

Experience The Elegance

TOYOTA CAMRY HYBRID

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Navana Limited
•Dhaka •Chittagong

Darth Vader on steroids

TOYOTA MARK X



The damned Vista won't start. I'm running late for the photo-shoot and the engine refuses to tick over after sitting idle for a little over three weeks. The photo-shoot location is close by, so I decide to walk. Sweat drenched and skin burnt under the searing noon sun, I show up to see Aadnan hard at work, snapping away the shiny black beauty in front of the camera, and I forgive the weather because otherwise we wouldn't be seeing the Mark X in all its sun-kissed glory.

It's low. By low we mean killing small rodents on the road with the front bumper kind of low. The eighteen inch wheels sit flush with the fender, nicely tucked into each corner with the help of aftermarket coilovers and lowering springs. The rear tire has a slight stretch over the rim (subtle, compared to the stance gurus of the Far East and the West) which makes the car look poised and ready for some naughty fun. The body-kit is so subtle and so good in quality, you wouldn't find a single wave or ungainly protrusion even with a magnifying lens. It all works together and the exterior treatment brings you a joyous sense of occasion, your peripheral vision snapping to attention and telling you that this is going to be a very special experience indeed.

Shanin has owned the Mark X for about two years, and judging by the contents of the rest of his garage, his taste in cars is stratospherically high-

end, both in terms of quality and performance. He loves his Mark X, and despite having some seriously exotic machinery at his disposal, he genuinely enjoys his Toyota. The lowered, thirsty beast might not be the most practical or particularly drivable, but it makes for a great car to drive on the weekends when the roads are empty and the 2.5 litre 4GR FSE V6 engine can really stretch

its legs.

Sitting in the car, you are surrounded by a simplistic, very well furnished cabin that surrounds you in a cocoon of luxury. The dashboard layout isn't particularly bold or properly classy (it's somewhere in

between, reflecting the car's luxury plus performance genes), the center panel and navigation surround looks a little awkward and out of place, but other than that, the Mark X cabin feels premium and plush, distancing it from Toyota's bread and butter models.

When Shanin motions for us to get in for a ride around the block, I'm at the passenger door before he can even make his way around. The cabin blocks out the soft burble from the TRD exhaust almost completely at idle, as Shanin puts it into drive and moves out toward the driveway, we get a small taste of what we're in for. Outside the gates, he steps on the gas, the car surging forward with the air intake devouring volumes of air with feral growls, the rapidly rising revs pushing us back into our extremely well cushioned thrones. The slotted and vented ceramic TRD brakes behind each wheel act like a thick sponge wall in front of the car, pulling the heavy sedan's speeds down effortlessly without compromising the passengers' comfort even once.

Looking at the brakes before I got on the car (and knowing what the Mark X is capable of in terms of speed), I half expected a jittery ride where my head would be smashed into an invisible wall every time the brake

pedal was pressed. I was wrong.

The Mark X is docile in heavy traffic, keeping the passengers encased in an air-conditioned cocoon and darting into available spaces with little bursts of exhilarating acceleration with ease. Of course, the driver's skill has to be taken into account, and Shanin was very capable of manhandling the black beast in Dhaka's notorious traffic. Shanin's skills became clear when we saw the other beast he had hidden away in a corner of his garage, but more on that on a later issue of Shift.

Future plans? He wants to get an air suspension kit so that the Mark X can sit lower and be more drivable around town. He's also thinking of a supercharger for the 4GR-FSE engine, although based on the ride along, it's a pretty fast car already. Whatever his future plans are, we'll keep an eye on Shanin's collection.

Want a Mark X too? You'd have to buy second hand (around 40 lakhs), because the older models are not coming in anymore. The latest models (Kunny Z's D1GP drift car, pictured right) are too expensive to bring in, costing over 1.5 crore after tax is taken into account.

WORDS: SHAER REAZ
PHOTO: ADNAN ZAMAN

SPECS

2006 Toyota Mark X

ENGINE: 2.5 litre 4GRFSE engine, K&N Typhoon air intake, TRD ignition booster, TRD exhaust.

GEARBOX: 6 speed sequential automatic transmission.

BRAKES: TRD slotted, vented ceramic disc brakes all around, Eibach wheel spacers.

SUSPENSION: Tein coilovers.

WHEELS AND TIRES: 18 inch wheels, Dunlop Le Mans LM703 225/45 tires.

EXTERIOR: Kenstyle front bumper, INGS rear bumper and side skirts, Modellista rear spoiler, custom grille, MEC Design Daytime Running Lights, debadged exterior.



These can go sideways too!

