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SHIFT

AUTOMOTIVE PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star



Driving straight onto the beaches of Kuakata, Patuakhali.



The man and his machine at JIMC, Kishoreganj.



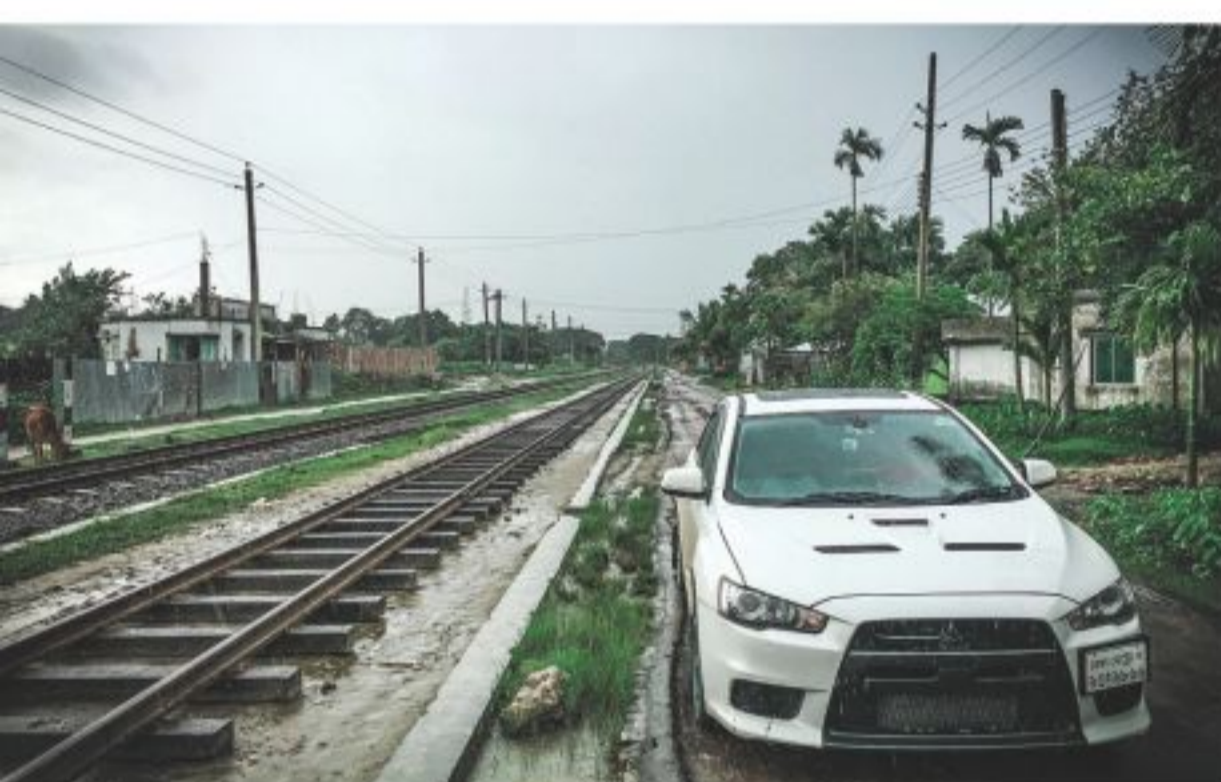
Beach buggies don't get cooler than this. Cox's Bazar - the largest stretch of uninterrupted natural sea beach in the world.

1 CAR, 13 DAYS, 64 DISTRICTS, 140 HOURS, 6155 KMS

Saidi Hossain's epic trip through 64 districts of Bangladesh in a Lancer Evolution, in record time.



Tea estates, smooth roads - Sreemangal, Moulvibazar.



Railroads took entire countries to their borders before the automobile came along.



Ever since humanity gained consciousness, there has been a curious need for the species to explore, untethered, getting to know their surroundings. On foot, horseback, drawn carts and finally the automobile, humanity has spread all over the globe and established itself as the dominant species on this planet. While some rightly think that this was a pretty bad idea, what with global warming, overpopulation and incessant, unsustainable drain of resources bringing Earth to its knees, there are people who still value a good adventure, the thrill of the open road and the importance of getting to know the place you call home.

Saidi Hossain, owner of Rahmania Auto Works, set out with his Lancer Evolution X on an epic journey all over Bangladesh, using the road legal rally car for its intended purpose, on and off tarmac. This week on Shift, he shares his story with us.

You finished the journey in record time. What was your route, and what was the average amount of time spent at each stop?

