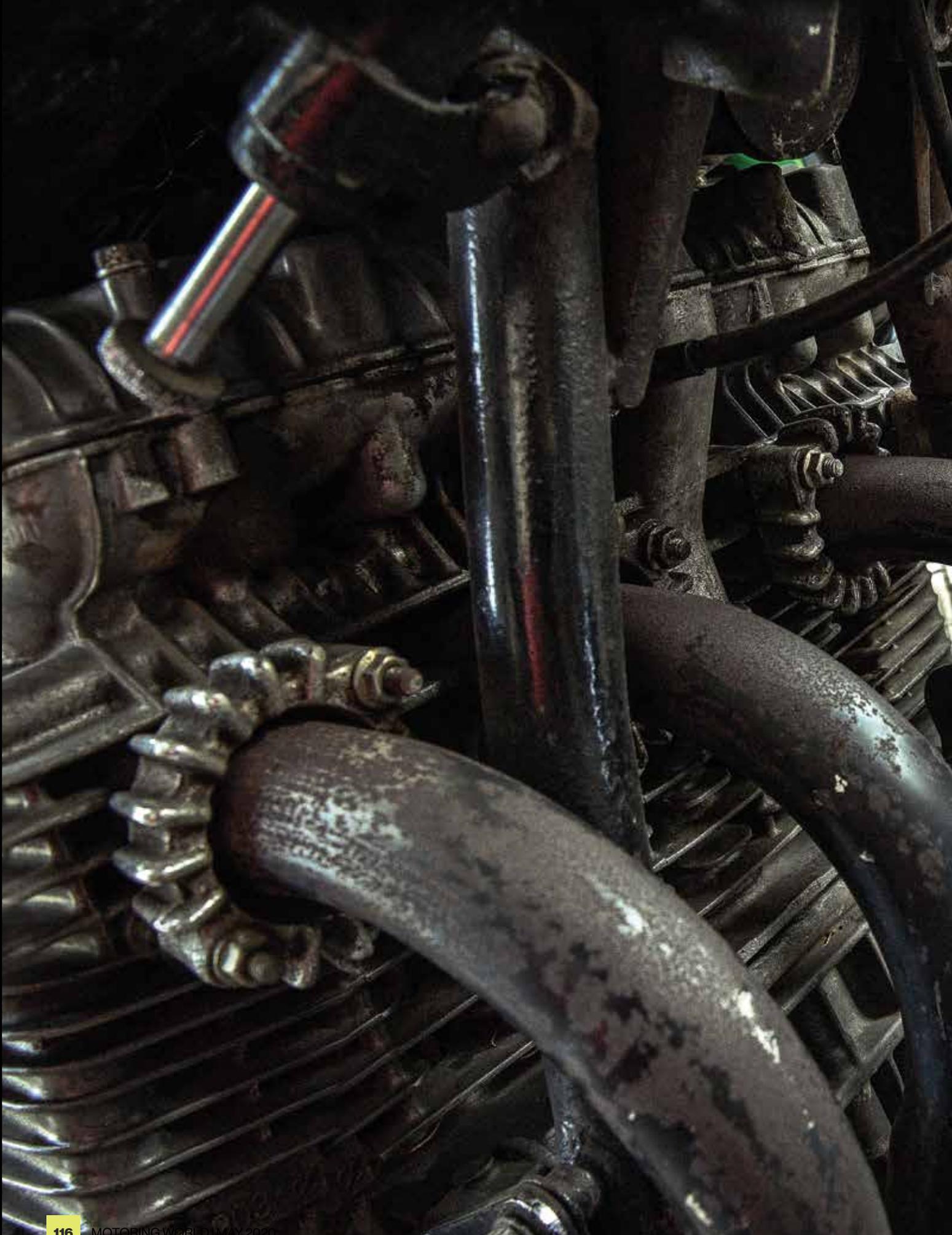
The Kawasaki KZ900 comes from an era when nobody cared about being a better person, however. It's a motorcycle that was born out of a fierce rivalry — a negative

emotion, you must note — and built for people who rather liked fierce rivalries. This was a time when nobody gave a hoot about inclusiveness or maintaining equilibrium. This is why Kawasaki, rather brazenly, looked in the direction of Honda who had only just unleashed its delightful CB750 upon the world, said 'Our engine has to be bigger' and commissioned the 903cc inline-four for its new world-beater, the 1972 Z1 which was the most powerful Japanese four-stroke motorcycle in its time. The KZ900 came four years later and, by this time, the idea of it being an absolute rock'n'roller had long been cemented. It was the bike to go around beating all those nice people you'd meet on Hondas.

The idea behind the KZ900 was to create a fast, involving motorcycle that was built for endurance. If you

had, for some reason, a burning desire to ride through an entire country while raking up speeding fines, the KZ900 was the motorcycle to have. It was rebellious, awfully irreverent and that's what made it sacred. Thankfully, the ideology behind what we want out of a 900 today hasn't changed all that much. It's still got to be manic, somewhat long-legged and, above all else, something with irresistible appeal. The Z900 ticked all of those boxes.

A 948cc fuel-injected inline-four-cylinder motor powers the Z900 and it produces, impressively, 123.6 bhp, which is a superb increment over the Z800. Crucial to the 900's performance is its 210-kg kerb weight, which means it is 21 kg lighter than the bike it replaces. Now that's seriously substantial! A lighter, more potent spec means the Z900 is evolution done right and





that itself makes it oh-so-tempting. I also like that the Z900 has no rider assists barring ABS which not only goes a long way in retaining its purity but also gives you less to worry about from a long-term reliability point of view. The lesser the sensors, the less likely the chance of something going wrong — that's a fair thumb rule, right?

