

**MODEL: AMBASSADOR CLASSIC
MAKER: HINDUSTHAN MOTORS**

STICKY SHIFT

Tarun Goswami

IT'S the only car in the world that has maintained its shape for more than five decades. And I'm not referring to the Landmaster, which was introduced in the early 1950s and can still be found in Kolkata, but the Ambassador that rolled out of Hindmotor in the late 1950s. This vehicle had enormous leg and elbow space and was ideal for big Indian families in that six adults could travel in the vehicle without any discomfort.

The Morris engine found place in both the Landmaster and early Ambassador and then came the mid-1960s when the Ambassador Mark II was introduced and some changes were made. The grille was modified and the shape of the sidelights was changed. At the time, only two vehicles were available in the market — the Ambassador and the Fiat — so people had to wait for more than six months to get a new car. Given that after sales service was pathetic and

doors would rattle after some time, it was a sellers' market and car owners would have no say. No attention was given to their needs.

The Ambassador received a major shock when the Maruti was introduced in the early 1980s. Sales plummeted as Maruti by then had become a symbol of the small family, not half because its 800-cc vehicle had a fuel-efficient engine.

The Ambassador Mark II was updated and

replaced by the Mark III and IV and in the 1990s the Ambassador Regent and Nova were introduced. Both were quite comfortable. The Nova had new suspension and the Regent was a good overhaul with a great airconditioning system. Then came the Ambassador 1800 ISZ, a sophisticated vehicle and very comfortable. I remember asking a senior police officer why the Central and state governments were still using Ambassadors for VIPs — West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee continues to use an

Ambassador

— and he said that Ambys were the only vehicles where getting in and out was never a problem. Also, because of the high ground clearance, the vehicle was a safe drive in rural areas, so from the safety point of view it was ideal.

But the real success is the Ambassador Classic. This 1500-cc diesel-driven vehicle is strong and the engine is noiseless. I had an Ambassador Classic and I must confess that diesel versions of Maruti's Zen and Esteem are nowhere as successful.

The Ambassador 1500 Classic now comes with five front gears, better suspension, great road grip and, thereby, a lot more comfort. It can tackle any surface and the interior is very roomy with loads of leg and elbow space. Highly sensitive power steering makes driving a pleasure and even on wet and muddy roads the vehicle behaves sensibly, without the slightest hint of skidding.

Ambassador's biggest problem is that people, particularly domestic hopefuls, discard its shape. But if one spares a rational thought, the Ambassador is still the ideal vehicle for Indian roads. Maintenance is well within the limits of

middle class and mechanics are easily available. It is also continues to remain the ideal family car.

Those intending to buy a new vehicle should take a test drive. Though the old shape has been retained, it's a new vehicle under the bonnet, with lots of comfort features. Powerful brakes ensure safety and passenger security, brighter headlamps make driving at night safer. And attractive colours promise to entice old Amby users.

Disillusioned with motoring reviews penned by so-called specialists who test vehicles in ideal conditions and go on about torque when all you want to know is if the vehicle is as good as advertised? Here's your chance. If you own a car or a two-wheeler, write in to us with your experience. Tell us if the vehicle performs as you were led to believe, whether you are satisfied with the service back-up provided by the manufacturer. But to ensure manufacturers don't sneak in puff pieces, or competitors don't misuse this column, do please send us a copy of your registration book along with your article. Send your submissions to the Assistant Editor, Features, The Statesman, Statesman House, 4, Chowringhee Square, Kolkata — 700 001.)

