

PHOTO FINISH

AMBASSADOR TAXI

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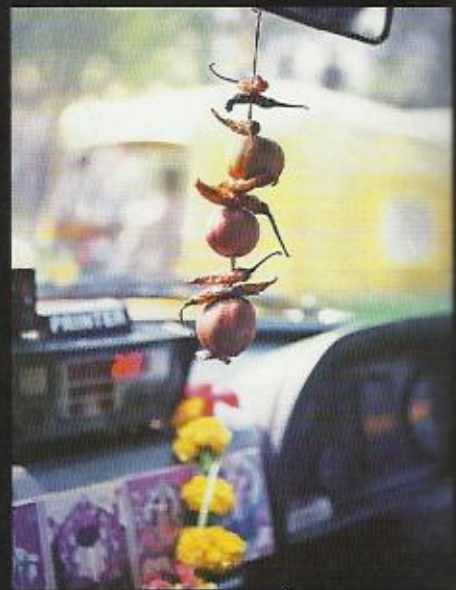


YELLOW SUBMARINE

A rare sight elsewhere, there's no escaping the charm of the lovely yellow Ambassador taxis in Kolkata

Life is different in Kolkata. This city moves at half-speed at a tangent to everything else in the known world and drifts in exactly the opposite direction of a hurried, time-critical city like Mumbai. The sights, sounds, cuisine and experiences this charming metro offers are thoroughly distinctive – if you ever were wondering what a city's 'good vibes' meant, a trip to Kolkata will sort that out for you. And it's the sum of so many little things that makes the city what it is – take the taxis for example. While the world is slowly moving towards modern cars, Ambassadors still form a significant part of this metro's backbone. Jovial, full of character and a pleasing element of the city's sights, there's no getting away from the ol' yellow workhorses.



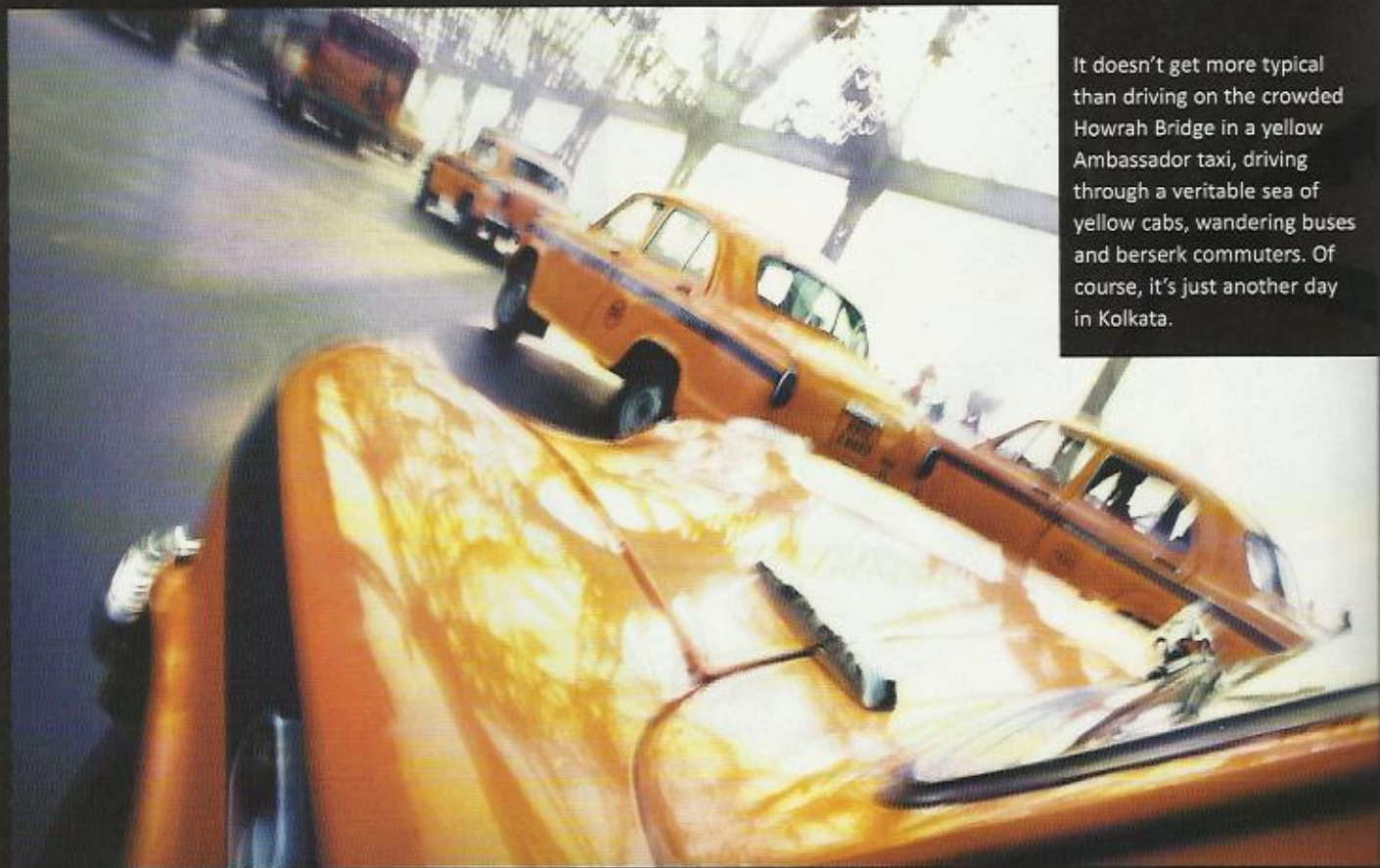


Embellishments are what make the taxis quintessentially Indian – from the de-rigueur *nimbu-mirchi* and snazzy decals still stuck in the '80s to something as silly as the cut-out of Aishwariya Rai's eyes. Man, what a country we've got!

