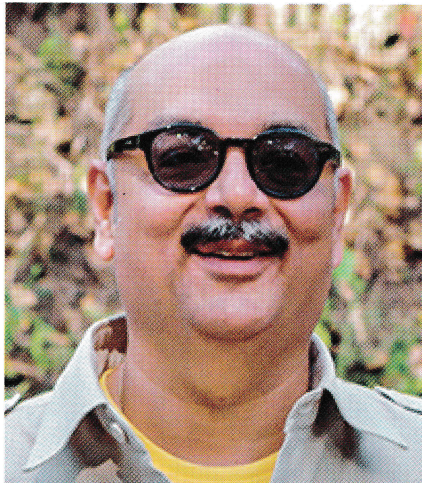


As we all know, the recent floods in Chennai have resulted in massive devastation. And amongst the victims of nature's fury are thousands of cars and two-wheelers. Many automobile manufacturers have come forward with special camps, schemes etc to repair the flood damaged vehicles. This is very good. But the costs will be substantial and even if the owners do somehow manage to get their insurance companies to cover part of the cost, they will still have to dish out a considerable amount.

Let me share my experience of the severe floods that happened in Mumbai on July 26, 2005. The skies simply opened up and in some 24 hours, the rainfall recorded was 944mm (37.17 inches). My wife was driving her Maruti Alto in the Bandra area that afternoon. She called me to say she was stuck in a crazy traffic jam due to the flooding. About half an hour later, she called again to say that the water was entering the car. I told her to immediately abandon the car and move to higher ground. Fortunately, an elderly Sikh gentleman saw her and offered my wife shelter in his house which was in a neighbouring building. This hospitable and caring family offered shelter to not just my wife, but also some 20 other strangers. They were provided with food, dry clothes and a space to rest in. My wife spent the night there and returned home after the water level reduced the next day. At home she gave me the car's location and keys. When I found the Alto and opened the door, I discovered that the water level had reached up till the steering wheel. I started draining the water out along with my driver and soon some local mechanics arrived and offered to start the car. I refused because I knew they would do a lot more harm than good, if they attempted to start the car in that state. Instead, I got my wife's Alto towed to a friend's service station.

I then went and bought six large cans of WD-40. Then I had the all the seats and the carpet removed and put out into the sun to dry. The battery was removed and taken to an authorised battery specialist service centre for complete servicing. The car was also put up on the service ramp and cleaned properly. Then the Alto's exteriors and interiors were painstakingly



Bob Rupani

WD-40 was sprayed. Then I had the spark plugs removed and cleaned. The carpets and seats were cleaned and all exposed metal parts sprayed with WD-40. After the carpet and seats were fitted back, it was finally time to connect the freshly serviced battery. Then the ignition key (covered in WD-40) was inserted and engine cranked. The Alto did not start at first attempt. Once more the key was turned. The engine coughed but did not start. A lump started to build in my throat. Had all my years of experience and knowledge of automobiles failed me? Another attempt, but nothing again. Once more and then the engine coughed and spluttered to life. Water started rushing out of the exhaust pipe. I revved the engine it was spluttering and misfiring. I kept my foot on the throttle. Gradually as the engine started to warm up, the engine

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Repairs of flood affected vehicles are not always expensive. One can also try a practical approach to fix them

blow dried with compressed air. The next day, the wheels were removed and I had the underfloor methodically blow dried again. Then the engine oil and filter were changed. Next, I had the fuel tank drained and it also was blow dried. The radiator was emptied and the coolant replaced. After this, the fuel filter and gearbox oil were changed. Then it was time to spray the oil penetrating and water-displacing spray – WD-40, which has been rated by many experts as one of the best tools ever. I sprayed it everywhere. On the electricals and fuse box; all exposed screws, nuts and bolts and every joint, clip, connector. The complete engine compartment was covered with WD-40. I even had the dashboard removed and sprayed WD-40 behind all the instruments and controls. The rear brake hubs were removed and WD-40 sprayed on all the brake components. The front disc brakes were sprayed too. Every inch of the Alto was covered in WD-40. For a day I just let it stay like that giving time for the magical water displacing spray to penetrate everywhere. The next day, more

note improved. After about 10 minutes, it started sounding like its normal self. Hugely encouraged by this, I took it for a spin. Initially everything was squealing. The brakes also lacked bite. When I pushed down on the accelerator there was a squeal. If I turned the steering there was a squeal. But gradually, the squealing reduced. After parking the Alto inside my building, I kept the engine running the entire night. Next day I took it to the service station and had the engine oil and filter changed again.

After this, the Maruti Alto never missed a beat. For the next seven or so years that it was with us, it ran flawlessly. Yes, the wheel bearings did start making noise a few months after the floods and I had them replaced. But that was it. I had spent around ₹7,500 to fix my flood affected Alto. Most others spent well over 20 times this amount. My practical approach had worked. If I had let those local mechanics try starting the Alto, it would most likely have resulted in a seized engine and several other problems. All-expensive-to-repair ones. **OD**