

INTERNAL COMBUSTION

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PRESENTLY I AM ON A 'CONQUER CANCER MISSION'. NEXT IT'S GOT BE 'MISSION ROAD SAFETY'

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In the journey of my life, I have been fortunate to drive down some truly awesome roads, in some really magnificent machines. I have always believed "Cars become great, only if they partner with you on glorious drives and leave you with memories you can cherish forever". On all my numerable road trips and expeditions, I have always tried to take routes where the "Pleasures of the journey, are equal to the delights of the destination". Along the way I have seen and learnt a lot, and also come across plenty of signboards –some informative and useful, others smart and funny, and even several that made no sense. But recently I encountered a signboard that

said, "You have cancer". When you are living your dream and doing all you enjoy, the last thing you expect, or are prepared for, is to have your doctor say, "You have cancer". So I guess it's time to fire up the engine and embark on a 'Conquer cancer mission'.

Being an avid automobile enthusiast with a bit of understanding of the way they work, I have spent most of my adult life evaluating and reviewing cars. It's something I know I do fairly well, and I believe there are enough of you out there, who also possibly agree. In my earlier years, I have also modified and customised a lot of vehicles and built a fair number for racing and rallying too. So I know how to prepare a car for competition or long distance overland expeditions, and also have the know-how to rebuild or restore a car. But I have almost no medical knowledge and don't have a clue about how my cancer can be cured and health, restored. So obviously I am going to leave it to my team of talented doctors, and hope that just like I have been lucky to drive some first rate cars, my doctors will do a top-class job on this challenging journey, and with a bit of luck, cure me.

Obviously I have to be a good patient and help them by following instructions in the best manner I can. But I do feel somewhat helpless, and honestly am frightened of what lies ahead. Ask me to tackle the most difficult off-road trail or throw a car into a corner as fast as I can, and I do it without batting an eyelid. There are many questions in my mind, how will I cope with the chemo? Am I really as strong as I feel, especially when on the motoring adventures and cross-country off-road expeditions? Or while observing wildlife at close quarters. Will the conditioning of the mind to take calculated risks and push the car to the limit and deal with various pressure situations help? Will my understanding of mechanicals and ability to analyse the set-up of a car, be of any use in a hospital? I can listen to an engine and more or less determine its condition. Over the years I have learnt to judge a car's handling and grip levels, its

steering feedback and response, chassis balance and weight distribution, body stiffness and rigidity, engine refinement and power delivery, turbo lag or the absence of it, how well it is mated to the gearbox, is the gearing too tall or short, does it need more gears, or bigger brakes, or larger and more sticky tyres, and so on. But will all this be of any use? When the chemo drugs are going through my body, will I be able to track their progress and judge the flow rate? Or how effectively they are working and what they are doing. Will my analytical mind be of any use? Professional racing drivers give feedback to their engineers and technicians to help set up the car. Will my own little experience of driving cars in the heat of competition; help me assist the doctors by providing them with any accurate sort of assessment of my body?

For over three decades now, my detailed road test reports and driving experiences have been published. And now that I am well along the path of getting treatment to cure cancer, should I write my own 'cancer chronicle'? Today this disease is widespread and a monster for mankind, and only a few actually share their experiences. But something within me says, I must communicate what I shall encounter on this "Conquer cancer mission". If it helps even one single person face this enemy of mankind in a better manner, it may just be worth it. And if I do conquer this cancer, which I am most determined to do, then the next mission will surely be to reduce the number of road deaths in our country. Road safety is something I have been writing a lot about, and for a long time now. But I have never actually got down to getting involved with improving road safety on an active basis. It's something I now feel I must surely do. With so much of driving experience in all sorts of conditions, I know I possess the knowledge and skills to make a difference, however small it might be. But something has to be done to reduce accidents and the menace of road deaths in our country. Yes, next it's got to be "Mission Road Safety" for me. 