## Justin's journey of discovery

OFFBEAT Driving across the country Justin Rowlatt and Anita Rani discovered that it's an amazing blend of the conventional and the contemporary. PRINCE FREDERICK on their adventure for a forthcoming BBC programme 'India on Wheels'

oaked in sweat, Justin Rowlatt walks through the gate of Accord Metropolitan: an anti-climax for a small group of journalists, who expected the BBC presenter to make a striking appearance, switching gears in a 1996 Ambassador with a hand-shift. Instead, a Hindi-speaking driver, looking as drained and pallid as Justin, guides the old Amby noticeably weather-beaten and rusty - to the parking bay. While stepping out, he mutters something about a major mechanical snag.

After reaching Chennai - the last stop on a drive across the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent for a BBC programme "India On Wheels" the car had broken down under the weight of an unreasonable workload. How did Justin and his team make the mistake of choosing this old banger?

## Two considerations

There was no mistake, explains Justin. The choice of car was dictated by two considerations. The Amby is an iconic Indian machine, loved both by bureaucrats and common people. This 15-year-old model which lacks power steering and air-conditioning - was preferred to the latest Amby that has these modern comforts and more, because the older car is a symbol of life in most parts of India There are places in this presenter Anita Rani in a Bol- large family that subsists on a for granted in villages - is in time - deface the Taj sic comforts.



While Anita felt the pulse of vibrant modern metros, Justin surveyed life in tradition-bound cities and towns, and in sleepy

## TOP GEAR Justin Rowlatt PHOTO: R. SHIVAJI RAO

allel journey undertaken by spent a couple of days with a joint family system - taken ing air pollution that could - of time studying the mores of World Service this September).

country, where people lack ba- ero Stinger. While Anita felt daily earning of Rs.200 to losing its appeal. the pulse of vibrant modern Rs.300 through farming. Dur- During his rambling jour- dustrial units moved out of the an Interestingly, "India On metros, Justin surveyed life in ing such visits, he was drawn ney, Justin could not suppress area long ago, it's the vehicles adventure. Wheels" also explores modern tradition-bound cities and to studying the engrossing in the investigative journalist in that are aggravating the prob-India with its billionaires and towns, and in sleepy villages. terplay between tradition and him. In Agra, he noticed that lem now." While in Orissa, he two one-hour segments - is Bollywood stars through a par- Just outside Varanasi, Justin modernity. He noticed that the dense vehicular traffic is caus- spent a considerable amount expected to be telecast on BBC

Mahal, "Though polluting in-

the proto-Australoid Dongria Kondh tribe. These people, renowned for fruit farming, feel threatened by an aluminium plant that has come up right where they live.

Famous for "The Chinese Are Coming", a recent BBC programme that takes viewers to places as diverse as Angola and Hacienda Heights (California) to track the "unstoppable rise of the Chinese in global business", Justin does not pause to think before answering a question about how the Indian economy compares with the Chinese. While the Chinese economy has enjoyed uninterrupted growth for thirty years now, Justin feels the Indian economy has grown sporadically. He believes a huge section of the population - primarily those in agriculture - has not been empowered to participate in or contribute to the economy's expansion.

Justin, however, points out India can't be painted with just one brush. It is a land of mind-boggling diversity and contrasts. Aware of the need for multiple points of reference to understand India, he prepared for the assignment by reading acclaimed books, including "India: A Portrait" by Patrick French and "Maximum City: Bombay Lost And Found" by Suketu Mehta In spite of this, Justin found himself unprepared for the India that met him on the way to enterprising

(India On Wheels' - with