

# Surprise! The Amby returns

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**NEW DELHI:** Call it a late renaissance or just a flash in the pan. The good-old Ambassador, the oldest surviving car on the Indian road, has suddenly hit a purple patch even as the industry as a whole is suffering from a slowdown.

Sales of the Ambassador more than tripled last month to over 500 units as loyal customers as varied as the cabbies in Kolkata to the babus across the country refused to drive or be driven around in any other vehicle.

"The taxi segment in Kolkata has displayed its preference for the golden yellow Ambassador," said Uttam Bose, MD and CEO, Hindustan Motors.

## YESTERDAY ONCE MORE?

### GLORIOUS PAST

■ The Ambassador is based on UK's Morris Oxford III model and has been in production since 1958, making it the longest-surviving car in India with an uninterrupted run of over 50 years

■ Though it has seen number of changes, its design remains by and large true to its Oxford roots

■ In 1979, the Ambassador Mark IV received a 1.5-litre diesel engine and became India's first diesel car

■ The car's strengths included its spaciousness and durability, making it a favourite with the taxi segment and politicians

■ In 2010, a diesel version of the Amby had to be discontinued in 13 cities as the company could not upgrade it to meet emission norms

■ Sales fell and in 2011-12, only 2,506 units were made, 60% less than in 2010-11

### AND THE FUTURE

■ Traditional customers of the Amby such as taxi drivers and bureaucrats have come back to the fold

■ In 2012-13, over 3,000 units are expected to be sold, 20% more than previous year

■ A BS IV-(emission) compliant diesel version of the car is slated to be launched by June 2013

■ A cheaper version of the car is also being developed for launch early next year.



### TORRID PRESENT

■ After the govt opened up the auto sector to foreign investors in the 90s, sales of the Amby declined as the market shifted towards smaller and more fuel-efficient cars