

# An Ambassador in its own right

## AMBASSADOR

**Born:** 1957

**History:** Owned by the C K Birla-managed Hindustan Motors Ltd. The first Ambassador car, modelled after the Morris Minor, rolled off the assembly line as the first truly Indian car

**Status:** This sturdy behemoth continues to thrive in smaller towns and is also popular with the minority wishing to make a "retro" statement in the cities

**Brand story:** The car that won't die has also become a brand that won't die.

Hindustan Motors, the manufacturer of one of the world's oldest cars, sells about 13,000 cars each year, mostly in the eastern and southern parts of India. Most spend their lives as taxis, about a quarter ferry government employees and the remaining 15% are for the retro-chic and nostalgic customers.

Earlier this year, fashion designer Manish Arora—himself the owner of a black "Amby"—hosted a special on Discovery Travel and Living, where he took the car, gutted, and then rebuilt it. With Pudukcherry leather upholstery and cloth from New Delhi's Karol

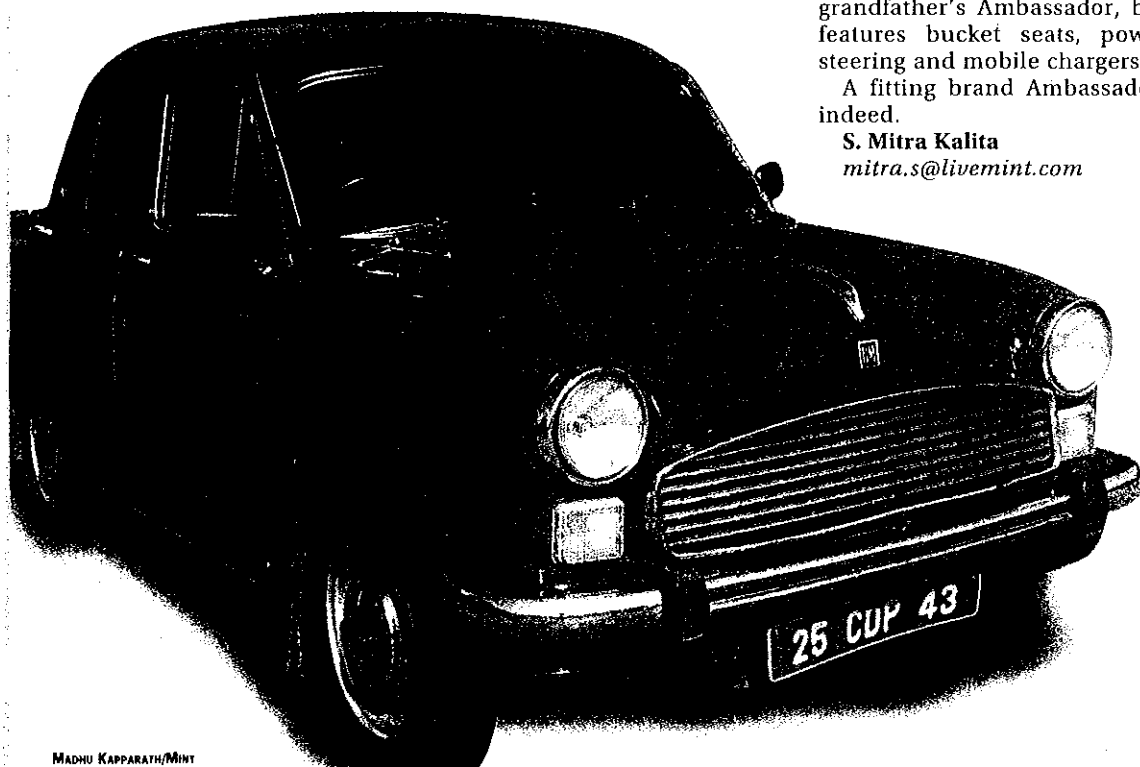
Bagh and old Delhi's Chandni Chowk, he turned it into a fashionable symbol of eclectic India.

The Ambassador's dependability, spaciousness and comfort factor made it the most preferred car for generations of Indians till sleek, powerful beauties took over Indian roads. And its brand ambassadors ranged from the Prime Minister's motorcade to the *kali-peelis* (black and yellow cabs) that stood, and still do, at every taxi stand.

Last year, Hindustan Motors rolled out a special model to celebrate its 50th anniversary. The bulging headlights, rounded body and a big bonnet were there, but there were also many new features—reflecting changing consumer preferences and a refusal to die. This is not your grandfather's Ambassador, but features bucket seats, power steering and mobile chargers.

A fitting brand Ambassador, indeed.

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