

Fifty not out



50 years apart – a 1954 Morris Oxford alongside the new Avigo.

THE HINDUSTAN Ambassador has been around for as long as most of us can remember. Most of us learnt driving in one and the saying goes that if you can drive an Amby, you can drive any other car. Well, the granddaddy of all Indian cars has just turned fifty.

The Ambassador started out life as the Morris 10. Built by Morris Motor Company in the

UK, kits of these cars were imported to India and were assembled at the Hindustan Motors' (HM) factory at Calcutta. Then, in 1949, the company began assembling the Morris Oxford, renamed the Landmaster in 1954. The Landmaster was christened the Ambassador and has been built by HM at its Uttarpara plant since 1957.

To date, the Amby's basic shape has remained unchanged, save for minor reworking of the headlamps, grille, bonnet, bumpers and tail-lamps. This automotive icon continued living in its various guises as the Mark II, III and IV. Then in 1993, an engine upgrade to 1800cc brought more power. Fuel injection was introduced in 1999 in the Ambassador Classic. It is being sold today as the Avigo with a 1800cc petrol and a 2000cc diesel engine.

But, everybody knows all this. So, how is it possible that a car can be around for so long and keep selling? The Ambassador is the preferred choice for the government, judges, politicians, the military and taxi drivers. And as anyone who has lived with one



Late Raghbir Singh's famous Amby shot at the Kumbh mela.

knows, it is simple to repair. In fact, Oxonians Joanne Bowlt and Tim Nicholson are driving halfway across the world in their 1954 Morris Oxford (pictured alongside) because its simple mechanicals won't leave them stranded anywhere on their arduous journey (see page 139). Stories of how broken fan-belts have been temporarily fixed by replacing it with a rope are not uncommon. The rear seat's comfort and space are in a league of their own.

The car has also become synonymous with India. Any feature on the country by foreign television channels or magazines has to have an image of the Amby. The late renowned photographer Raghbir Singh even produced a travelogue of India seen through the windows of the Amby (see *Autocar India*, September 2000).

This legend is a part of India. Ambys have done everything from transporting generations of Indians and their luggage to being part of car chases in movies. It deserves to be around for at least another 50 years.