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American Hustle

Project Cars:
1975 Chevrolet Impala

Americans have always been obsessed with size. From the ballooning waistlines of the average citizen to the jumbo sized egos spreading "democracy" all over the world, it is the defining factor in the plus sized American Dream. Unsurprisingly, the US auto industry reflected all of this.

It started with the Cadillacs and Chryslers in the mid 20's, with Duesenberg leading the charge of coupling opulence with incredibly large automobiles. This extravagance in size would forever be imprinted in the minds of Great Depression struck people, and after World War II ended and the economy was on the rise again, the obsession with size returned in full swing. Everything with wheels and an engine received the "full size" treatment, and

nothing could deter it.

The Chevrolet Impala will always be that one car which everyone has heard of, even if they aren't car geeks infatuated with American iron. It was the Cadillac of the upper middle class, a sign of entry into mind-boggling wealth, and of course it had to be immense in proportions to reflect that.

Akbar's garage has been featured on Shift twice already, so you can tell he knows his cars and knows how to treat them right. He completely restored a 1977 Fiat X1/9 and gave it a new life with a new heart (4EFT turbocharged 1.3 liter engine from a Toyota Starlet), so he had prior experience with difficult classic restoration projects.

The pristine white 1975 Chevrolet Impala you see here, rotted away in a

garage for over twenty years. With rust eating away at the body panels and the 5.7 liter Turbo Fire V8 engine bled dry of fluids, the Impala was a sad sight, a neglected piece of Americana dwindling away because no one wanted to take the trouble of fixing it.

"I got my hands on it by simply asking. It was already a part of the family so I just asked and started restoring it. I chose it because the Impala was already in the family and was a more reasonable project than the others we've got lying around. Plus, I always had a thing for large classic American sedans like Lincolns and Cadillacs and this comes pretty close", says Akbar.

The original engine was still in working shape, and with a few tweaks and prodding around, the V8

fired up, but it still had to be towed to the bodyshop for the painstaking process of getting its rusty panels back to shape. Handled by the professionals at Paintworks Bangladesh, almost every single part of the Impala's exterior had to receive fabricated metalwork. The rust was removed and panels replaced, and the engine was slowly nursed back to working condition. The interior was redone in a vibrant red colour, with diamond patterned door panels and a refurbished headliner.

"It was quite a lot of hassle. Three of the biggest problems were parts availability, mechanical and engine work and finding a place to park it."

The problem with old cars is the availability of parts, and for a large American car such as this, it's

impossible to find anything here. Akbar studies in the US, and during the restoration process he was abroad scouting out harder to find parts, hoping his large "baby" was in the right hands. Seeing the results, we'd say he had nothing to worry about.

What's next for the Impala? Akbar says most of the car is sorted out already, and other than a few minor tweaks left to do, the car is complete. He drove it as often as he could after it was finished, and when asked what it's like to drive compared to his tiny Fiat, he said "I get a lot of looks and uneasy faces from other drivers on the road because of how big the car is. Lot of cameras and pictures. I'm not really sure which is more attention-grabbing, this or the Fiat. I'm inclined to say the Chevrolet due

to the sheer size of the thing but both cars get a lot of attention."

