

OVERDRIVE

FULL ROAD TEST

MAHINDRA XYLLO

THE INNOVA FINALLY HAS A RIVAL!



- + HYUNDAI i20
- SUZUKI GS150R
- SUZUKI INTRUDER
- MURCIELAGO LP640
- MERC SL63 AMG
- OPEL INSIGNIA
- DUCATI 1198S



**CNBC-TV18
OVERDRIVE
AWARDS 2009**

EXCLUSIVE!

**XCD135 DTS-Si
KICKS OFF BAJAJ'S
BLITZKRIEG**



Renault freezes India plans

Slew of launches put on hold to combat recession

AT the moment, all future plans of Renault for India - including the Laguna, Megane and Sandero (maybe) have been put on hold owing to the recession. Financial constraints have forced the French major to take this drastic step and put on hold all products that would have otherwise rolled out from its Chennai production facility. However construction work is still on to get the plant underway since the facility will also be used by the Nissan-Renault alliance. So in effect the Nissan assembly line would still be running even if Renault had to shut down theirs. This alliance also has a partnership with Bajaj to manufacture its ultra low cost car, development of which

has also slowed down though it is still very much on track.

Meanwhile Renault is evaluating a product portfolio that could be rolled out of its Nashik facility, built in association with Mahindra.

Renault says once the crisis is over, regular service will be resumed. If the Sandero does come to India, of course,

Mahindra would appear to be the logical manufacturing partner, but no decision has been taken - yet, we're told. Renault intended to bring the Laguna in via the CBU route, and was looking at manufacturing the Megane here, when the financial crisis hit.



Pricing is Fiat Linea icing



THE gorgeous Fiat Linea which completely blew us away and is also the CNBC-TV18 OVERDRIVE Mid-size Car of the Year, has arrived at a showroom near you at very attractive prices. Launched at a glittering ceremony in Mumbai, the Linea costs between Rs 6.18 and Rs 7.2 lakh for the petrol variants and Rs 7.1 lakh to Rs 8.35 lakh for the diesel variants, ex-showroom Mumbai.

Both petrol and diesel variants will come in three trim levels each.

Mahindra Xylo plays sweet tune

THE Mahindra Xylo has been launched at very attractive prices. The E2 is priced at Rs 6.24 lakh, the E4 at Rs 6.69 lakh, the E6 at Rs 7.32 lakh and the E8 at Rs 7.69 lakh. The base model has all creature comforts including air-conditioning, power steering and power windows and the list grows longer with higher trim levels.



Candid Maruti

MARUTI Suzuki will display fuel economy information on all of its models available in India. The numbers displayed will be the ones generated in testing from institutions like ARAI, according to the manufacturer. SIAM had announced a programme in September 2008 that would encourage all its members to voluntarily display the fuel economy of the vehicle from March 2009. Maruti has jumped the gun, in a good way. And with numbers ranging from 21 (Swift and DZire diesel) to 11.2 (Grand Vitara), there's no reason for the company to be shy about them either, right? The tests are held under standard conditions - two persons in the car, no aircon, standard fuel, gear changes and acceleration at preset levels, standard air pressure in tyres and so forth - aim being for the conditions to be re-creatable, and therefore, the results being directly comparable.

Audi A6 price slashed

AUDI is offering a new set of incentive packages for the A6, including zero per cent finance and an extended four-year warranty. Audi also announced a price cut following the revision of excise and cenvat cuts, and the A6 has gotten Rs 1.51 lakh cheaper.



OPPOSING LOCK SIRISH CHANDRAN

There's a lot to love about the business we're in – fast cars, fast bikes, exotic locations. But what I love the most, what really keeps me buzzing is the excitement and anticipation at a new launch. The first time you lay eyes on the finished car (especially after the endless speculation, spy shots and artists' impressions), the first time you get behind the wheel and run hands over the interior trim, those first tentative kilometres which generally make or break the car, the nervous anticipation of the engineer as he awaits your initial verdict.

I love it to bits, a first drive of a brand new vehicle, but it doesn't happen too often in India. When it does it leaves you gutted. The Indica Vista – I had huge expectations from it, had seen it testing, heard of it being developed at MIRA in the UK. I even told friends to hold on to their existing cars in the hope that benchmarks would be re-written. But when I finally got behind the wheel everything came crashing down. And the new Sumo Grande? It's simply atrocious. I like to believe that the reason you don't see too many new Indicas and Sumos is because customers too have realised these vehicles aren't up to scratch in this day and age.

