

Smaller, smarter Amby next year

Voted 'World's Best Taxi' At BBC Show, Ambassador Set For 'Peppy, Youthful' Look

Jaideep Mazumdar | TNN

Kolkata: Things have just started looking up for the dowdy dowager of India's roads. Not only has the Ambassador car been voted the 'world's best taxi' by BBC's 'Top Gear', it is also poised for a makeover.

After decades of domineering presence on India's roads before losing out to sleek and snazzy cars with better engines and features, the Ambassador is finally trying to find its feet in the crowded automobile market in India. By the end of this year, Hindustan Motors will launch a smaller version of the Ambassador with a host of new features and in a year's time, a new-look car will roll out of the company's Uttarpara plant.

Uttam Bose, the new CEO of the C K Birla group's flagship Hindustan Motors, said the boot space of the new variant will be reduced but not the cabin space. The length of the car will thus be shorter and since it will be less than 4 metres, it will attract lower excise duty and will thus be cheaper. However, it will not fall in the hatchback category.

As for the new model that'll be launched next March, Bose is understandably reluctant to divulge much. "The new model will be on the existing platform, but will have many new and advanced features that exist in other automobiles. It will have some prefix or suffix to the 'Ambassador' brand and will sport a peppy and youthful look. It will also have new features sought by young and modern customers and will be competitively priced, offering ideal value for money," Bose added.

In fact, things have already started looking up for 71-year-old Hindustan Motors. Sale of the car has registered substantial increase. The order book for the next few months, says the company, is very good. The figures would have been higher had the company been able to introduce the BS-IV compliant engine for its diesel-powered models earlier. It has done so re-

MAKEOVER MANTRA



The BBC's 'Top Gear' has just voted the Ambassador car as the 'world's best taxi'

WHAT WILL BE DIFFERENT IN THE NEW MODEL?

Space: Reduced boot space, but same cabin space

Looks: The new model won't look drastically different from the existing car, but will have many new and advanced features sought by young and modern customers

Engine: Superior to that in the present model

COMPARATIVE SALES

	2013	2012
January	497	212
February	544	159
March	631	418
April	534	280

Price: Shorter length (less than 4m) will mean lower excise duty. So, the car will be cheaper. It will attract excise duty of 12% whereas the existing 1.5 litre, 1.8 litre and 2 litre models attract 24% to 27%

tria-based Magna, a renowned automotive technology firm.

Bose, who crafted the company's turnaround strategy, said: "We decided to focus on customer feedback and sent our sales teams all across the country to meet existing and potential customers and other stakeholders. We discovered that the Ambassador still commands tremendous brand loyalty and needs no introduction," said Bose.

The car, he added, found eager buyers in remote and interior parts of the country. "To a person in rural or semi-urban India, the Ambassador is a 'VIP' car. He has seen politicians and bureaucrats travelling in the car and so it is an aspirational car for him. We have reached out to such potential customers in the rural and semi-urban areas and have found a new market there," said another senior executive of the company.

says Bose, is its "formidable brand equity, low cost of ownership, easy and cost-effective maintenance, robust and sturdy build, unmatched cabin space and boot volume and perfect suitability for Indian roads". The company's turnaround strategy includes expanding its dealer network, offering improved financing options through tie-ups with banks and financial institutions and improving after-sales service. It is this 'toughness' of the Ambassador that saw it pushing out rivals from Britain, USA, Germany, South Africa, Mexico and Russia to emerge as the world's best taxi in the 'Top Gear' show.

Apart from this BBC booster, Hindustan Motors is also happy that it has started receiving orders for the Ambassador from Nigeria and Bangladesh. Exports to Nigeria have started and the first lot of Ambassadors is expected to be shipped to