

# INTERNAL COMBUSTION

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**VEHICLES DON'T CAUSE ACCIDENTS, PEOPLE DO. AND IN INDIA IT'S MAINLY BECAUSE OF THEIR BAD ATTITUDE**

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**F**or most of my life, I have started the day reading the morning papers, but I no longer enjoy it. In fact I think it's a really bad way to begin the day, because our newspapers are full of depressing reports of rapes, murders, terrorist attacks, frauds, government indifference and incompetence, man-made and natural disasters and what have you.

All such news upsets me, but the reports that really get my goat are about accidents and hundreds of road fatalities. Not a day goes by without a truck or bus going out of control and falling into a gorge resulting in senseless casualties. Or plunging off a bridge into a river or vehicles 'turning turtle', as the newspapers

put it. Numerous people dying every day in road accidents, is now more common than a cold. In fact it's all so commonplace that I think most people, other than the ones directly afflicted, don't even notice it anymore. It's almost like accepting, "But this is bound to happen". Or like many of us Indian's tend to believe; it's in our 'karma' or destiny, or simply an act of God.

I am sorry, but it is none of that. The fact is we Indians are amongst the worst drivers and road users in the world. And maybe because we are just so many, we care a hoot for safety. It's almost like having a 'death wish' on the roads in India. No, I certainly don't believe accidents take place because of fate or because the almighty wants it. It's we who are the cause of accidents. All the studies and records show that well over 80 per cent of the accidents in India, happen because of errors of the driver or rider! But why is it that we India's make so many fatal mistakes? Some of the reasons surely are poor driver training and easy availability of licenses, ineffective enforcement of traffic rules, drunken driving, badly maintained vehicles, shoddily built roads and what not.

But the biggest reason in my opinion is attitude. An attitude that it won't happen to you. A mistaken notion that you are the 'king of the road, and can do as you please. It's this mentality that is responsible for majority of our accidents. Many of our truck drivers are in the habit of painting comical wisecracks on their vehicles. I can never forget the chap in the hills up North who had written, - "Steering in my hand, and prayer on my lips". This guy had it really nailed. There cannot be a better way to express his attitude.

Interestingly, God and religion are often evoked on our roads. In the old days every ghat or hill road had a temple and some still survive on undivided carriageways. Drivers normally slow down outside such shrines and make offerings of money, flowers, etc, and seek the blessing of the Lord for a safe journey. This faith that

the Lord will watch over them, often leads them to push their luck which normally ends up in disaster. Now who is responsible, man or God? I will say once again, its attitude. An attitude that makes us do such stupid things that I have now begun to believe our roads are populated with lunatics.

If you are the observant and thinking sort, just step onto any street or Indian highway and watch the actions of road users. It's sure to drive you nuts. For some reason, everyone seems to be in a tearing hurry. Even the unemployed, who have nowhere to go. I was once driving on a deserted highway and doing over 100 kmph. Suddenly a chap who had been standing under a tree stepped out and crossed the road right in front of me. I had to literally stand on the brakes, downshift at the same time and dangerously change direction to avoid hitting him. While this cool dude walked across as if he was strolling in a park without even looking at my car. And then he casually went and stood under a tree on the other side. I was shaking with fear and anger and decided to go fire this guy. But curiosity got the better of me and I calmly asked him why he had done what he had. He nonchalantly said, "I live just around here, this is my area, and I cross the road as and when I please". Trying hard to control my temper, I told him he could have been run over, if I had not taken such a drastic evasive action. And you know what he said to me, "Please take care, you should not be driving so fast". The idiot had not even realized it was not me, but he who was at fault.

Sadly, he is not the only one. Almost everyone on our roads thinks they are invincible and not to blame. It's always the other's fault. If a maniac pulls out to overtake in the face of oncoming traffic, he expects them to slow down or move away, even if it means they have to come to a complete halt. And if they don't and there is a crash, then well, they are to blame. You did no wrong, even if you bloody well died while doing it. Oh Darling, Yeh Hai India.. 