So far, the Z900 has ticked all of the right boxes and while it may not come across as exemplary, it surely is a safe choice to make. Safe, however, is not a term you'd want to associate with the Z900 nameplate. It's sacrilegious. Is this what forty-one years can do to the evolution of a motorcycle? Well, it has. And I hate to understand why. Don't get me wrong. The Z900 is a lovely motorcycle, sweetly progressive and with immense potential for fun, but it simply lacks the soul, the character of the motorcycle it owes its etymology to. I'm equally sure Kawasaki would never be able to rack up the numbers had the new Z900 breathed through four carburetors, like the KZ900 does, or if it weighed about as much as a small elephant. But there's not even a bleak trace of a connect between the old and the new. It's as if the original 900 doesn't even matter anymore.

And there is hardly a case for this indifference because, despite having spent my recent years on a heavy diet of all kinds of fast bikes, I have never been more frightened by a motorcycle. I will never forget walking into the darkest, most desolate garage on all of Carmichael Road, the most expensive street in Mumbai, and finding the KZ900 parked there, with a shaft of light falling exactly over its gorgeously ageing lines. The eerie silence was interrupted by the voice of God himself, or so I thought, until an old but decidedly youthful figure emerged from the darkness, replete with ample strands of curly grey hair and a pair of classic cut denims. This was Gary Lawyer,



“The KZ900 whisks you back to the time when people let people be”

the ace vocalist who has brought to life the dullest of congregations around the world by his electric performances and, as he insists, a dyed-in-the-wool motorcycle guy. It was in a phase of soul-searching while still residing in the United States that he bought himself the KZ900, brand new, and it was unsurprising that the motorcycle followed him to Mumbai as well. Full points to you if you remember seeing this very motorcycle in this magazine, from when we were called BS Motoring.

‘This motorcycle is the diary of my life,’ said Gary, as he handed over the key to an already shaky

me. I didn’t quite know if it was his way of being candid or some sort of forewarning, but I decided it was best not to ask. Fifteen minutes into riding it, I was a lump of quivering jelly and I just had to pull over for a break. This was a forty-one year old motorcycle with an 82 bhp mothership of an engine, one solid disc up-front and with a dry weight of 232 kg. It made me feel weak, unimportant. In comparison, the Z900 was instantly welcoming. Ten minutes of saddle time later, the Z900 was a generous accomplice and its supremely flickable characteristics meant I found myself riding it like I would a KTM Duke,

which is to say ‘erratically, without a care in the world’. I like that about the Z900, but I would still rather be scared silly, even at the expense of looking frail and slow, by the KZ900.

The sight of these two motorcycles on the relatively empty streets of upmarket Mumbai was overwhelming, to say the least, but that was only until we fired them up. Then, all hell broke loose. I was on the KZ, stroking the beastly motor into attaining steady momentum, while Raunak, astride the Z900, revelled in its crisp, fast, focused nature. Out of habit, I did envy him everytime he spun the Z’s rear tyre up, but looking down at



This isn't about technology but rather the shift in priorities. Speed is a constant theme, thankfully



Both 900s, but that's where the similarity ends



Evolution done right, from right to left, that is



'That's a Thrux...' Stop right there! The KZ's Rickman fairing gets this a lot



Gary Lawyer, master vocalist and motorcycle guy, knows his poses, too!

the analogue speedo of the KZ and at the Rickman fairing, to me the most beautiful motorcycle fairing in the world, I was at peace again. The KZ900 whisks you back to the time when people let people be. When character was all that mattered and conformity was sent to the gallows, unrepentantly.

It's true that the KZ900 doesn't like to be ridden when it's too sunny, or too rainy or anything that accounts as an imperfect riding condition. And yet, it has the character to keep you lusting after it four decades in a row. Can you imagine still owning the current Z900 in 2057? That's a near impossibility, unless you are some sort of veteran in the subject of embalming. It's not so much down to build quality or engineering principles, but simply a matter of the machines of today being built to be replaced. Nobody wants you to hold onto a motorcycle for forty years, let alone pass it on to the next

generation. They want you to buy a motorcycle and then, three years later, they want you to buy another one. More motorcycles can never be a bad thing, per se, but I guess our generation will never know of love, loyalty, personality and character the way our predecessors did. That's the price we pay for evolution. What's good for many is not necessarily the best for anyone at all.

It's well past noon when my time with the KZ900 is up and I have one last question to ask Gary; does this motorcycle have a name? 'No,' he says, 'I haven't given it one.' I was uncomfortable with this for days after I had bid the KZ900 goodbye. How can four decades of fierce companionship not spawn a single affectionate endearment? I realised my folly in due course, thankfully. If this motorcycle could ever have a name, it would have to be nothing but 'Gary'. Old, a little reckless, but boy, does it make music! ■

MOTODATA

KAWASAKI Z900

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	948cc, in-line four
Max power	123.3 bhp@9500 rpm
Max torque	10 kgm@7700 rpm
Transmission	6-speed
CHASSIS	
Type	Tubular steel trellis
SUSPENSION	
F/R	41 mm USD fork / monoshock
BRAKES	
F/R	300 mm twin-disc / 250 mm disc
TYRES	
F/R	120/70 R17 / 180/55 R17
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	2070/820/1064
Wheelbase	1450 mm
Kerb weight	210 kg
Fuel tank	17 litres
PRICE	₹ 9.33 LAKH (ex-showroom, Mumbai)

