



(From left) Author Gautam Sen, Arvind Singhji of Mewar and French ambassador Jerome Bonnafont raise a toast to the coffee table book, *The Maharajas and their Magnificent Motor Cars*, at the French embassy on Wednesday evening

By Ranojoy Mukerji

HAPPY hours descended on the French embassy as the glitterati, the chatterati, the royalty, old money, new money and the yet-to-acquire money came forward for the launch of scribe Gautam Sen's book on royalty and their cars, titled *The Maharajas & Their Magnificent Motor Cars* on Wednesday evening.

It is worth noting that in the early 20th century, Indian royalty gave a higher preference to their motors than their canines or their spouses (the latter two not necessarily in that order), and if it were not for Indian royal patronage, many fine jewellers, coach-building and customising companies from Europe would have gone down under pretty easily.

It has become fashionable for journalists to write books these days and Sen utilises his deep knowledge and access to a lot of hidden treasures of information on early motor cars from the continent to write a rare gem of a picture book.

The book was officially released by Arvind Singhji of Mewar, himself a prolific collector of some amazing cars of the early days of motoring, all housed beautifully at his museum in the palace grounds of Udaipur. Whilst releasing the book, Singhji appealed to people to keep the documentation of their cars in order and also requested the government to help get back so-

A royal jaunt from the past



A 1934 Rolls Royce 20/25 7 Passenger Sedan, from Diljeet Titus's collection, was on display at the launch of the coffee table book

me of the finest leons of motoring history which have been sold overseas.

The function was hosted at the residence of the French ambassador Jérôme Bonnafont who played the perfect host — that's a task that comes easy to him as he hosts some of the finest

evenings in town worth attending. Bonnafont spoke about great Indo-French ties and how Sen's book, which was first published in French, has been well received in France.

Sen spoke about the book a few minutes later and reminded the audience how well-designed

French cars were — without mentioning the fact that they never ran properly. That credit should go to the Germans, and nowadays, to the Japanese. Other eminent speakers who spoke of their collections with passion were Nitin Dossa, Ravi Prakash and Diljeet Titus. Two vintage cars from Titus's collection were also on display: a 1934 Rolls-Royce 20/25 7 Passenger Sedan (coachbuilt by Kellner, France) and a 1930 Stutz Series M, 4 Passenger Speedster, Dual Cowl Le Baron.

The evening air was conducive to flying kisses and the French wine was heady, so after about half-an-hour of the start of the cocktails, everybody became friends enough to display bonhomie, which only spiritual upliftment can otherwise bring. Singhji seemed to be enjoying the evening too as the ladies milled around him and the wannabes got their photos clicked with him.

As the legends of cars merged with the stars under a clear sky, it indeed turned out to be a wonderful evening!