

www.autox.in

autoX

₹70 | VOLUME 6 | ISSUE 10 | AUGUST 2012



DRIVEN

**RENAULT
DUSTER**

SUMMER

of style



HYUNDAI ELANTRA



RR PHANTOM COUPE



AUDI R8 V10



MASERATI
GRAN TURISMO S

VISITED
**GOODWOOD
FESTIVAL OF
SPEED**



**EPIC ROAD TRIP:
MONTERO TO PANGONG LAKE**

autoXCHANGE

Finest Selection of Small, Luxury, Classic, Sports Cars and SUVs

66



52



34

OPINION FORMATION LAP	12	AN EXPRESSION OF ART ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH	38	GOODYEAR TRAVELOGUE	92
OPINION RING OF DREAMS	14	AUDI DRIVING SCHOOL AUDI R8 DRIVEN ON BIC	42	LIVING IN VW JETTA / PROJECT BMW / FIAT LINEA / HONDA BRIO	95
GREEN NEWS	16	DESTINY'S CHILD HYUNDAI ELANTRA	46	REVERSE & FAST FORWARD FORMULA ONE 2012	100
NEWS	20	GO ANYWHERE MITSUBISHI MONTERO DRIVEN TO LEH	52	MOTORSPORTS WRC / MOTOGP / NRC / HORSEPOWER CHALLENGE	104
BIKE NEWS	22	DECODING THE PHANTOM ROLLS ROYCE PHANTOM COUPE	60		
FROM THE BLOGOSPHERE	24	JACK OF ALL TRADES RENAULT DUSTER	66		
INTERVIEW ENRICO ATANASIO	28	GOODWOOD FoS	74		
TECH ARTICLE DUAL CLUTCH TRANSMISSION	30	GRAN STYLE MASERATI GRAN TURISMO S	84		
THE JUDGE OF VICTORY VICTORY JUDGE	34				

DON'T MISS!

Xit

APPLE MACBOOK PRO
RETINA DISPLAY

SONY 3D BLU-RAY
HOME THEATRE SYSTEM

SAMSUNG
GALAXY ACE DUOS

JOY AND
INFOTAINMENT



74

GO ANYWHERE



WE TAKE THE MONTERO FOR AN EPIC ROAD TRIP TO PANGONG TSO, AND DISCOVER THAT IT'S VIRTUALLY AN UNBREAKABLE VEHICLE – CAPABLE OF GOING LITERALLY ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD!

TEXT ISHAN RAGHAVA



JUST DO IT ANYWAY.



JUST DO IT ANYWAY.



There are certain destinations in every traveler's mind that are treated with respect – and when you get there, it's a privilege to have reached, or shall we say 'conquered.' It's an achievement that one's proud to share. But, to an avid traveler like me, the appeal is somewhat different – it's the journey that matters most. And if it involves risk – all the better!

And for years, Leh Ladakh has fascinated me. After all, it's got some of the finest natural beauty on earth. For ages, I've been hearing that it's an experience that I could never even imagine. But the excuses for not having made it there yet were familiar – time and money. Sure, I wanted to see it for myself, but who had two weeks to spare, a pocket full of money to spend, and, most of all, the inclination to actually put a plan together.

However, sometimes, things are destined to be – and so it seems was this trip. My colleagues were riding from Delhi to Leh on two motorcycles, and wondered if anyone would be foolhardy enough to drive up with them in a Mitsubishi Montero – as a support car, snack shop, relaxation chamber, storage room, and, most importantly, a mobile workshop! So, in a flash, it was done. So, after much running around and last-minute preparations, we finally hit the road one sunny morning on our way to Leh – starting what we knew would be an epic adventure.

Now, highways in India can be tricky to forecast at the best of times, but in the middle of the peak tourist season, one should expect some punishment. And we got our share of it on the first day itself, with a 2-hour-long jam in the heart of chaotic Manali town. But, after much struggling, we managed to reach our preferred haunt in Manali, Johnson's

Café – where, after a hearty dinner, we got some well-deserved sleep.