REAR VIEW

IMW DRAG RACING BIKES

PROJECTILE MOTION

Two drag bikes. Two different strokes. The sole purpose of speed

By Janak Sorap *Photographs* Vishnu G Haarinath





It was evening time and there were several motorcycles parked besides each other just outside the IMW Racing workshop. While most them were parked for display, some were being worked upon. A few steps inside the workshop, a mechanic was carefully installing different parts onto a freshly painted red frame. It had a Pulsar 220 engine and that was about all that I could recognise looking at the machine. All the other components like the wheels, swingarm and suspension were unlike what you'd expect on a Bajaj. It was the assembly of a drag-spec motorcycle in progress. The reason to be there was that in just two days I'd be riding two custom-built drag-spec bikes for the very first time. What better reason can one think of to head to a workshop like this?

As I was observing the other bikes in the workshop, Iqbal Shaikh, the man behind building all the drag

bikes under the IMW Racing name comes out of his office. Behind him, stacked on shelves, are several trophies from his wins in drag racing championships. While I was already impressed by the workmanship on the upcoming red drag bike, he invited me into his office to see a bike standing in a corner, sporting a blue trellis frame with silver body panels and red highlights. It was only after I got close enough that I realised it was a KTM Duke 200 engine mounted onto a drag chassis. The attention to detail was fantastic as even the thin brackets holding the delicate fairing were buffed to a sparkling shine. After being engrossed for some time observing the details of the motorcycle, Iqbal informed me about the other drag-spec bike, a Yamaha RX-135 weighing only 54 kg and with even skinnier tyres. It was ready, but was kept at his house since it is his prized possession.

Fast-forward to the day of the shoot, I finally got to see both bikes, especially the RX-135. The Yamaha can easily be called a gleaming piece of art, just like Iqbal had described the other day. As I was in the process of being awestruck by the detailing on the bike, Iqbal went off on the Duke for a warm-up run, only to return with a missing brake pedal that fell off halfway. It's a part and parcel of building these bikes which he says is necessary after every build. After quickly fixing it with a makeshift brake pedal using two nuts and a bolt, the bike was back in action.

First up was the Duke 200, standing little less than three feet above the ground, getting accustomed to the riding posture itself was a task. After adjusting myself to the seat which had absolutely no cushioning, I cranked the engine up with the ignition button located beside the meter.



A very strict weight loss programme, indeed



'Seat' is a bit of a lavish word to describe this...



Holes drilled everywhere to reduce weight



“The Yamaha can easily be called a gleaming piece of art”

The motor came to life with a deep exhaust note that got louder every time I revved it. After getting familiar with the clutch via a few runs, I crouched and got ready to launch a bike for the very first time. I held the tacho close to 3000 revs and let the clutch go. The front lifted slightly, but was quickly back down, and the bike shot ahead with every gear change to build more speed like a predator going for the kill. Within seconds, I was already over 100 kph with one more gear left. I upshifted to the last cog and rolled off the throttle as the sudden rush of speed was completely unexpected.

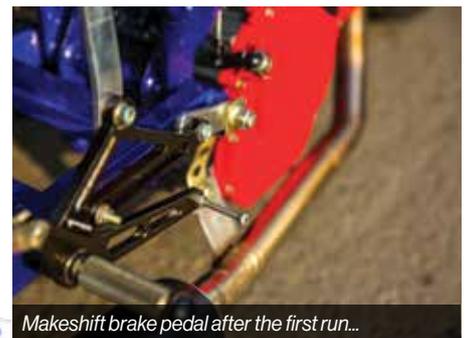
After recovering from the sudden rush of adrenaline it was time for another run, this time on the RX. Two-strokes are known for their infamous powerbands, so I had to muster a bit more courage to get on it. This one was even lower



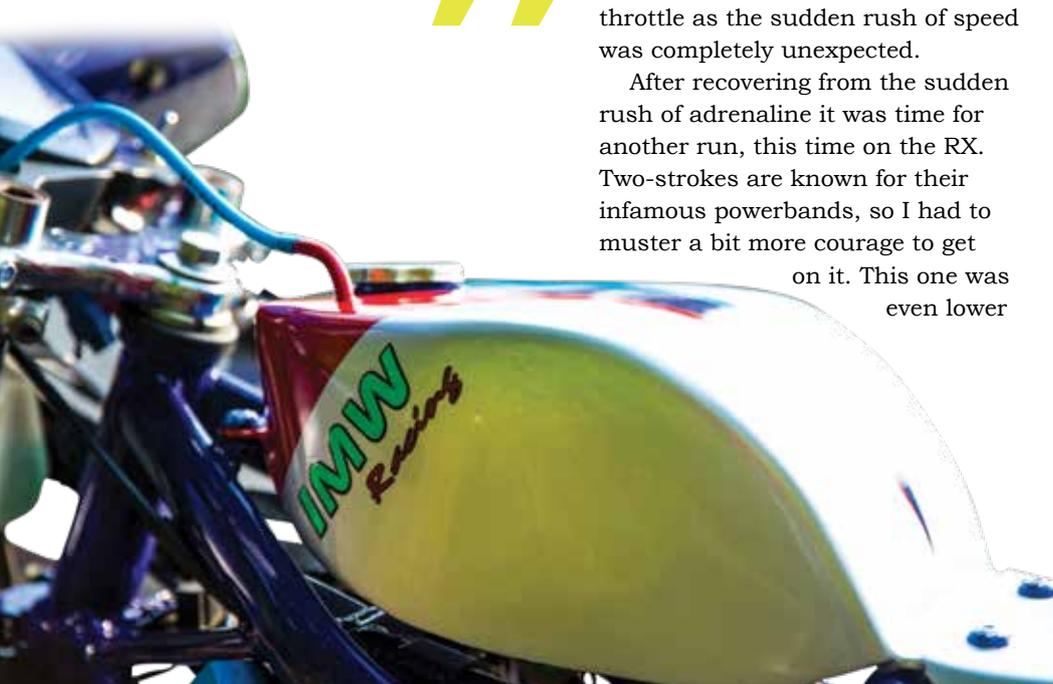
Press the ignition button to make it come alive



Testarossa? How about Fondorosso instead?



