



PROJECT CARS: 1977 FIAT X1/9

THE Yellow BOAT

Akbar asks if I'd like to drive. It's like asking me if I like air, or those tiny delicious sweets that come in different colors. He says he lets people older than him drive. I assume it's because older people can usually pay for the damages via ATM cards right away. For a change, it's good to be older.

I hop into the driver's seat of the car that's older than me, but only barely older. I sit in it, like really, really in it. It feels low and I'm looking up at everything, and I love it already. And then I try to get the gear into drive and it won't budge, which is embarrassing for me. Akbar says I need to pull hard, but I'm afraid I'm going to break it. But hey, old cars, they have these little issues that makes them more charming. Unless they don't work. This car works, though. I start, grab a hold of the meaty non-powered steering and gently roll off. Top down. Oh, bliss.

to '89 with engines either being 1300cc or 1500cc, with sub 100bhp levels of oomph. Well, not exactly oomph.

This Yellow Boat is a little different. While the original engine ran, it was anemic. So this being Bangladesh, it was looking for a meaty Toyota heart transplant. Akbar went for a 1300cc 4E-FTE engine. Yep, turbocharged and intercooled with the possibilities of up to 120bhp. In such a small and light car, that should be interesting.

So I ease the accelerator in and when I feel the boost is right, I floor it. The car surges forward with urgency. The black vinyl seats squeak, one of the windows rattle, the steering is tight and the ride is stiff thanks to the monocoque chassis. It was probably a little over engineered back then but that's a good thing. High tech stuff for 1977. The car turns tight despite needing more suspension

work according to Akbar. Even though I sit low, the ground clearance is still high enough that I don't have to inch across speed bumps.

You forgive it for being old and a little ratty, because the fun factor is high, very high. The car turns and stops with pretty good feel through the brakes. Disc brakes all around are reassuring; no power-assist there so I know how they are reacting. You have to work this car to get the full bucket of fun. Turbo takes a little time to spool up but when it does you feel like Captain Kirk about to go into warp drive. Could be cause the windows are down.

I couldn't help smiling. This is what driving is all about, it has to make you smile like a maniac. And then we push it a little more and I think I have a permanent grin pasted on my face. New cars are sterile compared to

catching car. Also because I just imagined it would be a really fun car to drive and it turns out I was right."

He's right about it being eye catching. Girls love it. I've been showing pictures to my wife and female friends and they think it's cool even though couple of the friends differentiate cars just by colour.

Initially, it rusted away for so long because the original owner ran out of parking space. It did not run, exterior was beaten up, paint was in bad shape, interior needed a lot of TLC. We don't have the best of tools or technical expertise in Bangladesh, but we do know how to wield a hammer. According to Akbar, car restoration is a trip down a long and troublesome road but it's always worth it in the end. There's still more to be done, old cars need work. The 4E-FTE has the occasional overheating issue due to the original Fiat radiator being hard to replace, but everything is minor - the big stuff is done.

Old cars, when restored right, command respect. They're not flashy, they're a style statement. A new Mercedes and Audi pulled up while we were talking, except I couldn't look away from the Yellow Boat.

S P E C S

Engine: 1300 cc 4E-FTE turbocharged, intercooled engine from a Toyota Starlet GT.

Brakes: Disc brakes all around.

Wheels: Replica 15 inch Enkei RC-G4 rims.

Owner: Akbar A. Sattar
Studies at: George Washington State University, Columbia, USA.



Hobbies: Occasionally restoring classic cars and making them go faster till they fall apart. Rinse and repeat.

Under construction: 1974 Chevrolet Impala. Watch this space.

WORDS & PHOTOS
EHSANUR RAZA RONNY



Go to our website for before and after shots.



This 1977 Fiat was in Akbar's family for a very long time. It was last lying in their factory for over eight years until one glorious day in 2011. A car like this needs to be on the road. How special is it? The X1/9 is a Bertone designed Italian sportscar with a mid-engine layout. The wedge shape was inspired by contemporary power-boats and the designers and engineers went to great lengths to ensure good handling. Weight distribution was originally 41/59 front/rear. Except it feels like it's almost 50/50. The car was built from '72

This. In fact, I don't even know if we are going fast because the speedo is broken. But heck, this car gives you a sense of speed even when you're going slow. Modern cars have it the other way round. You go fast but feel slow and end up with a false sense of security. The Fiat feels scary, fun, quick. Cars should feel faster than they are; it will help curb speed related car-hugging-tree incidents.

So why this car? "It is unique," says Akbar, "It was relatively easier to restore than the others that I had available to me, and it is a very eye-

Surviving rain

Rain is romantic. You want to post Facebook statuses and listen to November Rain even in September. And you want to go drive because rain is so damn romantic, except we live in a country with potholes the size of small swimming pools and the rain comes every other day making sure the potholes are filled to give your car or bike a good soaking. Then there's our inimitable style of driving all over the road. Well, not inimitable, cause lab monkeys have shown the same driving skills along with people from countries like India and Italy.

Bottom line: During rain, driving is a life threatening activity. Specifically, yours. How do you survive?

Brakes made of Spongebob
In the rain, brakes are less effective. Number one rule: Go slow. Don't jam on the brakes unless you're Vin Diesel. Most cars typically have drum brakes at the rear. When wet from a thorough soaking, these are close to useless. Pump the brakes after moving from heavy water.

Slippy, slidey fun
Your car is not a boat but it can become one at very short notice if you drive fast over water. Even three inches of water can cause hydroplaning. This is where your tires roll over water and have very little or NO contact with the ground. You float at speed. It's not fun, as trees and other rooted objects are around to stop you.