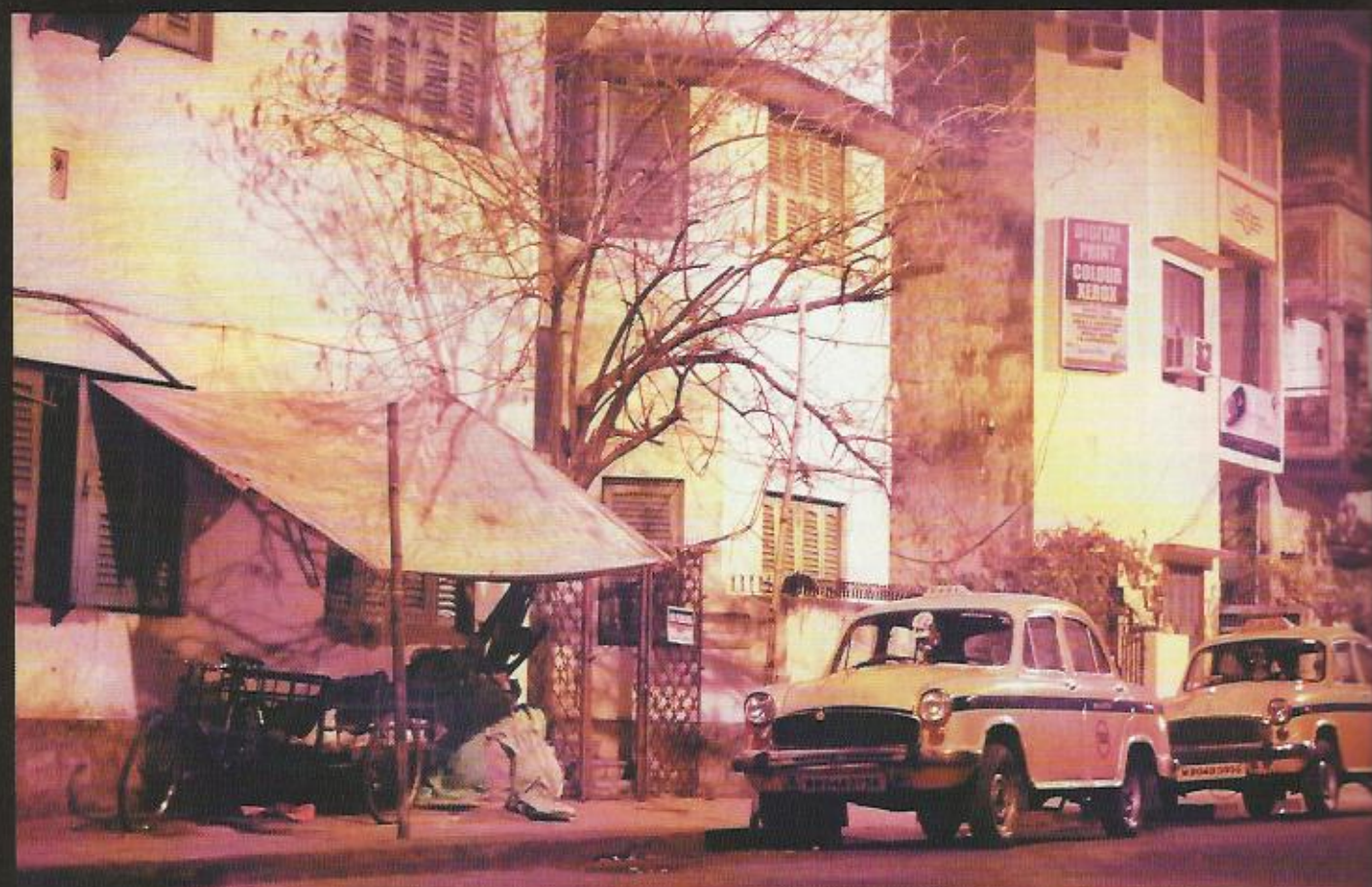
Calcutta was the erstwhile capital of the British Raj from 1772 to 1911. Post 1911, New Delhi was appointed as the new capital and by 1947, the Brits were gone but one Brit managed to make its way back to India in 1954. This time, it was a car. The Morris Oxford started production in India as the 'Landmaster', which was eventually updated and billed the Hindustan Ambassador in 1958. The lovable – if a bit flawed – car that would go on to capture a nation's hearts.



What better way to experience such a city than through the shapely windows of the Ambassador. Don't let the blur fool you though – the Isuzu motor provides power that can be described as 'just about adequate'.



It doesn't get more typical than driving on the crowded Howrah Bridge in a yellow Ambassador taxi, driving through a veritable sea of yellow cabs, wandering buses and berserk commuters. Of course, it's just another day in Kolkata.



In the warm amber glow of the night time halogen lights, the rotund Amby looks fantastic against a city that's got more beautiful buildings than its fair share.

This was India's first diesel car – no wonder we fell in love with it. As archaic as it looks and feels today, its deep round headlamps with chrome nacelles, gaping grille, the characteristic shapely bonnet, the bench seating, the diesel clatter all seemed revolutionary. For most of us, times with the Ambassador are memories that are etched inside our heads forever.



Looking back at it today, it was a people mover in more ways than one. These taxis, along with the Fiat/Premier taxis of Mumbai, serve as a gentle reminder to the good ol' days, when there was just one Doordarshan movie every week and Campa Cola was the only drink available. Besides being one of the oldest series in production today, it's a car that's almost as old as independent India, and the fact that it's still plying on the roads today is something to be treasured.