

# THE PIONEER

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## Atlantic drivethrough

### Sanjay K Bose

When Dev entered the room and diffidently announced that he was now the proud owner of a car, we all stood up and cheered. After all, wheels of our own were but a distant dream for us indigent graduate students - we were restricted in our mobility and cramped in our social ambitions.

It was love at first sight with that old Dodge Coronet. Dev coyly revealed that he actually got the car for free from a family friend. That he was not the one to drive a hard bargain was immediately obvious. If he had shown even an iota of unwillingness, his friends would have probably paid him hard cash to take the car away!



For us, on the other hand, wheels of any kind were not to be sneered at. It mattered little that this particular set had probably rolled out of Detroit about the time Hitler was invading Eastern Europe. It was unlikely that a fashion model would ever easily let herself be photographed getting out on the kerb from this car.

As a matter of fact, one aspiring to do so would have to be passed out through the window as the car was a three-door model. The kerb-side door at the back was securely locked and could never be opened.

The car had an ambitious speedometer that went up all the way to a glorious 200 mph. We never really got to test its tall claims since the car vibrated like a roller coaster at anything beyond a sedate 40 mph.

The fact that the milometer did not work at all was a plus point as the mileage calculations for this beauty had to be done in gallons per mile instead of the other way round. It was just a coincidence that the gasoline crisis of the 1970s happened soon after we got the car. Saying that we consumed enough fuel to start it was just a foul canard spread by folks jealous of our newfound mobility.

For the four years that we were together in Stony Brook, the car stood us in good stead. We did not mind the fact that it loudly complained every time we got it started and wheezed and groaned like a soul in hell when it finally got going. We rarely got to test the horn - the car made enough noise to make the horn superfluous.

We were lucky that we never got a traffic citation for noise pollution. The annual inspections were trying moments when we stood around the car with knitted brows of worry while the technician muttered wise-cracks, "Seems the car has escaped from a museum while no one was looking, eh!"

One evening, some time before we all left the university, Dev suggested driving to a pub in New York city for beer. On the way back, we decided to finally test the speedometer on a deserted stretch of road on Fire Island, which was unlikely to have any cop cars around. With Dev driving and me doing the navigation, we did make it to that road.

We were dozing pleasantly when the car stalled. When we got down to investigate, we discovered that we had driven right off the road and into the beach and had the dark silent waters of Long Island Sound stretching before us.

It was good that the car had stalled. Or else we would have been testing its capability to float in salt water. Who knows, we might even have realised our life-long ambition of visiting Europe by being the first people to drive through the Atlantic!

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