

MAN AND MACHINE

PRINCE FREDERICK

Staying original

Be it his hair or car, Naresh Bangara steers clear of artificiality



Naresh Bangara's mobile number reflects his love for an old car. It has the number cluster '5815', which, when prefixed by 'MSX', is the number of his 1959 Ambassador. Naresh used to get '5815' for his vehicles, but stopped the practice as prices of special numbers became exorbitant. He does not attach any special significance to '5815'. It is special in his eyes because his 49-year-old Ambassador wears it. And as a family heirloom, this car is valuable.

Naresh has improved or, at the least, preserved whatever he inherited from his father Raja Bangara. He has turned a small Philips showroom his father established in 1945 into one of the largest in the country. And he takes care of the Ambassador as zealously as his father used to.

Raja Bangara bought this Amby on August 13, 1959 for Rs. 14,440. The guarantee certificate, which the Bangaras have kept with them all these years, provides most of these details. Even the car's sale slip was with Naresh for a long time, but got lost when his family moved house. A 1959 Amby promotional poster that came with the purchase announces that "Ambassadors are getting overhead valve engines for the first time".

Like its owners, the car holds on to old things. The Smith's milometer, fuel, oil and battery gauges have never been replaced or modified. The straight-four petrol engine and SU Carburettor are in there since 1959. That can actually be said about most other parts too. When any part gets worn out, Naresh is either already prepared for the situation or tries to get the right replacement. Knowing taillights and parking lights can get damaged easily, he had stocked 12 pairs of each. Now, four pairs of each are in the bag. But replacing the parts of this Mark I Amby has seldom been so easy. For example, he had to bend over backwards to get a Bendix self-starter and speedometer cables. "Most dealers don't have a clue. They always bring Mark IV spare parts. I don't give up until I get what is meant for my Amby. Even something better won't do."

This is not surprising considering that he has not done anything to his hair. "My grey hair makes me look older than I am. Some think I am fifty, while I'm just on the wrong side of forty. But, no thank you. Hair dyes are not for me. I would rather stay original."