

From the blogs

All hail India's Ambassador, voted the world's best taxi

India's Ambassador taxis may have been displaced by models made by Peugeot, Hyundai and Fiat. They may rumble uncomfortably along the country's roads, their roofs may leak in the monsoon, and it goes without saying that they rarely, if ever, have four functioning doors. But the Ambassador is as much a part of Indian roadside nostalgia as the palm tree and the pothole, **writes Avantika Chilkoti.**

Now *Top Gear*, a British television show, has labelled the Ambassador, made by Hindustan Motors, as the

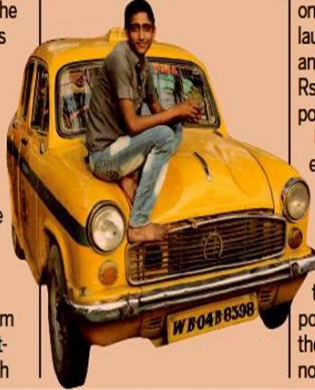
world's best taxi, beating the black cabs of London and New York's yellow cabs.

The model that won *Top Gear*'s battle of the taxis is on display in the UK at the Beaulieu Motor Museum's World of *Top Gear*.

According to the museum, "It's so tough that, although it now lives in World of *Top Gear*, with a quick wash and brush up, it could be back in service tomorrow."

The *Top Gear* episode features what the museum labels a "world taxi shoot-out". There was not much

The Ambassador: seen as 'virtually indestructible'



competition for the Indian candidate, which the museum describes as "virtually indestructible".

The Ambassador, modelled on the Morris Oxford, was launched in India in 1948 and sells for about Rs450,000 (\$7,600). But its popularity has waned.

Uttam Bose, chief executive of Hindustan Motors, says the company sells 400 Ambassadors a month, down from 2,000 in its heyday. And where the vehicles were originally popular for private use too, they are mostly sold as taxis now.

Two new launches are on the way and Mr Bose hopes these will boost sales to 1,000 units per month. The first is a smaller model with updated features and a new look designed to appeal to private users, while the second has been updated to meet new emissions standards and is expected to sell as a taxi. The company has also begun to export the classic cars, mostly to Bangladesh and Africa, and sends about 50 units abroad every month. The old jalopy is rumbling on.

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