Makeshift brake pedal after the first run...



to the ground than the Duke and had an even more committed riding position. So much is the attention given to weight loss, it doesn't even have a kick starter; you always have to bump start it. After stalling it a number of times, I finally got the hang of the clutch and braced myself for what I knew was coming. With an empty road ahead of me, I lined up with my chest resting on the fuel tank, gearbox engaged in first and working the throttle to hold a constant rpm.

A bit scared already, I let go of the clutch and in an instant, there was a sudden blast of raw power that almost threw me off the bike. The front end of the bike luckily remained straight thanks to the steering damper, but it was

still light as all the weight had shifted to the rear. There was no speedometer to know what speed I was doing, just the view of the thin front wheel keeping the bike in a straight line. The feeling was very scary, something out of the realms of the normal world that I live in. While this run was without opening the throttle completely, I could only imagine what would happen if given the full whack. No, there was no way I was going to try that.

As I stood wondering about what had just happened, I couldn't help but be amazed by the potential both these machines were capable of. While the KTM was notably faster once it gained momentum, the Yamaha seemed like it ran on 2T mixed with sheer madness. It came

across as hard to control with every single gearshift. It is still impressive to see first-hand that in spite of two-stroke technology being much older than four-stroke machinery, it still outperforms the latter clearly in terms of sheer power and speed. The emotion and fun factor involved in riding a two-stroke is something that cannot be replicated with a four-stroke machine. On that note, Iqbal started up the Yamaha, revving it up for his fix of 2T-infused speed. ■

We would like to thank Iqbal Shaikh and his team at IMW Racing for building such unbelievably fast machines on two wheels. If you want the motorcycle of your dreams, call them on +91 9819441818.





LEAN ANGLE

2020 NORTON ATLAS 650
NOMAD & RANGER



TWIN TWIN

TVS just bought itself a
couple of lovely Nortons

By Alan Cathcart Photographs Kel Edge



The news that Norton, arguably the most historic British two-wheeled brand (a kind of Jaguar to Triumph's, well, Triumph) has been purchased from the liquidator as a going concern by India's TVS Motor for £16 million, appears to ensure the future of its current range of motorcycles developed under previous owner Stuart Garner. Indeed, it thus follows in the tyre tracks of its four-wheeled Jaguar/Land Rover compatriot, which was acquired by Indian conglomerate Tata in 2008, and has since flourished.

With TVS confirming that Norton's future range includes 'the upcoming Atlas series' it appears

the Indian company will continue developing Norton's new 650cc parallel-twin Atlas model range, production of which was slated to commence in December 2020, before Norton's cash troubles ruled that out. Initially available in Nomad and Ranger street scrambler versions, one (Ranger) more decidedly dual purpose than the other, this was priced at the upper end of the middleweight market, with the Nomad retailing at £9,995 (₹ 9.47 lakh), and the Ranger at £11,995 (₹ 11.37 lakh). Compared to the Kawasaki Versys 650GT at £8,649 (₹ 8.20 lakh) in the UK, these two all-new motorcycles presaged a series of entry-level models in the

Norton range, alongside its 1200 V4 Superbike family which entered production late in 2018.

Indeed, the Atlas duo are a direct spinoff from those 1200 V4 models, with the liquid-cooled eight-valve DOHC parallel-twin wet-sump motor common to both versions essentially representing the front cylinder bank of the 72° V4 engine, with the same chain camshaft drive up the left side of the Atlas motor, which is fitted with a 270° crank. This has been stroked slightly to obtain a full 650cc, in which guise it delivers the same 84 bhp at 11,000 rpm at the crank on each model, with 6.53 kgm of torque peaking at 9000 rpm, running on 11:1 compression.



Norton uses a dedicated engine-management system from Mechatronic on these two twins, the same supplier as on the V4, with twin 48-mm Jenvey throttle bodies, each with a single Bosch injector (compared to two on the V4), and a ride-by-wire digital throttle, but as yet no choice of different riding modes. The 6-speed extractable cassette-type gearbox with straight-cut primary gears uses the same ratios as the V4, with a cable operated oil-bath clutch, and a single gear-driven counterbalancer to eliminate undue vibration, which it indeed does.

This extremely compact engine was entirely developed in-house at Norton, according to the company's head of design, Simon Skinner — who for the time being at least remains with the company under TVS ownership. The Atlas duo's UK-developed engine is fitted in a tubular steel perimeter chassis

— again, entirely designed but also manufactured at Norton, says Skinner — with the engine as a semi-stressed component, and aluminium swingarm mounts.

