



# The humble Amby rules world of cabs

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**LONDON:** Long despised at home for its bovine looks, the humble Ambassador car has been named the world's best taxi. And the bulky car, modelled after the British Oxford Morris, beat off an impressive opposition — everything from a Russian stretch limousine, to Mexican Volkswagen Beetle, German E-class Mercedes, and even the British black cab — to win the title.

The cabs were lined up by the BBC television's *Top Gear* — a popular motoring programme — in a car race with a difference. Drivers could show unlimited aggression to beat off rivals in a televised carnage.

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The Hindustan Ambassador, much admired for its endurance, proved it was no dove either. At one point, the Russian limo attempted to block off the New York Ford Crown Vic, but was broken in half as the speeding New York cab crashed right through it.

"Oh my word," said presenter Richard Hammond, "that is Russia taken out. In fact, America has taken itself out, as well." But as Hammond shouted out amid the wilful destruction, the old *kaali peeli* (black-and-yellow) Indian Ambassador, driven by Scottish racer Gordon Shedden, gently rolled past him.

"London's black cabs are no match for India's virtually indestructible Hindustan Ambassador," wrote a reviewer in the *Daily Telegraph*.

Despite its fuddy duddy image and the onslaught of modern, comfy cars, the Ambassador still enjoys a free run in its hometown as a cab — Kolkata has about 35,000 taxis, all of which save three are Ambassadors. "Given the state of our roads, the Ambassador is the best option here. It gives good mileage, has a big boot and, most important, has an extremely low maintenance cost," says Kripanand Jha, who has been sitting behind the wheels of an Ambassador for more than 20 years now.

Among passengers, the car is popular because of its comfort in the back seat. "It almost gives a feeling of being seated in your drawing room sofa," said Soumik Basu, a Customs official, who travels more than 15km to work every day in an Ambassador taxi.