The challenge on the next day was to ensure that we got an early start to beat the tourist traffic heading up to the Rohtang Pass, in order to make it to our next stop for the night – Sarchu, a small tented camp area at an altitude of a mere 14,000 feet. But, of course, this is an *autoX* trip, and with our phenomenal luck – or lack thereof – I should have known that we would never be able to stick to the schedule. So, for a multitude of reasons, we left Manali at 2pm, a full 7 hours behind schedule. But hey, we're from Delhi, so how bad could traffic be? Worse than we could ever have imagined as it turns out. Due to a recent landslide, certain parts of the Pass were single-lane only. This, combined with massive weekend tourist traffic, meant that it took over 6 hours to cross Rhotang. So, at 8pm, I managed to cross Rohtang to drive through the walls



JUST DO IT ANYWAY.



JUST DO IT ANYWAY.

of snow in the pitch dark. I knew there was no way we could reach Sarchu that night, with literally no one around but the huge peaks on one side and the river Chandra-Bhaga on the other. It was just me, the Montero, and the dark of night – and it was far too great a risk to take.

So, guessing where my two-wheeled colleagues were (as they'd slipped though the jam with ease) I made a run for Jispa – the last halt before Sarchu, where I was more than a little glad to join them for a hot dinner before we called it a night. Little did we know what the elongated journey to Leh held in store for us the next day. The enormity of the task that lay ahead didn't dawn on us completely till the next morning. As a result of covering only 130 kilometers the previous day, we now had another

370 kilometers of roads to cover to reach Leh. And it was a formidable task, on roads where maintaining an average speed of even 30km/h is difficult.

Now, as one gets higher into the mountains, your definition of good roads begins to change completely. While we scoff at anything less than smooth 4-lane tarmac, out here in the wild just the fact that there was a gravel track that was obstruction free was a luxury. After about two-and-a-half hours of non-stop driving, and crossing the Baralacha La Pass situated at 16,500 feet (from where both the Chandra & Bhaga rivers originate) we reached Sarchu and took a breather – but only for a few minutes, as Leh was still over 260 kilometers away.

Since it was already past 1pm, and we had a lot of distance to cover, we

pushed on towards Pang. The roads, the altitude, lack of oxygen, combined with the lowering temperature, meant that the conditions were beginning to take a toll on us. So, to keep fatigue in check, we took a break for lunch at Pang – the last place we could do so anyway, and it gave us an opportunity to stretch our legs and feast on some good old Maggi (the dhabas do an excellent job of making some lovely mix veg Maggi with freshly cut tomatoes, onions and herbs) that provided much needed nutrition. With a minor checkup of the vehicle done, we began our final leg of the journey to Leh. The only issue was that it was already 4pm, and we were running against time!

However, all our worries were temporarily forgotten when we saw what

beauty nature had in store for us at the More Plains – a stretch so wide and vast, with nothing in sight for miles but the mountains surrounding it. The arid, brown landscape of the area against the strikingly clear, deep blue sky was truly unimaginable. But, with no time to spare, we pushed on towards Tanglang La – one of the highest motorable passes in the world, at an altitude of 17,582 feet. The landscape around us quickly changed from arid brown to a sprinkling of snow, and then – almost instantly – we were surrounded by snow banks. As a result, the temperature also dropped well into the low single-digits. And, just to put it in perspective, two days prior to that, I was enjoying the air-conditioning blasting me with chilled air with the air-con set at a comfortable 20 degrees – now ,

the same temperature was keeping the cabin cozy & warm!

As in most passes we had encountered thus far, the road to Tanglang La was nothing but a gravel track. Thankfully, there wasn't much traffic to impede our progress, and we quickly crossed the top and were on the descent to Leh, which lay another 110 kilometers ahead. Now, even though daylight was fading quickly, we began to develop some hope that our determination would pay dividends, and we would make it to Leh at a sane hour.

The roads about 35 kilometers before Leh suddenly transformed into beautiful, wide, winding bends with an excellent road surface, which meant that our spirits started lifting. We were within touching distance of our destination,

and we finally made it to Leh at 9:30pm. Luckily, despite having no reservations (that's what last-minute plans do for you), we managed to find a nice hotel and parked up for the night and grabbed some dinner. And it was only then that it dawned on us that we had covered the last 370 kilometers on nonexistent roads, in a driving time of under 9 hours, which was no mean feat. We reached our destination safe, sound, in good time, and had quite an adventure in doing so.