A fully-adjustable 50-mm Marzocchi-made upside-down fork branded as a Roadholder (the name given 60 years ago to the suspension on Norton's legendary Manx GP racer and its streetbike spinoffs) sits at a 24.5° rake on both models, but the Ranger has 200 mm wheel travel against the Nomad's tauter 150 mm range. Same at the rear, where the braced cast-aluminium swingarm operating a Marzocchi monoshock adjustable for rebound damping and spring preload (but only with a C-spanner) via a rising-rate link, gives 150 mm of wheel travel for the Nomad, and 200 mm for the Ranger.

Despite its dual-purpose focus, the Ranger carries the same front-end brake package as the Nomad, which wouldn't look out of place on a



Simple. Perhaps too much so for a Norton?



Shiny clutch cover really stands out!



British legacy now finds an Indian home



No, that's not an RE Interceptor 650...



Now, that looks hot! And the pipe will be, too

one-litre superbike. The twin 320-mm Brembo fully-floating front discs are gripped by the Italian firm's four-piston twin-pad radial Monoblock calipers, though the switchable dual-channel Continental ABS will help riders who get too enthusiastic with their right fingers stay out of trouble. At the rear there's a 245-mm disc with twin-piston Brembo caliper, altogether stopping a bike that weighs 178 kg dry in either guise, according to Skinner, split 50/50 front to rear.

Both bikes use a 17-inch rim on their rear wire wheels, with a front 19-incher on the Ranger shod with Avon's new Trekriders dual-purpose rubber, whereas the more tarmac-focused Nomad uses the firm's slightly less knobbly Trailriders tyres, with an 18-inch front. This results in a 1446-mm wheelbase for the Nomad, versus a rangier 1470-mm stride for the, er, Ranger

Starting with the Atlas Nomad, I was immediately thrilled by the fruity-sounding aftermarket exhaust

fitted to the bike, which probably won't be Euro 4 legal, but still wasn't too offensively loud that I mentally cringed riding through villages or past schools, as on the open-pipe Domiracer hotrod I remember riding along the same roads three or four years ago. It was no louder than a Triumph aftermarket pipe on one of its midsize triples, but has exactly the same effect, delivering a sporty feel-good factor to riding the bike.

That's a sentiment enhanced by the engine's performance, for the way that Skinner & Co. have tuned it this is a switch-hitter of a motor, with a very welcome split personality. Below 6000 rpm it's an amiable all-rounder of a bike, happy to plonk along at low speeds in third or fourth gear in traffic or through towns and villages, where the accommodating suspension's generous well-damped travel delivered good ride quality over the increasingly prevalent lumps and bumps of Her Majesty's highways.

But then show either Norton an





the revs, and from six grand up to the 11,000-rpm revlimiter it is un-be-iev-ably quick-accelerating, with the ultra-flat torque curve that fast-forwards you towards the horizon. Either Norton's contained weight doesn't hurt, but it's the fact that they're much more powerful than any of their mainstream 650cc competitors from Kawasaki or Suzuki, which makes them so much fun to ride. From 8000 rpm especially there's an extra hit of performance from the Norton motor, which propels you even harder towards that horizon. These are very invigorating bikes to ride, and the

single counterbalancer does its job well – there are no undue vibes at any stage in the rev band, despite both engines being rigidly mounted in the frame.

I was glad to discover that the Nomad's handling was capable of harnessing this performance – I was about to write 'slightly unexpected' but, after all, this is half of a 200+ bhp hypersports motor, so it stands to reason it should deliver thrills, but without spills. I think what made it unexpected was the sight of an 18-inch front wheel and Avon's Trekrider dual-purpose rubber on the bike – but although this was the

first time I'd ridden a bike with these tyres, I was pretty impressed by their level of grip. They delivered sufficient lean angle to scrape the Nomad's low-mounted dual-purpose footrests with rubber inserts quite badly, to the point that I really do think they need to be raised.

In fact, the Nomad's a bike with a split personality that's a little incongruous. It's really an Atlas café racer both in styling and capability, much more than a putative off-roader – making it really neither one thing nor the other. I'd like to raise the footrests and stick full-tarmac tyres like Pirelli Angels on it, maybe

Like I said, this motorcycle would make a pretty fine café racer...

with a 17-inch front wheel — though the 18-incher fitted doesn't slow the steering down unduly. But full respect for those outstanding brakes, with the Continental ABS which cut in occasionally but not over-eagerly on strewn leaves in country lanes. Like I said, this motorcycle would make a pretty fine café racer, and doubtless Norton will produce one soon based on the Atlas platform, especially with the Nomad's 824-mm seat height being ideal for such a bike.

Riding the Ranger confirmed this — if you want to go offroad but to ride tarmac to get there, or to go to work to earn the £££ to buy the bike in the first place, this is an excellent model to do so on. The Ranger's taller 867-mm seat still allowed me at 5'10" in stature to touch both feet down at traffic lights, but coupled with the 19-inch front wheel made it a confidence-inspiring trail ride along hard-surfaced lanes and muddy tracks. The low-speed rideability of the engine again came to the fore — but just like the Nomad, show it an open road, and the Ranger speeds along very nicely, with just the upright riding position to contend with in terms of windblast. Still 120-kph cruising was lots of fun, and this is a true all-round motorcycle with added reserves of power when you want. And the good-looking seat on both bikes was pretty comfy, too.

