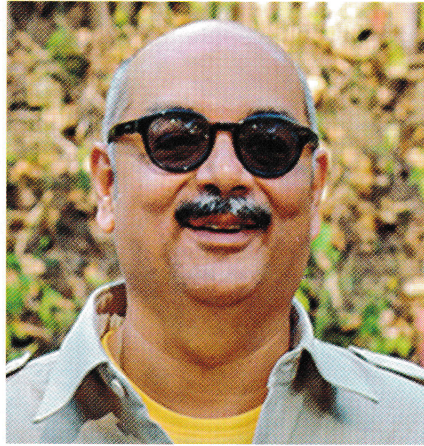


Sales volumes of automatic cars in India are gradually growing. The growth picked up momentum after Maruti Suzuki introduced the AMT or automated manual transmission. Now several other automobile manufacturers have also started offering cars with AMT. While AMT's are not real automatics in the true sense of the word, they work just like an automatic transmission with the gears shifting on their own. More importantly, AMT's are far easier to service and repair and they are also a lot more affordable. The increase in the number of automatic or two pedal cars (those with only a brake and accelerator) is welcome, because they are most convenient to drive on our crowded and chaotic roads. They decrease stress while driving and also reduce the fatigue.

While more consumers are opting for automatics, there also exists a mental block about them. Yes, many people, even those who have been driving manual gear shift cars for a longtime, have a fear about driving automatics. I have heard so many people say, "Arre baba I have not driven an automatic before, how will I drive one now?" Even my wife Madhu felt this. When I told her I could teach her in five minutes, she laughed and said "It surely can't be that easy".

Confident that I could do this, I went with her to the car, which was an AMT and sat in the passenger's seat. I then told her, "The first rule of driving an auto is you never use your left leg. It is not to be used to operate either of the two pedals, it just rests. Use your right leg only." Then I pointed to the gear shifter and said, "D is drive and you obviously select it when you want to go forward. R is reverse. And N is neutral". Being an AMT it did not have P or park. Next I explained that before she touched the gear lever she should press the brake. And she should do this every single time she wanted to move the gear shifter. After that I made her press the brake, shift the lever to D and then I asked her to gently release the brake pedal and press the accelerator- with her right leg only please. She drove tentatively for 2-3 minutes and then said she wanted to learn to reverse it. I made her stop by the side of the road, asked her to keep the brake pedal pressed and to then shift the lever to R. Again the brake was released gently and she pressed down on the accelerator and learnt how to reverse the car. She was filled with joy and said, "Wow,



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Many people have a mental block about driving automatic cars. But it really is quite easy

this is really easier than I thought. And what fun!". Ever since, she only wants to drive automatics. Of course I did tell her when she parked the car she needed to keep the gear lever in D or R as this was an AMT and did not have P or Park. If she was driving a proper automatic, all the driving procedures would remain the same, the only difference being that when she parked, she would put the gear lever in the P position. As for shifting gears manually on an automatic or AMT, is something I said I would teach her at a later date, after she had more experience of driving an automatic.

Since then I have taught a lot of other people how to drive automatics and they have all been amazed at how easy it actually is. But I have also noticed one thing. After people start driving an automatic, they tend to go much faster. Not intentionally, but I think because they are freed of the task of shifting gears and just have to push down on the accelerator pedal to pick speed, they tend to push down more that they would in a manual car. Because unlike in a manual vehicle, they don't have to release the accelerator to change gears, so they are constantly pushing down on the accelerator.

Moving on, let me say that I am getting increasingly appalled at the way many of

us behave on the road. Take for example ambulances or emergency vehicles, nobody gives them way. An ambulance will come with siren blaring; beacon light flashing, but the vehicles ahead of it seldom give way. If the traffic is halted at a red light, then a few will move their vehicles forward to make way for the ambulance. So many times you see family members of the sick person being transported in the ambulance, looking anxiously out of the window and waving at the other vehicles and road users to move and clear the way. But they rarely respond. Instead if they move, they again immediately get behind the ambulance and chase it to take advantage of whatever priority it may be getting on the road.

Ambulances and emergency vehicles should obviously have the right of way. But our road users deny them this right. I wonder what sort of sick mindset makes them do such idiotic things. Another thing that has begun to happen in recent times is that whenever an accident takes place, instead of helping the injured victims, many people stand and film the scene or situation on their phones. It appears filming such sad scenes and sharing them on social media, has become more important than helping accident victims. **OD**