Saidi Hossain (SH): My route was Dhaka-Sylhet-Chittagong-Barisal-Khulna-Rajshahi-Rangpur-Mymensingh-Dhaka. The trip involved continuous driving in between districts, and during the day my crew and I covered as much distance as possible before stopping to eat and take photos at periodic intervals. Over 13 days, we didn't stop for lunch at all, relying on breakfast, dinner and tea breaks in between to get us through the day. Each stoppage lasted no more than half an hour, so we spent around that time in each district.

Any memorable driving roads?

SH: The road leading from Panchagarh to Nilphamari, via Debiganj, has to be the best road I've driven on in Bangladesh. A two lane highway with butter smooth roads, almost zero traffic, very few people, and occasionally winding left and right - with a car that has relatively good power, this road is blissful to drive on. Besides that, Khagrachari, Rangamati and Bandarban areas, with winding roads built through the hills by the Japanese, is the closest you'll come to experiencing proper corners in Bangladesh.

What about the worst roads?

SH: Chapainawabganj to Naogaon. Continuously broken

tarmac, jittery dirt roads. It was so bad that even a Lancer Evolution occasionally had trouble, although I have to say that the people there helped out a lot in crossing these bad roads.

Any trouble with law enforcement?

SH: Not at all. The police and anyone we came into contact with over the course of the trip were extremely helpful and courteous.

You mentioned stopping to eat in most districts. Any favourites?

SH: Hotel Akbaria in Bogra has the best beef and yoghurt I have ever tasted. Naogaon has the best milk tea.

Which districts or areas stood out for you?

SH: Sylhet was a big highlight, as we got to know about Baniachong village in Habiganj, which is apparently the largest village in Asia. Barisal was also a good experience despite the hectic ferry crossings - glad to report that bridges are being built to connect Barisal directly with the rest of the country, and will be open to the public soon. Barisal to Patuakhali and then directly driving to the beaches of Kuakata was a great experience, as was Bagerhat. Khulna's main town was also memorable because it is now hugely developed, yet it is clean and pristine, as if it was built the day before we arrived. Another great part of the journey was going towards Tetulia - from Kushtia to Rangpur, the roads were great, and on reaching the end of Bangladesh we realised that the place where the border to India starts and Bangladesh ends is actually called Banglabandha.

What advice would you give to other people wanting to embark on a journey like yours?

SH: Keep good people around you. Be mentally and physically prepared to drive 6-7 hours a day, for consecutive days if you want to cover the maximum amount of distance. Take a car that can be easily maintained - I took the Evolution because I know the car inside-out and it is reliable. Wash the car at the end of every day, or else the dirt and grime will ruin the paint.

AS TOLD TO: SHAER REAZ
 PHOTO COURTESY: SAIDI HOSSAIN



Why own a rally car if you won't take it off road?



Shortcut to Sunamganj from Habiganj. Blue skies, clear water, dirt roads.



AUTO NEWS



MAZDA RX9 HAPPENING?

Over the past weeks, rumours have built up on the new rotary powered RX successor in the sports car market. Mazda has not yet confirmed it, but might launch the RX-9 in 2020 to celebrate their 100 years. It is to be based on the RX Vision concept, hence we anticipate sharp jagged looks and sleek body styling. Mazda has teased us with some drive train details too -

1.6 litre twin rotor turbocharged motor with homogeneous-charge compression ignition (HCCI) to chuck out over 400 hp of RWD power. The transmission is said to be rear axle mounted, hence a perfect weight distribution is expected on the sub 1,300 kg coupe. If rumours are true, then we can expect a more concrete close-to-production concept next year.

COLLECTIBLES



KYOSHO 1/64 SUBARU LEGACY

Kyosho, makers of beautiful and often, too expensive diecast models, has sort of a horrid reputation when it comes to smaller scales. Their 1/64s are sometimes full of paint problems, with paint bubbles and rashes coming straight from the factory. Considering the premium price you usually pay for these highly detailed but sometimes faulty scale models, buying Kyosho in 1/64 is often a risk.

If there's any car that can get me to take that risk, it's a Subaru. More specifically, the Subaru Legacy RS rally car, complete with classic Subaru livery, gold wheels, and the mandatory roof and hood scoop. The interior detail is mind-blowing, with a rollcage, bucket seats and even the neck braces that sanctioned rally racers come with. The Legacy RS by Kyosho is available in three variants - two with rally decals but different numbers, another without decals - all clad in the signature Subaru blue-gold colour scheme. Yes, the paint is spot on, although you should be prepared to suffer the indignity of scratched up windows - the plastic gets ruined from thumbprints pretty easily.

Competing in the early 90's, the Legacy was a properly successful AWD rally car, but was eventually replaced by the lighter, swifter Impreza in the mid-90's. If you want a significant piece of rallying history sitting on your shelf, be prepared to cough up a little over 1500 taka.

WORDS AND PHOTOS: SHAER REAZ