I must especially compliment Skinner and his men on the Atlas gearbox, which is literally faultless. The shift action is short, precise and instant — it's so effective that you don't even need to use the clutch changing down through the gears, not that using its light-action lever is any hardship, making both Atlas

twins ideal town bikes, especially the Ranger where you sit high enough to see over traffic quite easily. But the choice of ratios from the V4 is also inspired — the top four in the 6-speed gearbox are quite close together, allowing you to really keep the engine in the boil if you're revving it out. But down low it's sufficiently flexible that you can pull away in sixth gear from as low as 2000 rpm, or about 50 kph, without any real transmission snatch, making this a flexible friend of a motor — but with performance on tap when required.

A combination of British design skills and now Indian manufacturing expertise at the right price augurs well for the long-term future of the Norton brand. In fact, Norton's new Atlas family already made a promising debut in the rain-hit 2019 Isle of Man TT's Lightweight race for 650 Twins, when Peter Hickman took a brand-new street-legal Superlight version of the firm's all-new twin-cylinder family, with a more powerful 102-bhp twin-injector version of the same parallel-twin motor in the Atlas duo, and despite the bike never having turned a wheel under its own power in coming straight from the Norton assembly line to the 37.73-mile track, within four laps had lapped just 16 secs slower than the class lap record. He went on to finish eighth in the race after some minor problems, after lapping at over 120 mph on a bike he'd never ridden before. That's how good a package Skinner and his team have masterminded in this new family of bikes, and it'll be very interesting to see what other variants with a 100 per cent tarmac focus they come up with next, under TVS ownership. ■



MOTODATA

2020 NORTON ATLAS 650 NOMAD / RANGER

POWERTRAIN	
Displacement	649.57cc, parallel twin
Max power	84 bhp@11,000 rpm
Max torque	6.53 kgm@9000 rpm
Transmission	6-speed
CHASSIS	
Type	Twin-tube steel perimeter chassis
BRAKES	
F/R	320-mm twin discs / 245-mm disc
TYRES	
F/R	110/80 R18 / 180/55 R17 / 120/70 R19 / 170/60 R17
DIMENSIONS	
L/W/H (mm)	NA/NA/NA
Wheelbase	1446 mm / 1470 mm
Ground clearance	NA
Seat height	824 mm / 867 mm
Kerb weight	178 kg
Fuel capacity	15 litres
PRICE	
₹ 9.47 LAKH / ₹ 11.37 LAKH (excluding duties)	

COLD SNAPS

Can you say ‘Sucker for punishment’?

By Varad More *Photographs* Royal Enfield

I was in Thailand when I got the call. The voice on the other side said, ‘Hey, Varad, I called to invite you for the Royal Enfield White Out 2020, from 20th Feb to 1st March. You think you can join us?’

At that point I had no clue how, because after Thailand I was headed to Morocco and was only going to be back in India on the evening of Feb 18th. But I confirmed nonetheless. Because, you see, the White Out is not just another ride to the Himalayas. It is a winter ride, in one of the coldest regions of the world. Fast-forward to Feb 20th, I found myself in the back of a cab being driven to Shimla from Chandigarh airport in the dead of the night.

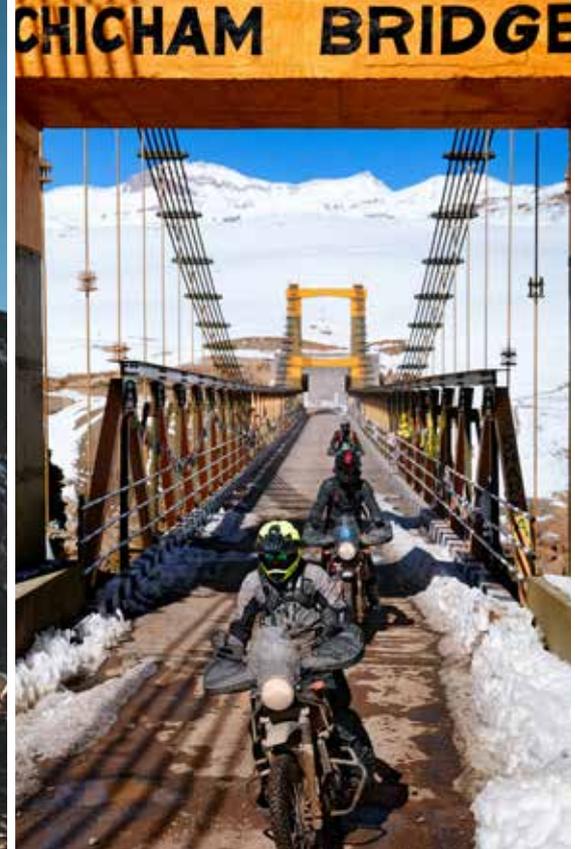
Starting from Shimla, the next morning greeted us with light rain, a thick blanket of snow spread till the horizon and riding temperatures

indicating 4 degrees on the scale. It had snowed the week before, and we expected roads full of snow and black ice. And we weren’t wrong. Within the first few kilometres itself, I had gone down a few times, bruising the handlebar on my rock-red BS6 Himalayan and my ego. This was the first time I was riding on proper snow, and the sheer unpredictable behaviour of a motorcycle on snow was just as uncertain as the weather in the mountains. As if to prove the point, the rain stopped and black ice covered the road while we crawled our way over it. Barely covering 12 km in two hours, we stopped for tea and for everyone to regroup. With countless falls in the process, everyone checked for damages to their bikes and once sure there was nothing major to be fixed, we continued our journey to Rampur Bushahr.