After a good day's rest, it was time to check out the one destination I'd been itching to visit – Pangong Tso. Most of us have heard much about this lake from friends & family, and it remains a wonder of nature. But, of course, the craving is to experience it for oneself – and see whether the hype is worth it.



JUST DO IT ANYWAY.



JUST DO IT ANYWAY.

FEATURE

But, again, like most things around Leh, this too required us to make another journey – albeit a small one compared to what we'd covered already. To reach Pangong, one has to traverse Chang La, located at 17,586 feet, and cover a distance of just over 150 kilometers.

So, the next day – for once – we did start early. But, of course, there was an issue – it was raining. Early signs on the road were mixed though, the skies were dark & brooding, and temperatures were low. And it only got colder as we climbed to Chang La, where we encountered fresh snowfall, and the temperature gauge displayed an ambient temperature of exactly 0 degrees!

After Chang La, we encountered some beautiful roads – with a winding stretch of blacktop stretching for kilometers with rolling grasslands on both sides where you can spot wild horses, yaks, and sheep grazing peacefully. But this is just a precursor to the main attraction. Pangong Tso is visible long before you're upon it, with its aquamarine blue water shimmering

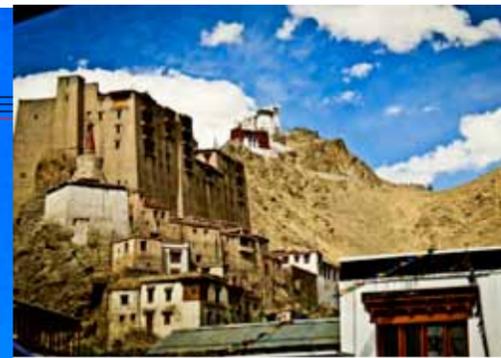
away in the distance – creating an alluring and inviting panorama.

To say that I could describe how serene, beautiful, and surreal the lake looks close-up – and the effect it had on me – would be a gross exaggeration of my writing skills, not to mention an insult to the beauty of the lake. So, let me put it this way – if you, in your lifetime, ever have a chance to visit Pangong, don't even think about letting it go. The indigo blue skies, the crystal clear water that changes from green to a deep blue, and the vast tranquility of the place is something that you must experience. And this beauty stretches for as far as one can see. Just to put it in context, the lake is 134 kilometers long, and is divided between Indian and Chinese territory.

After having soaked in the beauty, we proceeded towards Mann village – a quaint little hamlet about 12 kilometers ahead of Pangong, and decided to stay at the campsite for the night. It's here that we got a glimpse into what the winters must be

like for the locals. In the evening, the temperature was hovering around the 0 degree mark, and, despite being seated in front of a roaring bonfire, we could feel the wind chilling us down to the bone. How the locals survive a frozen winter here every year, with temperatures falling to as low as -40 degrees is something that I can't even begin to imagine.

It's here, sitting under the stars with an amazingly clear sky, that I began reflecting on what we'd been through on this journey – over 1,300 kilometers through all kinds of terrain and weather. And, while constantly running against the clock to reach the next destination, we'd achieved something fairly remarkable. Moreover, I think in all the stress, planning, anxious moments, dealing with problems, being stuck in jams, losing track of fellow travellers, I forgot to think of one of the biggest and most important pillars of strength during the journey – the Montero. Now, I'm not a person for hyperbole – but, considering that the terrain we



traversed, I have to say that I can't imagine it being quite this easy (for lack of a better adjective) in any other machine out there.

Tackling non-existent roads, fording through water crossings, climbing incredible inclines while carrying a full load of luggage, food, supplies, tools, and tons of other stuff, the Montero just soldiered on without a single fault or complaint. Plus, the manner and speed with which the terrain was dealt with simply wouldn't have been possible in even the most expensive SUV out there – the Montero took everything in its stride, and just soldiered on.

As for me, despite the toll the journey takes on you physically, I think I'll be back next year, and for many years after that. After all, there's a lot more left to explore in Leh Ladakh that I could not see on this visit. You could say that I've been bitten by the Leh bug. So, if you're on the road to Leh next year, and see a Montero bullying its way through – kindly make way, as I'll probably be running late again, and be in a hurry to make it to my next destination! **ax**



JUST DO IT ANYWAY.



JUST DO IT ANYWAY.