

HM Scripting Popular Twist to Ambassador Story

Oldest face of Indian automobiles to undergo a complete change—from structural design to aerodynamics and aesthetics

CHANCHAL PAL CHAUHAN NEW DELHI

The quintessential Ambassador is set to get its most radical makeover in the six decades of its history. The oldest face of Indian automobiles, which carries the legacy of the British Raj on its wheels, will undergo a complete change—from structural design to aerodynamics to aesthetics.

The car's manufacturer, Hindustan Motors, is hoping that a new-look Amby will be able to compete with today's modern cars and thus stop a slide into oblivion. The revamp began last December, and it will be at least a year before the results become evident. The Amby's familiar rounded rear squab and curvaceous sloping hood will give way to an aerodynamic bonnet with straight lines and a new boot with integrated tail lights. The all-new Ambassador will have modern wraparound headlamps, and a design somewhat similar to India's largest selling hatchback, Maruti's Swift.

The new Amby will also have new engine calibrations, an anti-lock brake system and aluminium alloy wheels. For comfort, there will be new leather seating with wood grain interiors. There will also be an integrated music system and instrument cluster catering to the needs of the new generation. Hindustan Motors says it will not tinker with the Amby's traditional credentials of dependability, spaciousness and comfort. Speaking to ET, Manoj Jha, managing director, Hindustan Motors, confirmed the changes. "There are a whole lot of plans for the Ambassador. We are working on several options and the changes are part of the plan. While some smaller changes will be introduced soon, larger macro variations will be incorporated in due course," says Jha.

According to vendors involved in the makeover, the car will be totally transformed with a new design with better aerodynamics coming from a new architecture. "It will not be the regular Amby we have been seeing for the last several decades. The changes will be radical with rich features and improved looks to take on all modern competing sedans," says a Delhi-based auto component maker.

The transformation of the Amby, which is based on the British marquee Morris Oxford, is a last-ditch effort by Hindustan Motors to turn this retro platform into a car of popular choice among the likes of Honda City, Maruti SX4, Volkswagen Vento and Ford Fiesta. But can the Amby which was India's mainstream car till the 80s when the Maruti 800 was launched, regain its long lost glory?

Popular with Politicians

Jagdish Khattar, a former chief of Maruti Suzuki, feels HM might have left it for too late. "It may be a little late for the car that still commands a niche value in the Indian customer's mind space. The changes are long overdue, and may still not be adequate to woo younger customers." Khattar, however, adds that if HM can combine the Amby's legacy with a more contemporary look, it could still make its presence felt. Over the years, the Amby has largely found fancy with the Indian political class, and it has been governments that have helped keep the 1948-established Uttarpara factory going till date.

But that support too has been declining of late. Sales of Ambassadors stood at 5,510 units in the first 10 months of the current fiscal year from 8,210 in fiscal year 2009-10. "Its difficult for the Amby to regain its lost glory. The car is largely taken by government, which is also gradually moving to other brands with better safety and performance parameters," said automotive expert Ranojoy Mukherji. The last significant makeover of the Amby took place in 2004 when HM launched a re-designed version. HM will be hoping that the revamp works.

CHANGE IN THE AIR