A motorcycle in the land that named it. No wonder the Himalayan looks right at home



Asia's highest way of conquering divides

Next day's ride was going to be a long and treacherous one from Rampur to Nako stretching for about 200 km. And while we climbed up to Nako, which sits at 12,000 ft, with the backdrop of Reo Purgyal, the highest peak in Himachal Pradesh scaling upwards of 22,300 ft, the sight of fairytale-like snow sheets covering the landscape was breathtaking (figuratively, not the AMS-type). But we encountered very little snow on this route except for a few patches where a few of us tumbled down repeatedly, laughing inside our helmets while picking each other up.

Funnily, during the ordeal we comfortably forgot how cold it got. Post sunset, the temperatures dropped to sub-zero, but amidst the laughter around the campfire our tolerance levels climbed. Only till we got into our rooms, though. My night stay in Nako will be memorable for a while, even for everyone on the White Out. The thermometer showing minus 10 degrees outside and the absence of a big socket in the room forced me and my roomie Azman to sleep in the toilet which had a geyser socket that we could connect the





A hauntingly beautiful interplay of light, mountains and motorcycle in the Himalayas. And a rider choking on dust, cursing the vehicle ahead

Kaza was the coldest place we experienced on the ride

heater to. There was no other way we could've made it through the night.

The next day, from Nako, the road till Kaza saw little or no snow. Temperatures kept dropping further, though, and the wind chill got sharper, piercing through whatever warm-weather gear we wore. Toes froze, despite being wrapped in multiple levels of thick winter socks inside waterproof Goretex boots. Thankfully, the Himalayans were kitted with rain mitts and heated grips, both by Oxford, which allowed fingers to operate controls. Without

those crucial accessories, I was certain of crash landing in a pile of snow.

Kaza was the coldest place we experienced on the ride. In the night, temperatures dropped below minus 20 degrees and this time there were no heaters in the rooms. Or attached toilets. Next day, the blokes at Royal Enfield weren't going to return without ploughing some snow with the Himalayans, and so we went looking for the white stuff to Chicham, where lies Asia's highest altitude bridge.





Wonder what he's so mad about...



'Why do I have a sudden impulse to sing Informer?'



'This puddle is deep. I think I see a submarine.'

“... my fingers would've cracked sheets of ice if they could scream”

Still very dissatisfied that our lot hadn't seen the worst of snow riding yet, it was decided that we'd take a slight detour to Pin Valley on the first day of our return journey from Kaza. And as we arrived at the turn off to Pin Valley, we could see the road ahead covered in six inches of snow and ice. It was time to bring out the snow chains.

I'd spoken to a few friends who had been on White Out before and I clearly remember (now) that one of them mentioned to not remove gloves while installing the snow chains. However, at that moment, I forgot this critical detail; gloves came off and eager fingers mingled

with dense cold metal — my fingers would've cracked sheets of ice if they could scream. I hurriedly put my gloves back on, but the damage was done. I turned up the heated grips to maximum and waited for some relief.

Once slightly better to operate the controls, we set out on the road to Pin Valley. Wary of the shooting rocks above us and a possible blizzard coming in unannounced, the ride was demanding on the body and mind. Huffing and puffing, we stopped at a few spots to catch our breath and take some photos. And by the time we decided to turn around and head back to Tabo for the night's stay, ice had trickled down and



'Do you hear someone singing Informer?'





Innocent mountain-dweller being taken for a ride



'Someone made a village out of an avalanche!'



Happy faces of White Out 2020!

formed numerous puddles that hid black ice beneath. One would ride over the puddle expecting a nice splash for a dynamic photograph and what he got was a proper face plant. It was like Takeshi's Castle, but on motorcycles.

Thankfully, speeds were negligible and no one got seriously hurt. But it sure as hell scarred a lot of us and thereon all puddles were met with absolute caution, a little fear, and the Royal Enfield photography crew

waiting to capture the falling stars of White Out 2020. Back in Shimla, dry and warm inside the hotel, gorging on sumptuous food after surviving the past ten days on *daal chawal* and chowmein, we all shared stories of the ride and the common emotion of having successfully completed White Out 2020. We'd made bedrooms out of toilets, roads out of snow tracks, and friends out of complete strangers. Not a bad way to spend a cold spell. ■

**CHILD'S
PLAY****KARTIK WARE**
@kartik46

Being a creature of habit, I rarely surprise myself. Any semi-astonishment is limited to the weird things I ask of Google, like 'do spiders have knees' and 'complete Street Hawk series'. When it comes to motorcycles, though, I've always reliably obsessed over clip-ons and rearsets, even if my introduction to those speed-born elements was only as recent as the 12-year-old first-gen Yamaha R15. Nonetheless, over time, I've collected more knee sliders than a spider has knees. And even if I could never fill the space between said 'bars and 'pegs with racer-like poise, that's always where I've been at home. So, it was rather uncharacteristic of me to go buy a KTM 390 Adventure.

Perhaps this lockdown business has evaporated the joy of buying a new bike. Parking it for a month after clocking only 800 km hasn't helped, either. And I found myself wondering. Memories of happy years spent with long-termers like the R15, later the R3, and now the Continental GT 650 bubbled back to my mind's surface in a most vigorous manner. All throughout history, bikes like those have put their riders in aggressive foetal positions to live at speed. Wheelies seem less scary, too; despite an elevated front wheel, I'm still relatively leaned forward and not afraid of landing on my backside with the bike on top of me. And yet, I knew the Adventure was the one for

me. I just didn't know why.

