

In April, I had written about the 'big business of auto awards'. I was expecting a lot of flak from the automobile industry and colleagues for saying the things I did.

After the passage of a couple of months, I must say that the consequences have been surprisingly pleasant. I have received many mails and responses from people in the industry and not one has anything uncomplimentary to say.

One senior Indian executive, who has been in the industry for over 20 years wrote, and I quote, "Your article is indeed very timely and much needed. What you say is 100 per cent correct. I have had some of my seniors ask me, 'How well do you know these auto journos if you can't even ensure an award for us? They can surely at least create a category for us'. Speaking of categories, I was at one awards function recently and was shocked that they felicitated an automaker for 'best interiors'. What will we have next - best side cladding, best horn note or best headlamp illumination! I have heard heads of leading automakers say, 'Why should I go to that award function if I am not getting an award? To clap for others? No way'. That is the level of camaraderie within the industry. Or the lack of it I should say."

Another senior executive mailed me and said, "Read your column with considerable amusement. We've known each other for over a decade now - a decade in which I've been the 'insider' in several brands of different hues. I have seen PR heads beg bosses for their promotions saying - 'How can you deny me a promotion after I got you such and such award?'. I sincerely love cars like you do. Which is why I believe - may the best car win."

An expatriate in a top position in a luxury car company in India wrote, "Thanks a lot for pointing this out. Very true remarks. It's good to point out ethical things at times." Another person from the industry said, "Very well put. Good to see someone speak up." There were many other responses like - "Refreshing read. I think you know my thoughts on awards and also the whole 'getting into bed' with manufacturers business", "Wonderful, so forthright",



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on this for the moment, but what needs to be understood is that age alone cannot be the criteria for deciding if a vehicle is a polluting one. A well-maintained and cared for machine can be less polluting than many uncared for newer ones. Another undeniable fact is that there are various other significant factors which are causing pollution. One of the biggest ones is adulteration of fuel. The subsidy for diesel and petrol by the government has now ended, but kerosene continues to be subsidised and costs about ₹15 a litre in Delhi. Petrol is about ₹59 and diesel about ₹47. With such a big gap in prices, kerosene is mixed with both petrol and diesel and sold for huge profits. The result - even cars with advanced engines become polluters as they burn unclean fuel. In time the engines also suffer damage and pollute even more.

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"Nice one" and several more echoing the same sentiments.

Obviously my fears were completely unfounded and I am not the only one who believes that auto awards have gotten way too commercialised. What I wrote was what I had observed and experienced as an auto journalist. But the feedback provides insights into how the auto industry also looks at awards. I never knew or imagined that people got promotions and raises if they helped their company win an auto award. I also had no idea that the performance of executives is judged by how well they know auto journalists and how much influence they can exercise over them to get awards. Clearly this nexus of 'you scratch my back and I scratch yours' is not likely to end anytime soon.

THE DIESEL VEHICLE BAN

The National Green Tribunal has banned 15-year old petrol and 10-year old diesel vehicles from plying in the Delhi-NCR region. This rule also applies to vehicles entering into the region from other states. The government has managed to get a stay

We are also a nation that burns its garbage in the open. The incineration of plastics and all sorts of toxic material is unregulated too and generates a huge amount of harmful pollutants. Tyres are also burnt as fuel in brick kilns to save costs. Another aspect everyone tends to overlook is the power cuts, which happen frequently, especially in summer. Thanks to this, almost all large shops and well-off families have diesel generators, as do most hotels. Generators are also used a lot for outdoor weddings and events. While there are norms and checks for vehicle emissions - there are none for generators. The pollutants that are emitted from the exhaust of a generator are a whole lot more than what comes out from the tailpipe of a car.

In 2017, the new BS5 norms are expected and the BS6 norms in 2024. Both are welcome, but nothing will change until we tackle things like fuel adulteration and introduce better quality petrol and diesel. Of course you also have to stop burning of non segregated garbage and reduce the emissions from generators. **OD**