So last week I drove down to Nashik with little expectations from the Xylo – if Tata can't get things right, what hope does Mahindra have? Moreover, I still remember driving the very first Scorpio from Nashik to Pune and, god, that car was bad – no car ever tried as hard to kill me and when it couldn't it just broke down on us.

Let us face it; Mahindra hasn't done

itself any favours by giving the Xylo such a ridiculous front end (this after the Scorpio which, if nothing, was at least a looker). That's it I thought – the unravelling of the much vaunted Indian automotive story – and eased off, very gently, on to the test track. A lap later it struck me that the Xylo wasn't doing anything funny. Pushed a little harder and she didn't try to kill me. Five laps later, I stopped and couldn't

hide my excitement at the fact that the Xylo actually works, works almost as well as an Innova (and that's as high as praise can go).

You'll read all about the Xylo in the road test. What I want to impress on you is the fact that Mahindra is unlike most car companies that we run into. Rarely, if ever, do car companies admit their mistakes – M&M candidly admits to getting things wrong with the Scorpio, but also insists that those mistakes won't be repeated. The biggest mistake with the Scorpio was that it was incomplete, that the last 10 per cent R&D was left for customers to do. Of course every successive iteration of the Scorpio was much improved (and today it's a damn good SUV that I'd recommend to anybody without hesitation) but that's not how you launch a car. We auto journos have always whispered to friends to wait for a year before buying a newly introduced car to give engineers time to sort out all the niggles that didn't crop up in their tests, to put in all the parts they forgot to put in and to finish all the R&D they forgot to do. With the Xylo it's safe to say that customers won't be expected to do any R&D because Mahindra has really paid attention.

No longer do they flinch when questions are raised about crash safety (it meets European norms for its class, says M&M) or emissions. It is built well. Rs 550 crore went into the Ingenio project over four years and since Mahindra had the luxury of using the existing Scorpio line (of course with updates), a lot of that cash was used in setting up a whole new body shop for the Xylo which is pretty much state-of-the-art with final shell assembly being

done entirely by robots. Mahindra's plant engineers are hugely proud of it (rightfully so) even claiming it's the first time in India (not true). A 100 prototypes were built (which everybody has seen testing on the expressway for the past few years), which together have clocked over a million kilometres not just in India but in Sweden, Australia and South Africa.

All that reflects in a car that rides very well, handles well (obviously within the goal posts that you'd set for an MPV) and is quick and comfortable to do distances in. The Scorpio was bizarre in that it couldn't accommodate three rows of seats unless one set of passengers had their legs chopped off. This one has more space than an Innova. And inside there's an unusual amount of attention paid to the detailing, so much so that you even have read-outs for humidity and a trip meter for distance travelled with the air-con! There are only two things I miss – airbags and ABS – but that will come soon enough (has to when exports pick up).

Six years back the running joke was that Mahindra did the front of the Scorpio but money ran out by the time they reached the rear. That's why we had a sheer cliff face for a tailgate and leaf spring suspension that, on the road, made the front and rear behave like two different vehicles. The Xylo has a contemporary rear end and coil spring suspension and as a result feels cohesive, reliable and predictable.

Of course you might say that all cars today are impeccably engineered; we don't write paeans of praise for an i10 or an A-star that are brilliant cars with absolutely no nasty surprises. So why all the hoopla? Just because the Xylo is an Indian car designed, developed and manufactured in India?

In a word – yes.

A decade from now when historians write Brand India's automotive story, it's not the MNCs taking advantage of cheap labour to manufacture in India that will be talked about. It's the Indicas and Scorpions, Xylos and Nanos that will star in that story. If the Xylo is anything to go by, there's still hope for Indian engineering capabilities to shine against the best in the world.

Now I can't wait for the Nano. **C**

Indi-genius



Robots are used to weld Xylo body shells at the brand new body shop.

Xtra sting

The Mahindra Xylo has the sedan segment firmly in its sights besides the class leader Innova.

Words: *Sirish Chandran* | Photography: *Gaurav S Thombre*

- + Extremely good value for money
- + Well built, ergonomic and stylish interiors
- + Excellent ride quality especially over broken roads
- Awkward styling won't suit most tastes
- Access to rear most seat not very good
- No luggage space with full complement of passengers





RIDE & HANDLING



Like all Mahindras, the Xylo too gets a simple yet rugged body on ladder frame set-up. However a lot of work has gone into the body engineering of the Xylo and there's a brand new body shop in which final assembly of the floorpan, sides (which is stamped out of a single piece unlike the Scorpio) and roof is done by robots and is completely automated to ensure pin-point accuracy. This has made the chassis 120 per cent more rigid than the Scorpio while unsprung masses have also been reduced to give it better dynamics.