Bippu tuning

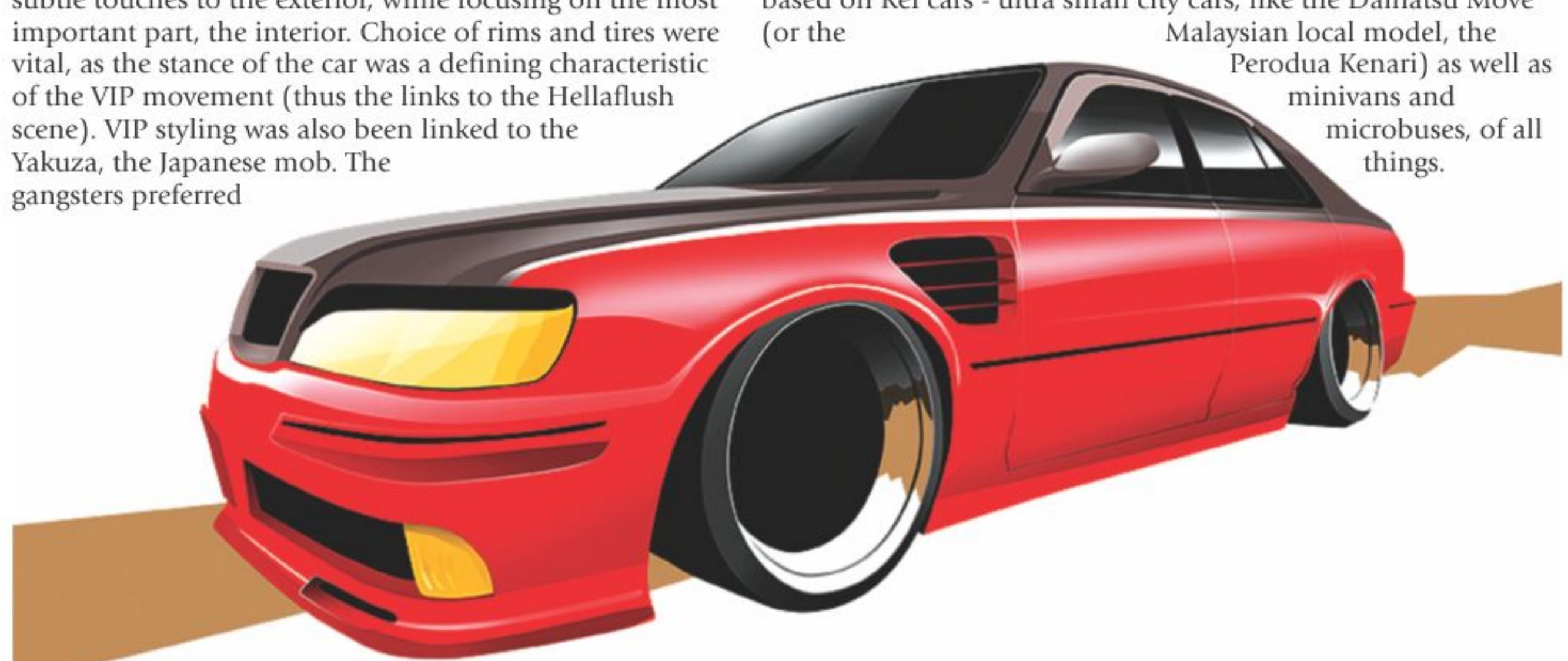
Bippu, or VIP car culture is all about low, wide cars and going fast comfortably.

The Japs have given us many unique car styling ideas, and VIP car styling, or Bippu in Japanese, was one of the biggest crazes over the past few years. Alongside the Hellaflush movement, VIP styling is still running strong.

Having its roots in street culture in mid 90's Japan, Bippu styling came up due to a crackdown on sport compact cars and regular tuner cars by the cops, forcing drivers of tuned cars to turn to slower, more non-descript family or luxury sedans for cruising around town during the day. Not content with rolling around in stock cars, they started lowering the large, heavy sedans, and adding subtle touches to the exterior, while focusing on the most important part, the interior. Choice of rims and tires were vital, as the stance of the car was a defining characteristic of the VIP movement (thus the links to the Hellaflush scene). VIP styling was also been linked to the Yakuza, the Japanese mob. The gangsters preferred

using nondescript luxury cars that were often mechanically stock, only to avoid detection by police and rival gangs. Since the whole deal started because the drivers wanted anonymity, the engines were mostly kept stock, other than minor upgrades like the exhaust and intake.

