

Reflections

by BOB RUPANI



The allure of a sports car lies as much in how it sounds
as in the way it looks

T **THIS IS THE FIFTH ISSUE OF EVO INDIA** and I am pleased to say the response to it has been very positive. The highlights of course have been the beautiful photography and features and tests of 'sports cars'. The appeal of sports cars is universal. Everyone gets drawn to them and loves them. Park a Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati, Porsche, Aston Martin, Jaguar F-Type, etc anywhere, and a crowd is sure to collect, with people from all strata of society. Rolls-Royces, Range Rovers, Hummers, the BMW 7 Series, Mercedes-Benz S-Class, Audi A8 etc do not have this sort of affect. Sure they draw attention but do not cast the kind of euphoric spell that sports cars do.

So what is it that makes sports cars special? To an owner it could be brand, prestige and price. Or more likely, looks and styling, power and speed and handling and performance. For bystanders and onlookers it's usually the sexy shape and attractive styling. But what I really look for in a 'sports car' is 'sound'. I get completely turned on by the sound of a powerful V8 firing up. Coughing and spluttering on a cold morning. And as warmth and heat spreads through the engine components and oil, you tap the accelerator pedal and are rewarded with the rich sound of the engine clearing its throat. As the gauge on the dash starts to rise towards the ideal engine running temperature, you select first and let out the clutch. The gas pedal is pushed down and the engine starts singing its song. Magical mechanical melodies created by valves letting fuel into the combustion chamber, the exhaust valves pushing gases into the exhaust system and the muffler both amplifying and absorbing sound. As you move through the gears, the engine breathes in petrol and exhales gases all the while making mesmerising music. You bury the pedal into the carpet, the revs rise and the 'song of the engine' starts to hit its 'high notes'. Seated behind the steering wheel, you 'become the conductor' of this 8-cylinder, 32-valve, 6.3-litre, dual overhead cam and naturally aspirated orchestra. An orchestra that will make even 'aapro Zubin' envious. *Su bolech bawa!*

A sports car engine's 'sound of music' is very important for its sex appeal. Most sports car makers are aware of this and have teams of engineers tuning the engine's sound and acoustics. This is a very specialised task and manufacturers like Ferrari, Lamborghini, AMG etc have highly qualified and skilled engineers exclusively dedicated to this task. Of course the stringent pollution and noise norms and legislations are making cars quieter due to the extra technology in the exhaust system to reduce CO2 emissions. Despite

this, many sports cars still sound sexy and awesome and I think **evo** India should run a contest to select the 'sexiest sounding car'. Maybe even a 'song of car' award. What say Sirish?

Right from prehistoric times, song and dance has been an integral part of the growth and evolution of mankind. If the beat is good, everyone from an Australian aborigine to the highly endangered Jarawas who live in the Andaman and Nicobar islands respond to it. Similarly an engine that has the right 'sound of music' will always be more special than those that don't. In fact in diesel engines you have more noise coming from the engine itself, than sound from the tailpipe. Ever wondered why most sports cars are powered by petrol engines despite the fact that diesel powered Audis have been winning events like the 24 Hours of Le Mans? It's the sound of course. Petrol engines can sing, while diesel engines can only be made more silent.

These days many petrolheads even have the sound of racing engines as their cellphone ringtones. You can download the

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recording of a Porsche on full song at the Nurburgring. Or a Ferrari F1 car racing through the street circuit of Monaco. But sadly this year onwards, the engines in Formula 1 cars have been downsized and legions of enthusiasts like me are mourning the fact that we will not be able to enjoy the sound of the naturally aspirated V8s that have been replaced by 1.6-litre V6 turbocharged engines.

The sound of an engine affects even animals. While writing a book for the Maharana of Udaipur on his 20 HP Rolls-Royce (chassis number GLK 21), which won a prize at the 2012 Pebble Beach Concours D'elegance event, I met some old-timers who told me that in the 1930s, this Rolls-Royce was used for ceremonial processions, surrounded by elephants and horses in colourful attire. The Rolls-Royce was the preferred choice for such processions, as the animals behaved better because it had a smoother sounding engine than most cars of those times! ❧

Bob Rupani is a pioneering Indian automobile journalist and is presently the executive editor of Auto India