Too close for comfort
It's always the other guy's fault. So compensate for their actions by staying far, far behind the 'other guy'. It takes longer to stop on wet surfaces. At speeds of 60kmph or less, stay at least three car lengths away.

You're blind
Change wipers ever season. Wipers can get brittle over time. Bad ones leave streaks that are difficult to see through and they scratch your glass over time.

Get new ones, use old ones at the office for impromptu sword fights.

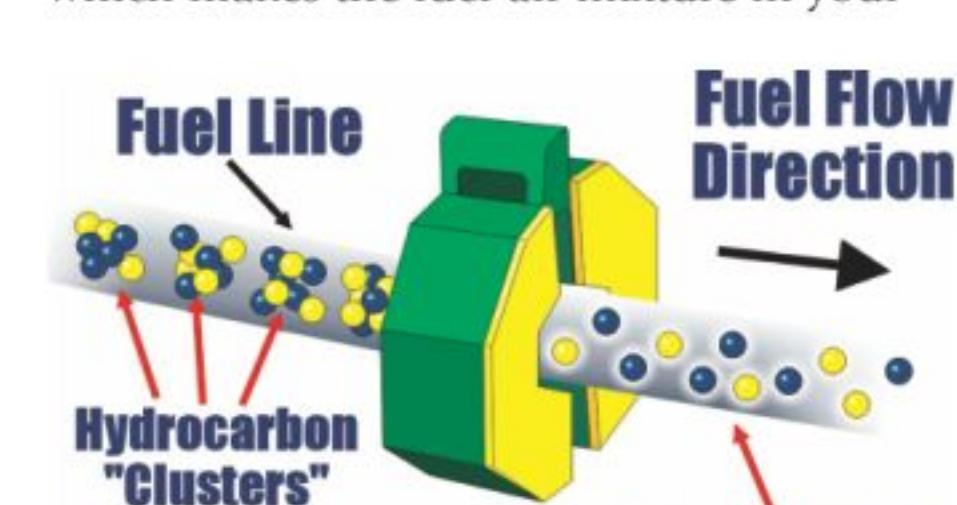
Scuba diving
Certain areas in the city sometimes get waterlogged so bad that alligators start thinking of relocating. Avoid driving into areas where water comes up above the bottom of your door. Modern cars have fussy electrics that hate water. If you have to go through possibly alligator infested water, drive slow, drive steady. Water won't go up your exhaust and into your engine. The risk is water flowing over your hood/bonnet and getting in through your air intake. That causes hydrolocking, meaning your engine has just drowned. When driving through more than a foot of water, slow is the key word.

You blend with the scenery
You need to be seen. Turn on the headlights even in broad daylight. In the rain, silver, grey and green cars are almost camouflaged. This is where all the tacky add-on flashing and blinking LED lights come in handy. Yellow is a good color for visibility so ride a taxi, but those come with their own health risks.

MYTH OR WHAT? Magnetic Fuel Savers



The theory seems simple. You have two large cylindrical magnets clamped onto your engine's fuel line, as the fuel goes past the magnets, the fuel molecules are "separated" which makes the fuel-air mixture in your



SHAFER REAZ

engine burn more efficiently, thus miraculously increasing your fuel efficiency AND make a few extra horsepower in the process. Sounds too good to be true?

The problem here is that 95% of all cars out there use steel to make the fuel lines. Unless our 6th grade Physics teacher was wrong, steel is magnetic and if you clamp a cylindrical magnet around a hollow steel object, 99% of the magnetic flux from the magnets will be retained by the steel. So the magical magnets don't even reach the fuel you're trying so hard to save.

Verdict:

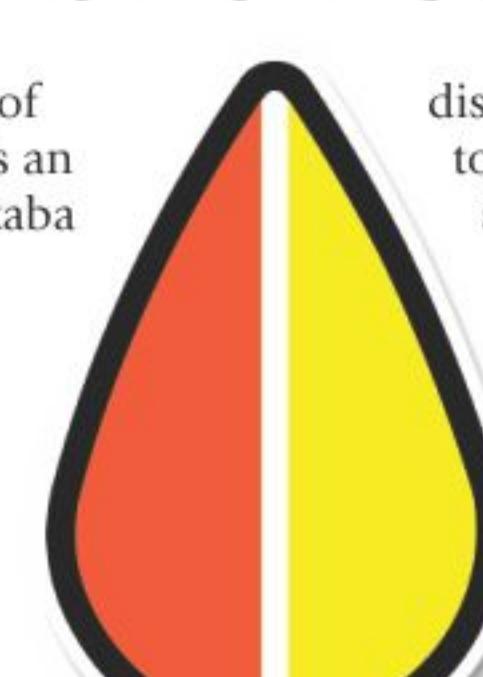
You just bought a very expensive and shiny looking magnet. We suggest you put on your refrigerator, it'll be way more useful there.

DID YOU KNOW?

Shoshinsha and Koreisha



JDM culture often takes tokens of actual Japanese culture and puts an entirely different spin to it. Wakaba leaves, otherwise known as the Shoshinsha (green yellow leaf) and the Koreisha (orange yellow teardrop), are badges put on cars to warn other drivers that the car wearing the badges are being driven by inexperienced or handicapped drivers. The Shoshinsha is



displayed by beginner drivers for up to a year after they obtain their standard driving license, while the Koreisha is for drivers older than a certain age.

Of course, since it's uniquely Japanese, it has to be taken out of context and overused by the rest of the world to show off their love of JDM culture, the Shoshinsha, especially, can be seen everywhere nowadays.