



Team OD was flagged off by TKM DMD production Shigeru Tomonaga, MD Hiroshi Nakagawa and DMD marketing Sandeep Singh



# Indian odyssey

Team OVERDRIVE heads out for an India Yatra on the Golden Quadrilateral in the Toyota Etios

Words & photography **Martin Alva**

**T**his story seems like one for our anniversary issue, where such epic drives and road trip extravaganzas belong. For the first time in over a year the entire editorial team was involved in an extraordinary drive encompassing the Golden Quadrilateral. We considered the exotic cars and then decided to drive the Toyota Etios on instead. Toyota claims this car has been conceptualised, designed and built for India and this would be the claim's ultimate test.

With the Toyota a few things are a given like reliability and quality but can Toyota's first car in the volume segment cut the Indian mustard? Well, the Etios has shone through our road tests and comparos, impressing us so much that it even won 2011 CNBC-TV18 OVERDRIVE Car of the Year. But nothing comes close to a long and gruelling real world test so roll on to the G-Quad.

In context of a long haul drive in summer, the Etios has an outstanding feature. It can hold and cool five one-litre bottles of water or six half-litre bottles of your favourite soft drink. Not even the Prado chiller holds as much. And nothing like having enough chilled fluids while driving across India.

Since Toyota intended to build a car for

India from the ground up, it opted for the bigger sedan version now that there is a fast growing number of Indians with disposable incomes who splurge on automobiles. The Etios is not a hatchback with a boot strapped on but a car designed to have a three-box layout from the start. Though there are hatchbacks that cost half of what an Etios does, it is sold out and commands waiting periods of over 4-5 months. And the company has announced an annual production of 70,000 units, no less. The Liva, which is a hatchback version of the Etios is due for launch in India and is aimed at those who do not want a boot in their car nor want to shell out extra dough for a larger car but the Etios is clearly aimed at the growing middle class family.

Like the Etios, the Golden Quadrilateral symbolises India's prosperity. The then BJP government deserves kudos for laying the foundation stone for this mega highway connecting the four metros. Connectivity is crucial to development and nothing comes close to the role this highway has played. The G-Quad has significantly cut travel times especially for the trucks and buses and has also aided in development of the surrounding areas. I've travelled on its highways a number of times over the years and there is noticeable

development wherever the highways run.

The OVERDRIVE Etios Yatra involved an over 6500km journey. We drove for 12 days (in four legs) starting from the Toyota factory at Bengaluru, and onwards to Mumbai via the NH8. We then proceeded to Delhi via Gujarat and Rajasthan. Heading east, we then drove through the heart of India all the way to Kolkata before driving south and reaching Chennai and returning to Bengaluru. The brief was to put the Etios through the ultimate test and verify its suitability for India. We divided the drive into four legs with two members of the team driving each leg.

The first leg began at Bengaluru where Sirish and I were flagged off at 12:30pm from the Toyota Kirloskar Motors factory by TKM bosses H Nakagawa (MD), Sandeep Singh (DMD marketing) and Shigeru Tomonaga (DMD production). Our plan was to be on the road by 11am IST but hey, IST also stands for Indian Stretchable Time. I rode shotgun armed with a smart phone and a wireless keyboard for documenting the trip on our blog. We got on to the crowded highway next to the industrial area in Bidadi where the TKM factory is located and hung a left for 'NICE' road (literally) and headed north.

Being the gadget freaks that we all at