

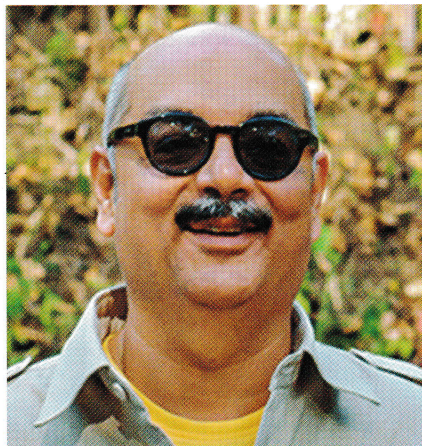
Gaurav Gill recently won the Malaysian Rally and became the 2016 FIA Asia Pacific Rally Champion with the Indian round to spare. This was

Gaurav's second APRC crown following his success in 2013. So far he has won all the five APRC rounds held this year, and I am sure he will be keen to sign off the season with another victory at the last round in Chikkamagaluru, where he will be driving in front of his home crowd in the first week of December.

The 34-year old Gill, driving the MRF Skoda Fabia R5, has completely dominated the APRC this year and has not just shown lot of skill but also maturity behind the wheel. Gaurav Gill says, "Like wine, rally drivers get better with age. Today, I am much quicker than I was in 2013, but there is more finesse to my driving". He has clearly achieved more on the international rally turf than any other Indian. In fact he is India's best rally driver ever, who is not just capable of competing in international events, but also winning them. I have been fortunate to sit with him in a car and I have also seen lots of his rally action videos and I think Gaurav is a highly gifted driver who has the talent to drive in the World Rally Championship. In fact, he has been consistently faster than other APRC drivers, including the WRC driver Jari Ketoma. Sadly, neither Hyundai nor Volkswagen has given Gaurav Gill an opportunity to drive for their respective WRC teams. Both Hyundai and Volkswagen have manufacturing facilities in India with Hyundai being India's second largest car maker, but sadly, despite this, they have not given Gaurav a drive. The least they could have done is called him for a test and given him a chance to prove his pace. I am sure if he gets such an opportunity he will show he has the skills to beat the best in the world.

What I fail to understand is why Hyundai have not given Gaurav Gill a chance? I know he has talked to the management in India, but nothing has materialised. The Hyundai WRC Team's main driver is Thierry Neuville, a Belgian. Hyundai sells a little over 20,000 cars in Belgium annually, while their monthly sales in India are around 50,000 cars! Hyundai is also the largest exporter of cars from India. Given all this, it makes a lot of sense for them to have an Indian driver in their team. Unfortunately this has not happened.

The response of the Indian media to Gaurav Gill's second APRC Champion title has also been disappointing. What should



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Gaurav Gill, the current APRC Champion, deserves a drive in the World Rally Championship

have been front page news in all leading newspapers got just a paragraph or two in the sports page of some dailies. Even we auto magazines have not given this deserving 'Champ' his real due. As for the TV channels, I don't think I saw anything on them about Gaurav's win. I accept that motorsport is still seen as a niche sport in India with a limited following. But winning an international championship is still a creditworthy achievement that needs to be lauded by many more Indians.

On a completely different note, I have observed a very unhealthy trend, which is only growing- that of children standing on car seats and sticking their heads out of the sunroofs of moving cars. This is a completely stupid self-created safety hazard. If the driver brakes suddenly, or goes over a bad bump, or God forbid hits another vehicle or gets hit, the resulting impact can easily break the neck of the child or snap the spinal cord, or cause some other serious injury. Recently I was on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway and was appalled to see three kids out on the roof of a German luxury car. They were sitting on the roof with their feet dangling inside the car through the open sunroof. A lady was sitting besides the driver and I presume they

were the parents of these kids. The car was being driven rashly at over 100kmph and the kids could have fallen or flown off the roof with the slightest of impacts! It's not the fault of the children, who are too young to know better. It's the parents who are to blame for allowing such brainless acts.

Sunroofs are offered only in premium and expensive vehicles. I would imagine the buyers of such vehicles have some amount of education and awareness. But the real truth is many are complete idiots. You have to be if you allow your kids to stick their heads out of sunroofs, or even worse sit on the roof. As usual, our authorities are completely blind to this problem, and nobody is stopping this from happening. Given this, I wish manufacturers would take note and stop offering sunroofs on their vehicles. Quite honestly sunroofs are not meant for a hot and dusty country like India. In Europe, they yearn for the sun and enjoy driving with the sunroof open on a sunny day. In India, it's the opposite. Because of the sun, most sunroofs let in heat, even when they are closed. So the air conditioning struggles to keep the passenger compartment cool in the summer. Given all this, we really are better off without sunroofs. [☐](#)