The big news though is that leaf spring suspension has finally been consigned to the dustbin. The Xylo gets independent double wishbone suspension at the front while at the rear there's proper multi-link suspension with coil springs, gas filled shocks to eliminate cavitation and something called European

valving which offers better transition from tarmac to off-road conditions. And it works. The ride quality is very good and at speed she smoothes broken roads with disdain. In that respect it's perfectly suited to Indian roads and conditions delivering great straight line stability even when the going gets rough. The handling, within the limits that you would expect off an MPV, is rather good, thanks also to the fat 215-section Bridgestone rubber. Push her hard and there's a fair bit of body roll and of course she settles into understeer but it is all predictable and even mid corner bumps don't result in any nasty surprises from the rear. The steering is much like the Scorpio's, a bit vague and heavy and lacking in feel.

The big question - how does it compare to the Innova? And the answer will have to be that the Innova is still the better handler though the Xylo does manage to ride better over rough roads.

VERDICT

Four years in the making, Rs 550 crore spent, over 100 prototypes built and over a million kilometres clocked in testing all over the world including Sweden, South Africa, Great Britain and Australia have resulted in an MPV that has us all pleasantly surprised. I doubt if many would have expected the Xylo to pose headaches to the Innova but it will, no question about it, and that's on pure merit - on the quality and attention to detail of the interiors, on equipment levels, on ride quality, on space and on the engine and transmission package. To top it all there's the pricing

that is shockingly good.

The base E2 variant is priced at Rs 6.25 lakh ex-showroom Delhi and that's enormous value-for-money especially when compared to the E variant of the Innova that costs Rs 7.6 lakh and doesn't get air-conditioning, power steering, power windows and central locking. Even the base Tavera is priced at Rs 6.17 lakh and that's totally out of its depth in this company.

The fully loaded E8 variant of the Xylo is priced at Rs 7.7 lakh which is over a lakh and a half cheaper than the equivalent Innova G4

variant which, despite the price, doesn't get alloys, parking sensors or the 2DIN stereo. The equivalent Tavera costs a frankly absurd Rs 9.61 lakh! Of course you can get airbags and ABS as an option on the Innova which you don't on the Xylo but otherwise this pricing is just astonishing. It even makes diesel sedans like the Fiesta and Verna look pricey and, dare I say it, irrelevant. Of course the era of sedans is far from over but the Xylo gives them such a close run for their money, that for once it looks like all the marketing mumbo jumbo is grounded in reality. C

TESTER'S NOTES



Sirish Chandran

Sit inside and you might mistake yourself for being in a Scorpio - a much better Scorpio! The driving position, drivetrain and general feel of the car leans towards SUVs though compared to the Scorpio her ride, straight line stability and handling are much better. It's quick too, 0-100kmph in under 16 seconds for something so big and heavy is surprising.



Bertrand D'souza

Thoroughly impressed with what can and am sure will be one of India's best people movers. We have driven this engine before but it never ever felt this refined, smooth or quick. Though not impressive dynamics comfortable enough for the average driver. Fantastic seats, decent room and loads of features make it great value for money.

Toyota Innova G4



Chevy Tavera Neo LT



Tata Sumo Grande GX



Mahindra Scorpio SLX



	Toyota Innova G4	Chevy Tavera Neo LT	Tata Sumo Grande GX	Mahindra Scorpio SLX
OD rating	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Engine	2494cc, common rail	2499cc, DI	2179cc, DICOR	2609cc, CRDe
Power	102PS@3600rpm	80PS@3900rpm	120PS@4000rpm	115PS@3800rpm
Torque	200Nm@1400-3400rpm	186Nm@1800rpm	250Nm@1500-3000rpm	255Nm@1700-2200rpm
0-100kmph	12.6s	22.9s	17.8s	21.5s
Top speed	151kmph	141kmph	144kmph	142kmph
Fuel efficiency	11.8kmpl	14.3kmpl	12.7kmpl	10.4kmpl
Ex-New Delhi	Rs 9.29 lakh	Rs 9.61 lakh	Rs 7.63 lakh	Rs 7.95 lakh
	+ Car-like to drive + Excellent refinement + Best-in-class dynamics - Boring styling - Price	+ Economical + 10-seater available - Dynamics - Refinement - Needs an update	+ Front styling + Space - Refinement - Quality - Handling & braking	+ Style & performance + Good mile muncher - Handling - Poor body control - Third row space