

SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT...

BY MEHER MARFATIA



WHAT'S it with us and wheels? We're just inseparable.

Within a couple of years since cars reached Indian shores around 1900, the first few hundreds were driven by Maharajas and mostly Parsi philanthropists.

If Jamshedji Tata and his illustrious clan rank among the earliest car aficionados, automotive journalism and rallying today are fields dominated by young community members.

Previous generations bequeathed a reverential worship for vintage and classic vehicles. Dady Wadia went around swearing distilled water alone was recommended for the stunningly styled Cord 810. With a breakthrough design, for 1936, aircraft-type dashboard controls and all, few refuted the claim for this ahead-of-its-time street steed.

The Bhiwandiwalla family boasted a succession of sleek specimens, from Sir Dosa-bhoj's Rolls to Perin's egg-shaped yellow Baby Austin. Adi Bhiwandiwalla's Bugatti proved an envied speedster with a fast pick-up touching 105mph.

"The response is inbuilt, we're naturally attracted to good cars," declares Fali Dhondy. "All boys are fond of wheels but we grow up watching our ancestors lavish more attention on cars than on their wives!" Dhondy personally tends to eight cherished beauties, including a 1923 Rover of which about eight are left worldwide, the 1928 Rolls, a 230 SL sports Mercedes, Ferrari 308 and rare 1980 Fiat.

It isn't blood running through our veins but motor oil, laughs one auto fiend. "We don't repair, we replace," quips another, "like being to the manner born." Seriously, why has it been a never ending affair of the heart for Parsis, this passion extraordinaire?

Chat with diehard car buff Russy Gandhi to discover what it means virtually living for the



1946 Citroen. Blessed with over half a century of tender loving care, his beloved's superb road-holding prowess is a virtue he can wax eloquent on forever. Spare parts tough to access pose no worry - he bought another Citroen in 1992 just for these. Inheritors of that same enthusiasm, his son and grandsons now share looking after the family's oldest baby. "We maintain cars in showroom condition," glows Gandhi.

Other gems would be Dinyar Jamshedji's Rolls Royce Silver Wraith, Neville Poonawalla's Ford Mustang, Erach Kotwal's Triumph Herald and Firoz Mehta's DeSoto Diplomat.

India-assembled elegance is exemplified by Rusi Daru-vala's Hindustan '14 and Da-rius Hodiwala's Fiat Elegant 1100, bought from a Lucknowi nawab, whose smooth suspension provides a "magic carpet ride" for passengers, he says.

Lest you feel women lag in this man and mechanism romance, think again. Jini Dinshaw, founder of the Bombay Chamber Orchestra, was once wowed by the fact that a taxi ramming into her Rover 16 at a traffic light showed visible damage, while

not the slightest dent spoilt her pride and joy. And when the country's first lady photographer, Homai Vyarawala, sold her 55-year-old Fiat for a new Nano, the Tatas gifted their modest little machine to her.

Whatever else, the vital criterion deciding how near perfect a car, is prior ownership. Check any classified ad column and see how Parsi-belonged cars continue to command brilliant value. But who's selling!



Russy Gandhi with one of his beauties!