

# Driven by passion

G.D. Naidu's love for automobiles is well documented at the Gedee Car Museum in the city

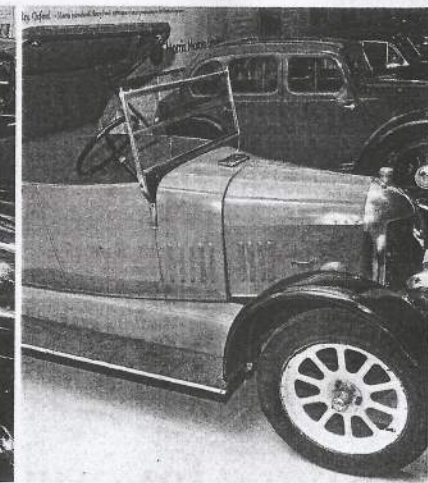
PARSHATHY J.NATH

So, this is how it feels to sit in Hitler's favourite car. The bug-shaped vehicle has four seats. It is so small that I have to duck my head while stepping out of the car. Yet, it is cosy and warm and just right for a family to enjoy a drive. At the GeDee Car Museum, the Volkswagen Beetle occupies pride of place. It is said the Fuhrer loved this car and urged his people to buy it as an investment. Called "the car at the price of a motorcycle", it cost around Rs.850, those days. At the newly opened museum set up by G.D. Naidu Charities, I am tempted to hop into all the cars (there are 55 of them) - Chevrolet, Rolls Royce, Mercedes Benz, Porsche from the collection of the renowned industrialist G.D. Naidu. Some of them are Hollywood stars! For instance, the Love Bug has featured in almost six movies! The collection also includes rugged-looking vans of Fordson and Thames which were used as ice cream vehicles and carrier vans.

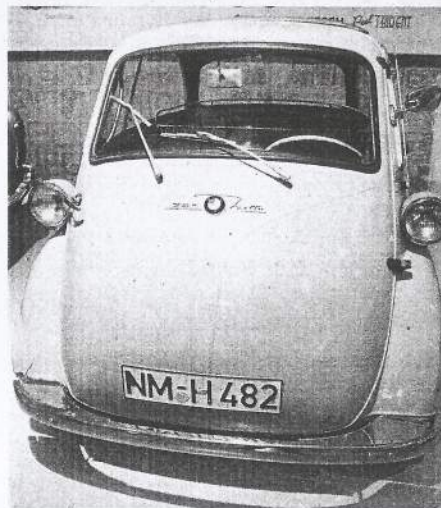
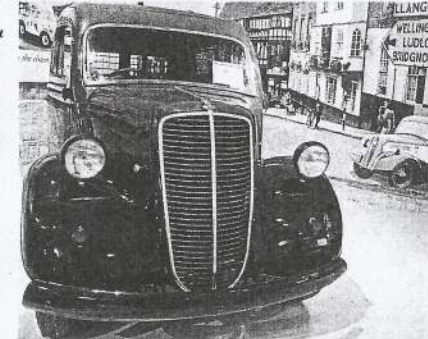
Automobile history unfolds before you as you walk down the curving hallway. There are interesting bits of information and stories wherever you turn like how Tutankhamun used the wheel in ancient Egypt. There are also pictures of steam engines and electric cars that were in vogue in Victorian England. "We are planning to extend the space. There are also workshops for restoration inside this campus," explains Prem Saravanakumar, the museum guide. Each car has a story to tell and is linked to world history. For instance the Bubble Car of the 50s and 60s was designed for the common man to commute during World War II in Europe. It can seat only the driver and a passenger. There are no doors on the side and the windshield of the car doubles up as the exit. These micro cars were manufactured for cheap transport for the locals. The Rolls Royces tell a love story. The bonnet ornament with her arms outstretched

behind her. The emblem is called the "Spirit of Ecstasy". The billowing robes of the lady stream past her like wings. According to legend, the bonnet ornament commemorated a secret love affair of John Montague, a pioneer of the automobile movement and Eleanor, the model for the emblem. There is also a tribute to the good old ambassador. Cartoon strips show how the car has become indispensable to the Indian way of life. Cartoons show the car being used to bear the bride and groom at their wedding, hang out laundry and so on. Of course, it is also the status symbol for politicians and gangsters. Don't miss the luxurious black limousine. "You can even host birthday parties here," says Saravanakumar in all earnestness. I realise he is not exaggerating when I peep inside. Inside there is a fridge, shining glassware, a television set and a phone for the passenger to talk to the chauffeur! At the end of the hall, a young man on a bike surveys

you from a black and white photograph. G.D. Naidu looks happy riding a Rudge Multi, a vintage bike made in 1912. Saravanakumar tells me why he looks so happy in the photo. While working in his father's farm, G.D. saw a British officer zipping past him in what he thought as a 'strange looking vehicle creating a funny noise'. It was love at first sight. He tracked down the officer, helped him clean the vehicle and service it. He vowed to save up enough money to buy a similar bike for himself some day. He did not have to wait long as the officer was so taken with his passion that he sold it to him for Rs. 300. There are other black and white photographs of G.D. Naidu taking classes, holding workshops and shaking hands with other automobile tycoons. The museum is indeed a tribute to this man of humble beginnings, who emerged to become one of the biggest automobile entrepreneurs in the world.



VINTAGE TREASURES the cars on display at GeDee Car Museum and (below) the Rudge Multi bike, used by G.D. Naidu PHOTOS: S. SIVA SARAVANAN



The museum is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The museum is closed on Mondays. The fee is Rs.50. For details, call 0422-2222548.



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