

# Reflections

by BOB RUPANI



A classic car event in Germany highlights the disparity, and the downside of classic and vintage car shows in India

**I** WAS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN the Crème 21 Youngtimer Classic Car Rallye held in Germany from September 17 to 22. The rules were simple. Vehicles manufactured between 1970 and 1990 could participate. My co-driver was Tim Westermann, a German auto journalist and experienced racing driver. Ours was the only Indo-German team in the event and Volkswagen Classic Museum loaned us a rare 1973 VW K 70. We drove over a 1000km in five days and had a splendid time.

The event was also an eye-opener in many ways. The pre-event scrutiny was so focused on safety that even the brake fluid was removed and its boiling point checked in each and every machine in the scrutiny bay. This is not done even at the highest level of competitive motorsport in India.

Almost all the 200 cars that took part in this event were in immaculate shape and had no problem over the 1000km route. In comparison, most classic cars owned by our collectors cannot do even 100km without breaking down. It was also very refreshing to see the cars being cleaned, serviced, and worked on by the owners themselves. Most Indian collectors have a team do such things.

Another remarkable thing was that the organisers were extremely friendly. They even partied with the participants in the evenings, which is rare in India. It was even more pleasing that the organisers always referred to the event as 'their event'. Not even the top boss said it was 'his event'. They all went about doing their jobs without claiming any credit or showering any favours. In India it's completely the opposite. In Mumbai, Delhi, or Bangalore, you will have one person say this is 'my event'. The events are very haphazardly run, with prizes often awarded to those close to the main organiser. In fact I know of one organiser, whose family always wins prizes at 'his event'.

Germany has about 70 to 75 vintage and classic car events every year. One person I spoke to had been to England for an event where 2000 cars took part! Compare this with India. We have less than 10 events a year, despite the fact that we have over 10,000 vintage and classic cars in India. We have everything, from rare, custom-built Rolls-Royces to Morris Minors. Beautiful Bentleys and lovable Volkswagen Beetles, Plymouths to Fords and Cadillacs to Mercedes-Benzes.

We have annual events in Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Chennai, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Lucknow. We now also have the Cartier Concourse de Elegance that is held once in two years, but entry is only by invitation. Participants turn up enthusiastically and so do several



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spectators. But the story is more or less the same each year. Apart from a few exceptions, the cars are the same as seen the year before. The start and finish venue is usually the same and the rally route is also similar. You typically start on a Sunday morning and finish by lunch the same day. The prize distribution also happens the same day and while trophies are given out, cash prizes, if any, are extremely rare.

Why can't we have an annual national vintage and classic car championship, let's say of 12 rounds? The last round can be the final championship round where winners from the local rounds compete with each other. You could have 10 to 12 winners across various classes from Mumbai, at the final round. The winners from classic car events in other cities would take part in the final round that could showcase the best vintage and classic cars. Such a championship would attract corporate sponsorship and local support and raise the standard of local events as well as improve the restoration and upkeep of the cars. The owners would get publicity and acclaim and there could also be substantial prize money. But I don't see any of this happening, because of the 'my event' situation and the egos and politics involved. ❌

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