

### **King of cars staging a grand comeback**

KOCHI: It has been in production since 1957. Despite its British origins, the Ambassador is considered the definitive Indian car.

Once the most popular car in the country, the Amby took a back seat when style mattered more than substance and a multitude of cars invaded the Indian roads and mindset.

But if the sale of Ambassador cars in the city is any indication, the king of cars is staging a grand comeback.

The latest model of the Ambassador, Grand 05, has been selling like hot cakes for four months now. "Since December last, the sale of Ambassador cars has hit an all-time high," says George Paul, sales manager of Marikar Motors. "Every month, we sell 180 to 200 Ambassador cars in Kerala." Armed with features that would give any new generation car stiff competition, the Amby has kick started a journey to regain its forgotten iconic status. Besides its leather seats, a commendable air conditioner system, power windows and steering, central locking system, disc brakes, radial tyres, moulded roof and tinted glasses, the Grand 05 boasts of 51 bhp and 74 bhp in the diesel and petrol versions respectively. "That's more powerful than any petrol car on the road now," says George.

While the full option Amby comes at Rs 5.30 lakh, the ordinary version is priced at Rs 3.97 lakh. It's mostly private owners who are lining up to own the car. Like Abdul Latheef, a businessman, who recently bought an Ambassador car, "It is sheer joy to own an Ambassador car for it brings with it a trove of memories. My family owned one for nearly two decades. Recently, when I bought an Ambassador, the reaction it elicited from people was funny." While Latheef who "spent every penny to buy it is one hundred percent happy driving the car," some of his friends think he ought to have gone for a stylish car. "I've driven nearly 12 different cars in a span of 10 years. From experience, let me tell you that none of those GenNext cars give the comfort of an Ambassador. It's best suited for Indian terrain." When private owners fell prey to the mad race to own stylish cars, the Amby found a place in taxi stands. Says taxi driver Shaji Njarackal, "I've been driving this Ambassador for eight years now. The maintenance cost of my car is less than that of popular taxi cars on road. Spare parts are cheaper and easy to get. The pick up is good. So is the level of comfort. One need not crouch and crawl inside the spacious interior of an Ambassador." The Ambassador has always been the car given to government officials from District Collectors to the Prime Minister of India.

The Amby is arguably the favourite car in power circuits. With its sales soaring, will it replace luxury cars? George doesn't rule out the possibility. "In our district, once the CNG terminal comes up in Vallarpadom, there are chances," he says.