

### **Build Your Own Maruti**

Socio-Economic upheavels can leave their mark on human relationships.

For instance, WW2 created employment opportunities for European women, millions of whom left the kitchen for a job in the defence industry. One spin-off of this was a spurt in the divorce rate, and therefore a reduction in the span of marriages. Our lexicon of relationships, too, expanded, and terms such as “7-year itch”, “Live-In relationship”, “Serial Love” became common in media.

So what’s this got to do with automobile enthusiasts like us?

IMHO, unlike non-enthusiasts, we don’t just *use* our cars or bikes, but share deeper emotional relationships with them. And economic change impacts this relationship too.

I should know. The arrival of our second child, non-arrival of a raise, and a mountain of soiled nappies, caused me to sell my Yamaha 350 to buy a new IFB Bosch front-loading washing machine.

Selling this bike in those days in Chandigarh, where I was stationed, was not easy. Unbelievable prices were being offered by young men with a need for greater freedom, and an even greater need to evade capture by the police in Punjab. Yamaha 350’s were the get-away wheels of choice, and therefore shared the same legal status as narcotics – BANNED!

I was looking for a trustworthy buyer who would maintain my bike well, and would be willing to sell it back to me when I was ready to be irresponsible again. The first part of this deal was finally sealed with a “Gabroo” in my office. *(Where in the world are you Harry Thind? And where is Rajdoot Yamaha 350, motorcycle, regn # DIT 3840, chassis and engine # 1A1 227? I am ready for the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of our deal !)*

Back to the current decline in car sales in India...

The cause, as usual, is an economic downturn, which increases trade-in cycles, forcing many to suppress their 3-year itch by shopping for the latest tyres/alloy wheels/car seat cover/iPod-cum-Bluetoothed-cum-GPS music system. In readiness for a second honeymoon with their once-new love.

With an attendant increase in interest rates, many need to look at a used car for their first love-on-wheels.

Which suits car dealerships fine, as used car buyers create footfalls when there are Nano, oops...sorry, none, for new cars.

Buying a used car has always carried a risk. Used-car dealers, however, devised the “161-step quality check”, “Full Service History” to make someone’s Ex more attractive, and the ensuing relationship less risky.

Despite this, there remains the stigma of forging an alliance with someone's Ex. But dealers and their ad agencies minimized this too – so, "Used Car" went out, and "Pre-Owned" came in.

Having witnessed fleets of "new" Ambassadors and Fiats being driven thousands of kms from their factories into Delhi, I wonder why people blanche at buying a used car these days! A routinely-serviced Maruti, with 50,000 km on the odometer, is a lower-maintenance relationship than one with a so-called "zero-mileage" Ambassador of those days (or even these days!).

But then, we enthusiasts' relish the labour of sustaining our relationships with our cars. And for our labours, this Post-Maruti era holds richer rewards.

First, a little insight, from BMW:

BMW feels that car buyer's need to be seen as unique, is greater than his/her need for speed.

BMW will, in the near future, shift to mass customization - to ensure that no two BMW's will be alike!

The same was true of Indian automobiles in the pre-Maruti era, but in the case of BMW, it will be by design. With an online tool linked to a novel manufacturing system, you would be able to "build" your unique BMW.

But Indian enthusiasts without BMW-sized budgets need not wait – Thanks to Maruti.

The prolific production of Maruti's in the past 28 years, and an excellent service network, has led to a wide array of used Maruti's for sale, scrapyards brimming with used Maruti parts, and a spare parts market where anything Maruti – OE or replacement- is available at rock-bottom prices.

So now, you can build yourself a Maruti that Maruti never built. E.g.:

- Maruti's Gypsy is N.A. ,and its successor costs almost INR 20 lakh. So, those for whom "off-road" does not mean "golf course", and are allergic to diesel fumes and sub-Maruti standards of build quality, here's a recipe:
  - One used Gypsy, with transmission in good shape. Cost – INR 1-1.25 lakh.
  - One battered Baleno with engine in good shape. Cost- INR 1-1.25 lakh.
  - Remove engine from Baleno and put in Gypsy. Stir for 2 weeks in a workshop with reasonably competent (and enthusiastic) Maruti-trained mechanics. Cost- INR 1- 1.5 lakh, inclusive of parts and minor fabrication.
  - Add Olive Green paint job and set of tyres. Price – INR 40K.
  - Total Cost – INR 4.5 lakh.
  - Net result: A carefree rut-with-a-slut-in the-mud relationship, that's low-maintenance to boot!



- Statutory Warning: Find a “friendly” RTO office for registration, before Anna Hazare does.

Finally, if circumstances ever force you to sell your Gypsy 1.6 , enhance the lexicon of our relationships - headline your advertisement, “Pre-Loved”.

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