Over the years, the initial ideas evolved and morphed, with people opting for larger, more modern cars, wilder exterior work (crazy paint jobs, widebody kits, insane amounts of negative camber), more performance oriented builds, and, weirdly, smaller and more commonplace cars. Especially in places like Malaysia and Thailand, people started building VIP style cars based on Kei cars - ultra small city cars, like the Daihatsu Move (the Malaysian local model, the Perodua Kenari) as well as minivans and microbuses, of all things.



The Shift guide to building your own VIP ride

What you need:

1) A car. Long, wide, preferably not beat up beyond measure. Toyotas make the most sense, and rear-wheel drive models like the Mark II, Crown, Cressida and Chaser are the expensive to build and maintain options. If you want cheaper, go for older, front-wheel drive Vista and Camrys. The expensive FWD option would be the Windom, which looks amazing if built properly. If budget isn't an issue, check out Shanin-Al-Nasir's VIP styled Mark X (above). If you want stuff from other makes, Honda Inspires and older Accords are good but expensive options.

2) Parts. You need lowering springs and exterior styling bits. RP customs and Racetige (look them up on Facebook)

will bring in application specific parts for your car, and if you can afford the prices, you will get genuine quality parts. For rims and tires, Nippon auto near Bashundhara has a very good collection of VIP worthy rims, other than that, Bijoy Nagar is full of rim and tire shops, so check them out. Bodykit wise, you'd have to make a judgment call and find a source you like. Our recommendation? Avoid bodykits if you can, since lowering the car and adding a nice set of wheels is more than enough for Dhaka's streets (unless you want to take on the pain of owning a bodykitted and lowered car).

3) Paint. The paint has to be very high quality, so don't paint your car cheaply. Workshops that use heated booths to paint cars is a good bet, and the big

workshops employ professionals who will ensure a good finish for the sizeable amount they charge. For buying the paint itself, we recommend Berger's Nexa Auto Colour and the premium paint catalog. It's worth it.

Don't try to do a VIP build on a tight budget, because the results are usually less than satisfactory. In fact, if you plan on using the car daily and driving it properly, a full on VIP build on Dhaka's streets might not be a great idea. Go for this only if you want a weekend cruiser, which looks cool and is comfortable only on smooth roads. Good luck.

WORDS: SHAER REAZ
ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

TWO WHEELER REVIEW

DUCATI 899

Motorcycles get a bad rap for being dangerous, unstable and too fast for anyone's good. Only one of those accusations is true. Take this, the Ducati 899 that's just hot, hot piping hot out of the oven. This is what dreams may be.

Look at it. The design evokes sultry midnight images. It's what true form following function is all about. The monocoque chassis incorporates an air intake that also feeds cooling to the onboard electronics package, which is not something to be sneezed at.

The throttle is ride-by-wire, meaning there's no cable involved. Electronics measure everything to the minutest degree. The 899cc, four-valve-per-cylinder, L-twin engine gives a phenomenal 148hp at 10,750 rpm and 73 lb-ft of torque at 9,000 rpm. Compare that to the mightiest of Bajaj Pulsars pumping out, at most, 24bhp (not saying the Pulsar 200NS is slow or bad, the NS is a marvel in its segment). But the comparison draws to mind what we just can't have in BD. Makes us sad, but it's also good to dream.

Shahn Ahmed, a fellow biker working in Michigan, USA, says he tried the previous 848 (with a 'measly' 124bhp). It scared the living daylights out of him because the bike was so sharp, so responsive, it makes any rider feel like a great rider, which can be misleading and dangerous. "These bikes are meant for experienced riders. The gadgets are there to tame the ride and make it safer, but I'll stick to my sub-500 budget used bikes for now," he says.

Take the braking performance of the Ducati 899. Three-stage ABS provides extra braking assurance depending on road conditions and how you set it up. The Wet riding mode drops power to 110 hp with even smoother throttle, increased Traction Control input and full ABS. 110hp? That's typical Corolla Axio levels of power output. Bikes now offer so much tech, comfort and safety, it makes the pedestrian versions available in Bangladesh almost feel like rickshaws in comparison. Then there's traction control as well as engine brake control which can be set up independently via a large display. The suspension is also 3-way adjustable for pre-load, compression and rebound. This effectively gives you all controls over stiffness and how well it soaks up the bumps. But unlike the fancier and bigger Ducati 1199S, this is not electronically adjustable. A screwdriver and wrench needed.

The 899 is priced at around \$15k. We can't have it here without bending a few rules and paying bejillions. But then we do have two Ferraris here in BD at the time of this writing. Why not this? For now I'll settle for the newly acquired scale model of the 899.

EHSANUR RAZA RONNY



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