I sincerely want to improve my off-roading skills, though I daydream more of trails with pleasant views than joint-shattering motocross sessions. I also need something comfortable, multipurpose and everyday, conditions that the Adventure effortlessly fulfills. Even the fact that dual-purpose motorcycles are congenitally and terminally incompetent when it comes to beauty, an important attribute of a motorcycle for me, didn't matter. In any case, most

... the motorcycle was home and my bank account was empty

of my musings were moot; the motorcycle was home and my bank account was empty. And, as happens with such things, it all fell into place when I was least expecting it, in the middle of asking Google about a motorcycle from my childhood.

Long before clip-ons and rearsets became a part of my life — long before I looked at any motorcycle other than my father's old Bullet — there was Street Hawk. An American TV show based around a top-secret

motorcycle that ran for 13 episodes in 1985, it appeared on Indian TVs in the early '90s, around the same time an impressionable young brain was forming. With each episode, I struggled to understand what those Yanks were yakking about, and hung on only for the bike to appear and defy physics in a manner befitting 1980s special effects. The rest of the show, as I've rediscovered thanks to a surreptitious part of the Internet, is spectacularly tacky despite some clever one-liners.

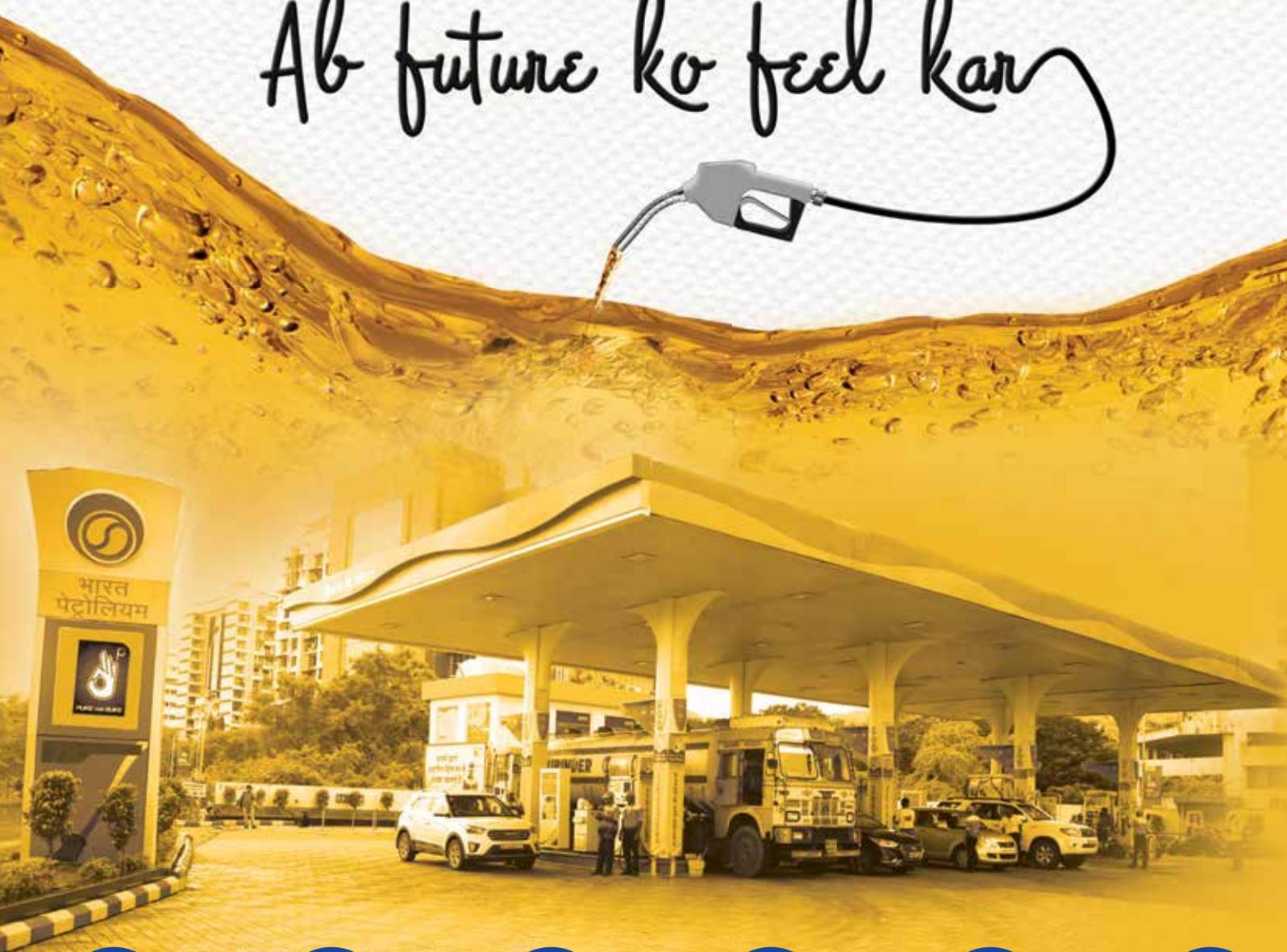
The actual motorcycle in the show was based on a Honda dirt bike, though its futuristic body looked nothing like one, and the producers conflated it with an inline-four sound. It shot lasers, jumped over cars at will, and resoundingly convinced my formative brain that nothing will ever be as cool as a motorcycle. It must've made more of an impression than I ever realised because its proportions are not dissimilar to the Adventure. Except for that outrageous beak. On the Street Hawk, of course. And so, becoming an adherent of a long-standing human tradition, my adult decision reflected childhood dreams. Beauty, ability and value for money have no meaning to a child living out his dream. Just like a motorcycle, he will always take me where I need to be. That inner child never ceases to surprise.

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