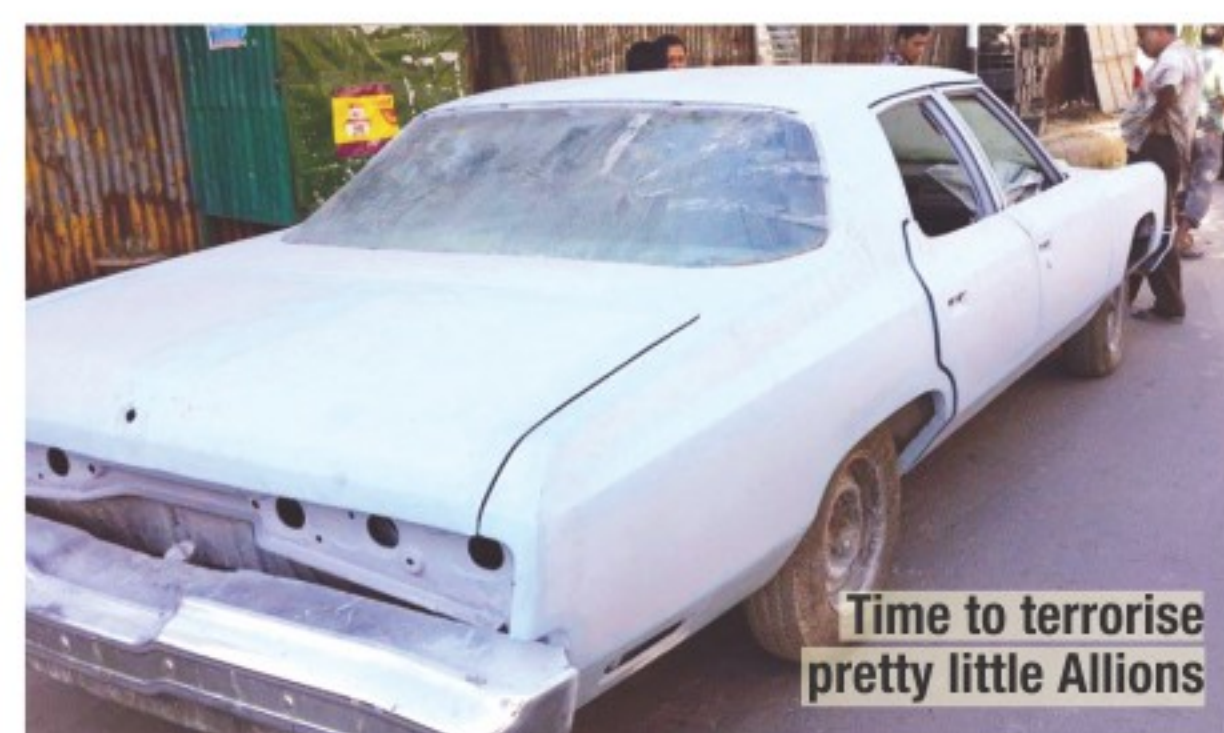
The number of stares we got while we were shooting the car was testament to how insane this land yacht is in terms of presence. It makes everyone standing around it feel like royalty, and with Akbar's bright yellow Fiat parked behind it, we felt like celebrities for a couple of hours.

You never stop working on a classic. Which is why there are a few surprises left in store for this and the Fiat. We'll be posting an update when all that happens. In the meantime we can't wait to see what Akbar lays his hands on next.

WORDS: SHAER REAZ
PHOTOS: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

What you see below is a fine collection of rust thanks to our beautifully balmy climate & drippy monsoon. The before pictures should be a testament to how far the skills have come of our auto body workshops.

PHOTOS: AADNAN ZAMAN



Surviving road rage

ANIKA ANJUM



In contrast to children waiting to be old enough to feel ways about stuff, I waited for my driving licence for as long as I can remember (and to own a gun but that's not happening, I suppose). However, although I am eligible to apply for one now, I haven't lifted a finger to go through the process. The reason for such apparent blasphemy, as it would seem to a ten year old me, is neither laziness nor the fact that I am reluctant to do anything that involves being in close proximity with unfamiliar people. I don't like driving anymore. In fact, unless I am asked to play chauffeur for family errands, I don't drive at all. This is because road rage and driving had become inseparable over the years. Weighing the enjoyment of driving against the possibility of being pissed off all day, I pass on the former. At every corner of the street, there is someone or the other who has made an utterly daft move, or not moved at all, causing a disturbance which, in turn, ruins the affected people's days entirely. It is quite normal for a person who has driven in Dhaka streets to be affected by anger issues caused by it.

Seneca, a Roman philosopher, stated, "Anger arises due to irrational ideas held about the world." We expect people to behave rationally. We expect the hobo to not jump in front of our cars and the indecisive driver to not block the left lane with the right indicator turned on. Although it is only fair to expect people to be non-suicidal, more often than not, they do run across the roads at their will, as if they are suddenly being chased by a space gorilla in a hippie hat waving a giant wrench. So, on what basis or statistics do we really expect them to

behave?

The solution to road rage--or anger in general, at that - may be simplified into one little step: stop expecting. Think of people as complete idiots. Every single one of them. Then, when even a single car uses its indicators on a turn, it is a bonus. One may argue how this philosophy is that of a defeatist, but consider it this way: if you train yourself to manoeuvre your car out of the sticky situations, you're the one levelling up with new skills and being able to keep your temper in check and, subsequently, not taking it out on someone else. Idiot drivers and pedestrians are out of your circle of influence and simply wishing they would act sensible has not made any change in the history of this country so far.

As a matter of fact, if a significant proportion of people start thinking this way and take it upon themselves to be extra-careful in the streets taking precautions against the horde of idiocy on the streets, it might just be safer on a larger scale for everyone to drive.

The writer is a young university student who knows more about valve angles and camshaft tolerances than we're afraid to ask.



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