

First ever

Lal Pari London Chali

Three generations set for dream drive in 73-year-old MG YT car to London factory where it was manufactured

Some things can be pursued owing to deep love alone – love for a parent as well as love of a child. This, coupled with thrills of adventure no Indian has attempted, now sees Daman Thakore pursue the thought of driving his vintage car, Lal Pari, all the way to London, exactly where it rolled out from a little over seven decades ago. Having great childhood memories with his father driving him around in this car only helped chase this cause.

I, myself raised by a father passionate about vintage cars, who owned and honed them – from a Humber Super Snipe, Morris and Austin to Plymouth and Land Rover – found it easy to understand how Daman's dream took seed.

Strutting around in a beautiful red MG YT, one of the only 900 cars of the model made between 1948-50, Daman along with 75-year-old dad, Deval Thakore, and daughter Devanshi, will drive from Uzbekistan to London over 75 days. Sounds exciting as it does unbelievable, this dream trip has been possible with meticulous planning, complete with stops at various cities and countries besides stay, interaction with locals, and photography. Most importantly, it is gifting this unparalleled experience to his 21-year-old daughter that is key.

I have a barrage of questions, the hows and whys: on the route, the vintage car's condition, the family's resolve, the accompanying bunch, the realisation of a dream, and Daman has answers, with ease only an adventurer can manage. And so, we begin...

Lal Pari's Longest Sojourn

A 1000-km trial run from Ahmedabad to Abu or Mumbai and back is scheduled after which the car would be flagged off from Mumbai in a container ship to Iran and then in a truck to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Considering the original Silk Route isn't possible, the Lal Pari gang is flying to Tashkent in June-end to set off on this "trip of a lifetime" that begins from July 1. Lal Pari would be shipped a month ahead post checks and restoration. "This 12,000-plus km journey would be covered across 75 days and we plan to drive 200 km every day, which is 60 days of driving. But, we have to consider breakdowns, local experiences, etc. What do we do in case we need some part – what if the engine, the carburetor, the gearbox fail? How do we account for such uncertainties? New parts cannot be fitted in to this car and, thus, to ensure all goes as planned, I imported another car, same model, from Canada," shares Daman of the importing process that took him a year.

But, how did he manage to find a sister for this 73-year-old car, in the last couple of years, I want to know. "That's because there are 150 of these cars still alive! The president of the club – International MG YT Registry – Paul Barrow himself called up the owner and helped by persuading him to sell it," reveals Daman of this 'sister' car he got for Lal Pari that has been with them for 47 years now.



ANURITA RATHORE JADEJA

HEART OF THE MATTER

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Lal Pari with family in 2022 (L to R) Udita, Devanshi Daksha, Deval, Diya, Daman with pet dog Goofy



(Left to right) Daman Thakore in Lal Pari (standing, right) with cousins in 1983; Daughter Devanshi with cousins celebrating a birthday party in 2010



Through Birthdays & Weddings

From being part of adventurous bedtime stories that Daman's mother would create about imaginary sojourns in the jungle with cousins, actual weddings in the family, zoo visits and birthday parties, MG YT has been their go-to entertainment when cartoons on TV didn't quite exist. "We have travelled in Lal Pari within the country, and while it has

chance to spend a long duration with my daughter. I wanted to prepare her to face the world and what better internship than this for someone studying global affairs? So, while undertaking this trip has the father-daughter angle, I roped in my father who insisted he wouldn't back out mid-way. To give back all the joy he gave me for 50 years, this was the least I could do. Also, if I have restored car as per factory specifications, I should be able to drive it back there – this became a personal challenge." From chassis, suspension and engine to lights and steering, all are original parts which took six years to source. "When restoring the car, each metre cost me 400 pounds; and I had them lying carelessly, all these years, in the backrest of my bed that was designed as Lal Pari!"

Life Beyond Business

Always clear that business would not rule or lead his life, Daman knew business growth was not the "larger goal". "I wanted to have freedom to spend time with family, to ensure my kids get attention and my parents experience the joy of playing with grandkids. Instead of expanding business we, in fact, reduced its geographical sphere to allow me time to follow my passion. It was a conscious decision for the life I wanted, complete with pursuing interests be it travel, wildlife, photography or motorbiking," says the adventure

Prep, Set, Go

- The group will pass more than 16 countries and each one will carry not more than three pairs of clothes weighing less than 5 kg.
- The Lal Pari gang will carry their food: bhakhri, subzi, daal, rice. Fresh fruits and vegetables would be sourced locally.
- The idea is to travel 200 km daily, stay with locals and camp. To facilitate this, there is a camper van which has a kitchen, two beds, car parts, video shooting equipments besides support staff. Besides three of the family, there is a vintage car technical expert Mukesh Bararia, logistics facilitator Kumar Shah and professional photographer-videographer Vinay Panjwani.

lover, who has travelled more than 30 countries biking, trekking and road trips.

Have Licence, Will Ride

Crediting his parents for moulding him to be the father he is, Daman philosophises how a girls' dad can never get enough time with them. "When girls are growing up, one is busy establishing business and once things are set, it's time for them to set out to pursue study, work and settle. The biggest gift in lockdown was that Devanshi applied for a learner's licence and a mistake led her to apply for geared motorcycle instead of a gearless scooter. She realised it a week before the learner's exam and while there was option to cancel the application, I urged her to try learning to ride a motorbike. In three days, I taught her to ride one and she passed. The first 2,000 km of bike-riding consisted of a 700 km expedition in Leh and 1,300 km in Arunachal Pradesh," says the excited father, looking forward to this trip more than any he has before. I look at the thrill in the smile and understand why they say, time flies...