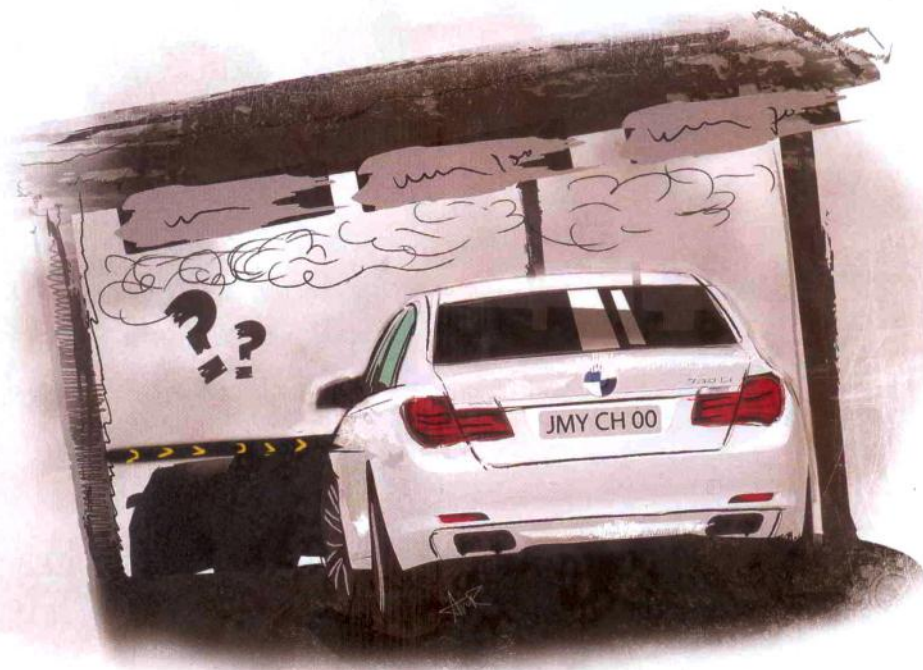


# Manoj Berry

Our automobile population is multiplying like rabbits, and our road space is growing at the speed of the turtle. Shanghai, here we come



I crept between a canyon of trucks bringing parts or taking away finished cars and bikes across either side of the Delhi-Haryana automobile corridor. The owners of these new cars and bikes will be fighting for even less space on the same road in a few days.

Sixty kilometres of stop-go crawling later, the traffic thinned, and I floored it. Only to be jolted by a series of rumble strips just before a village. Soon, I began slowing down as soon as I noticed signs of habitation ahead. Until I came to one village that, surprise, surprise, had no speed breakers. Silently blessing this civilised panchayat, I sped away, and quickly slowed down for the rumble strips – at the exit.

Asia is now the largest market for luxury brands. Ludhiana and Shanghai now jointly sing the chorus line of BMW, Ducati and Jimmy Choo. Around 95 per cent of the new wealth of most emerging super and not-so-super powers is with five per cent of their populace – this is the creamy layer that global automobile brands now design for.

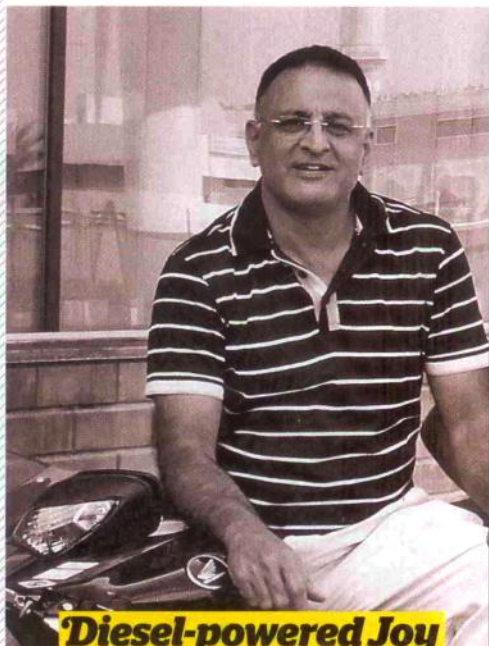
Diesel-powered Joy for the Jimmy Choo'd in the back seat has replaced the Ultimate Driving Experience for the enthusiast in the driver's seat. Techno-bling has replaced bhp in the new models ... "always on" LED headlamps for the "scowling eyes" look, grilles with larger 3-pointed stars...The showroom pitch too dwells on the B&O 6DVD changer, not on the six airbags. It's strictly business now, and on-road presence for the buyer is paramount.

There's a war on the roads between the five per cent and the 95 per cent. Road rage deaths in India, and the events in Tunisia, have given a sharp edge to a recent headline for the S Class Merc in a neighbouring country: "You'll rarely see it without security guards".

Food prices will keep climbing for a long time, regardless of which alliance is in Parliament. Yet more automobile factories will swallow yet more land for an increasing network of Indo-bahns – reducing food supply and pushing prices higher.

India needs to look beyond the automobile, beyond CWG and malls as icons of development, and think about quality of life instead. You don't need another parliamentary delegation to go look for solutions in Las Vegas. One ride on Singapore's public transport system will do. Ditto Masdar, a novel car-less city coming up in Abu Dhabi.

*The author is CEO of Embrand, a company that identifies and develops new product opportunities.*



**Diesel-powered Joy for the Jimmy Choo'd in the back seat has replaced the Ultimate Driving Experience for the enthusiast in the driver's seat'**

**I**T'S BEEN 45 MINUTES SINCE I JOINED the tail-end of a kilometer-long queue at the Manesar toll booth on the NH 8 to Jaipur. And my 6x6 vision (corrected and certified during my recent licence renewal) wasn't helping me read the signs atop the tollbooth, and I was unsure if I'd joined the right queue.

The driver of the 28-seater three-wheeled Vikrant minibus in the next queue reassured me, "Relax, every queue is the right queue. The toll company just wants your money – wherever you reach them from."

A new BMW 7 series battled – in an unequal duel, and ultimately a stalemate, with an 'Express' cycle rickshaw powered by a moped engine and a Bajaj scooter handlebar – for prime position on the edge of the slow lane, which had become the fast lane because the fast lane had become the slow lane as the traffic there was stalled.

Who in India did BMW design this latest version of Joy for – emotionally and physically? The chauffeur, who was saving His Master's Car's Bangle Butt from the rickshaw's hub? Or for the Master exhorting him from the back seat to preserve his No Claim Bonus?

Then another jam: a bunch of villagers calmly sauntered through a gap in the fence dividing the NH 8's carriageways to reach their farms on the other side. I'm sure the village lad who breached the gap to liberate his people won their gratitude, and the panchayat election.