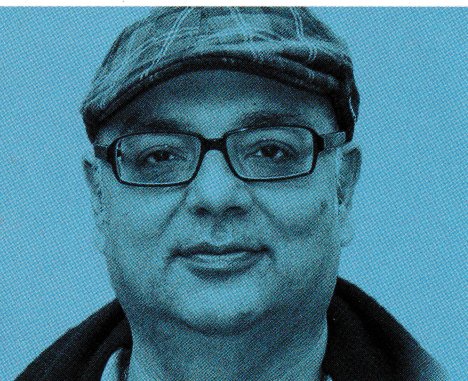


Reflections

by BOB RUPANI



Some very wild and wonderful things are liable to come to pass when you are in a car...

SINCE OFF-BEAT IS THE FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE, let me share some of my automobile encounters of the wild kind. In the late 80s, I was driving from Bombay to Kanha Tiger Reserve in my Maruti Gypsy. At around 3:00 am, I saw a huge owl sitting on a culvert and slowed down to get a better look. The owl in turn tried to fly away but the Gypsy was upon him so quickly that he got sucked into it (we were driving with the windows rolled down). It hit me on my shoulder and then fell in the lap of my friend sitting besides me. Fortunately he had a shawl wrapped around him and the owl got entangled in it and we were able to throw it out without any serious harm being done either to us or the owl.

On another occasion, I was going from Bhandardara to Nashik late in the night. My heavily modified Maruti 800 was fitted with Hella 500 auxiliary driving lights and these illuminated a leopard. The leopard darted to the right and I followed. He was stunned by the bright lights and froze and we had a really nice sighting of this evasive spotted cat.

Another time I was driving to Ranthambore Tiger Reserve from the Shivpuri Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh. Some 20km before Ranthambore, a peacock suddenly ran across the road and disappeared in a jiffy. My wildlife sensors were instantly activated and I stopped my Maruti Gypsy and started looking around. Just below the little bridge we had halted on was a stream, and a tiger was peacefully drinking water at its edge. After satiating his thirst he casually walked up and crossed the tarmac road right in front of us. After this amazing sighting we proceeded to Castle Jhoomar Baori. Next morning I found lots of agitated birds squawking and making shrill calls around my Gypsy. A little investigation revealed a big python resting under the Gypsy. I have even seen a 10-to-12 foot cobra chasing a frog on the Murud Janjira road. Once on the Jodhpur to Jaisalmer highway, I came across a mongoose that had just killed a big snake. It was holding it in its mouth and blood was dripping from the punctures the mongoose had inflicted on the snake.

Some years back, on a 3-week journey in a Volkswagen Passat, I had a big pack of dogs charging at the car. You often find dogs in villages chasing cars, but they usually do this after you pass them. In this case the dogs noticed us coming from far and came charging. Why? I dropped the pace and kept looking for the dogs. Finally the mystery of the dogs was solved. When I accelerated with the engine rolling over at around 2000rpm, the turbocharger would wake up and let out a sharp whistle. It was the whistling of the turbo that was attracting the dogs. And I realised this when I saw a dog lying down peacefully in the distance, wake up to the whistling and then charge towards the source of the sound, in this case the Passat.

One of my craziest experiences was in Bombay, driving my Premier Padmini.



It was the **whistling of the turbo** that was making the **pack of dogs** charge at our car

I stopped at a traffic light and heard a cat meowing. I looked around but could not spot it. This happened at the next traffic light too and again at the following one. This kept happening until I got really upset and pulled over. The moment I stopped I heard the cat meow again. I walked all around the car but could not see it. It meowed again. Where the hell was this invisible cat? I opened the bonnet - and there it was - a kitten sitting in the little cavity behind the battery. I gently pulled it out and released it where my car had been parked the night before.

Another freaky experience I had was with a used Toyota Corolla in the 90s. This car had been locked up in a warehouse for over three years, until I purchased it. I got its mechanical problems fixed and also had it serviced. Then while driving it one day, a terrible stench filled the car. It was so unbearable that I switched off the A/C and rolled down the windows to let in fresh air. Soon after I had the shock of my life. Thousands of black ants, small worms, and all sorts of insects began to emerge from behind and under the dashboard. It was so bad that I was forced to abandon the Corolla and have it towed to the workshop. The entire car was full of creepy crawlies and it had to be fumigated. On removing the dash we discovered that between it and the firewall were nests of millions of insects! The stench was a result of the hatching of their eggs. ✕

Bob Rupani is a pioneering Indian automobile journalist and has edited magazines like Car & Bike International, Auto Motor and Sport (India), BBC Top Gear (India) and Auto India

@evoindiamag