

LEISURE

TIME travel

What started as a work of passion has today turned into a heritage transport museum, a first of its kind and scale in the country. On display are over 75 cars, a railway saloon, bullock carts, palanquins, and the works—in short, an evolution on wheels

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THE JUST-opened Heritage Transport Museum near Gurgaon—on the 'evolution of wheels'—is a work of evolution in itself. For, it took an auto enthusiast over 20 meticulous years to collect, restore and maintain artefacts that many would dismiss as mere pieces of junk.

Even the concept of a museum took over three years to take shape, owing to issues ranging from funds to people's mindsets. "Initially, people doubted my intentions, as nobody in India 'makes' museums. It was also difficult for me to get donations," says Tarun Thakral, the brain behind the project and founder and management trustee of Heritage Transportation Trust. As most of the cars were bought from auctions, Thakral also had to "compete" with scrap dealers to own some of the items. "The total cost came to around ₹14 crore, out of which ₹6 crore was contributed by the Union ministry of culture," explains Thakral.

But today, the result is out there for everyone to see, and enjoy. From a ser-

mechanised transportation modes like palanquins, bullock carts, horse carriages and camel carts; a restored 1940s Piper J3 Cub aircraft suspended in mid-air; obsolete three-wheelers like *phat-phats* and *jugaads*; and a vintage petrol pump, apart from conference rooms and an art gallery.

The Maharaja of Ayodhya's car is one of Thakral's prized possessions, which he bought for about ₹2 lakh from an auction. His other favourites include a 1938 Ford Convertible, a 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air Convertible and a 1932 Chevrolet Phaeton, which, incidentally, was also his first collectible.

The experience begins with an exhibit that showcases the evolution of the wheel. Placed alongside the exhibit is a bird with wheels in place of wings—dating back to 3,500 BC from the Indus Valley Civilisation—the oldest artefact of the museum. "The reason why we placed this object is to show that even at the time of the Indus Valley civilisation, wheels existed in this part of the world," explains Thakral.

To break the monotony and have an edge over others, the museum has been designed in such a way that the contents of a majority of galleries



A Chevrolet Impala with a twist of contemporary art hangs in mid-air at the entrance of the museum



(From left) A Vespa scooter, Lambretta and a Royal Enfield bike in the motorbikes' section



A 1962 Dodge Dart station wagon



A 1940s Piper J3 Cub aircraft



The evolution of Ambassador cars on display in the Hindustan Motors' section



A 1941 Chevrolet Super Deluxe; and (right) a 1955 Oldsmobile Super 88



The Dilip-Chhabria-modified red 'convertible' used by Shah Rukh Khan in the film *Dil To Pagal Hai*; and (right) The 1934 Buick 90 limousine, which was used by the Maharaja of Ayodhya

en-seater, 90-litre 1934 Buick previously owned by the Maharaja of Ayodhya, to a Dilip-Chhabria (DC)-modified 1985 "convertible" Gypsy used by Shah Rukh Khan to woo Madhuri Dixit in *Dil To Pagal Hai*; the museum takes visitors on a roller-coaster ride—right from the advent of the wheel in India to the means of transportation we recall ourselves of today.

Spread across an area of over 90,000 sq ft on Bilaspur Taoro Road (a 75-minute drive from Delhi), the museum has something for everyone—over 75 vintage and classic cars parked alongside a recreated Indian street scene from the 1920s; a restored railway saloon from the 1930s; pre-

can be changed at regular intervals. The Trust is not putting its entire collection on display, as it aims to rotate its exhibits every two to three months. Roughly about 30-35 cars will move out every three months, along with the accompanying graffiti.

Coming up next are cars used in James Bond movies. "These cars keep on travelling around the world and, currently, they have all been booked till 2015. We hope to get them for a few months after that," says Thakral. The Trust is also tying up with museums worldwide, so that it can get exhibits from there for about three months, like in a gallery or exhibition space.

