

## DEDICATION

*For my wife Anne and my son Milan, for their huge help and their patience...*

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## CHAPTER 1

# THE CITY OF AUTOMOTIVE JOY

Contrary to popular belief, the second city of the British Empire wasn't always a city of poverty, depravation, filth and slums. It was, until 1911, the capital of British India, a city that the English colonialists built with their own image and thinking in mind, a city that had the best of Gothic, baroque and Roman architectural styles, as well as oriental and Indo-Islamic motifs – a combination that made Calcutta a rather picturesque city.

Created by the East India Company in 1690, specifically by the company's administrator, Job Charnock, as a trading post for the English, Calcutta comprised three villages: Govindapur, Sutanuti and Kalikata. It got its anglicised name from Kalikata, although this has since been rectified by the current 'official' renaming as Kolkata. Officially consecrated as the capital of British India in 1772, Calcutta as a city experienced rapid growth during the time of Richard Wellesley, the Governor General between 1797 and 1805. Tree-lined avenues were constructed in the European style, many impressive administrative buildings were built and it became an important port for the trade of opium with China.

In time the city was split into two distinct areas – one British, known as the White Town, the other Indian, known as the Black Town. The White Town – the central district around the huge green expanse known as the Maidan – was as elegant as any of the important European cities. Sure enough, the Black Town was

where the impoverished natives lived, though among them the wealthier Indians, including the rajas and the maharajas, had carved out a tidy part of the suburbs, where sprawling palaces with magnificent estates contrasted sharply with the surrounding slums.

As the British had begun their empire-building with the decimation of Bengal, the Nawab of Bengal and his extended family – over the years – were completely eliminated. Just the princely states of Cooch Behar and Tripura survived and they became a part of the Bengal Presidency, collecting revenue on behalf of the English. For the rest of the state of Bengal, the British administrators decided to retain the feudal system that was already in existence, elevating many of the landed gentry to the status of rajas and maharajas, most of whom realised that to further their own interest they needed to be closer to where the seat of power was, and so they went about constructing fabulous residences in Calcutta. Thus, by the time India had become the crown jewel of the British Empire – and Calcutta had become the second most important city of that empire – the city was an impressive metropolis, rightfully gaining the title of 'City of Palaces'.

The coalescence of British and Indian culture resulted in the emergence of a new class of urbane Indians called the 'babus', whose members were often bureaucrats and professionals, who read

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Preceding page: The Alfa Romeo Monza and an Indian one-off, the Bijou, at the Alipore tracks. (CMSC Collection)

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Calcutta, once the second city of the British Empire.

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Calcutta retains a very European look and feel.





The various participants at Calcutta's first automotive event. (CMSC Collection/National Library, Calcutta)

newspapers in both English and Bengali, were Anglophiles and in time developed a taste for Western civilisation and technology. And even though the very first automobile arrived in Mumbai in 1897, it was Calcutta that rapidly embraced the newfangled toy for the rich, so much so that the Automobile Association of Bengal – the first automotive association in India – set the ball rolling for all the other automobile associations that followed.

The Automobile Association of Bengal also introduced the first competitive activity fairly early in the history of the automobile. In the spring of 1904, it organised a drive from Calcutta to Barrackpore, a small cantonment town used as a base for the military, just 40km north of the capital of British India. Essentially for likeminded gentlemen (and one lady), the 11-car grid may not have sounded very impressive but it was 11 out of a total of 60-odd cars registered in the Bengal Presidency, which of course made the turnout fairly significant.

It wasn't really a race, but more an amiable trundle to a distant suburb, with a debonair break for tea at the country house of Maharaja Bahadur Sir Jeetendro Mohun Tagore. But for its time it was quite a feat, considering that cars in those days had to be hand-cranked, were hopelessly unreliable, had a ride that made sure that dentures fell out and suffered a tyre puncture every other kilometre. The most powerful car

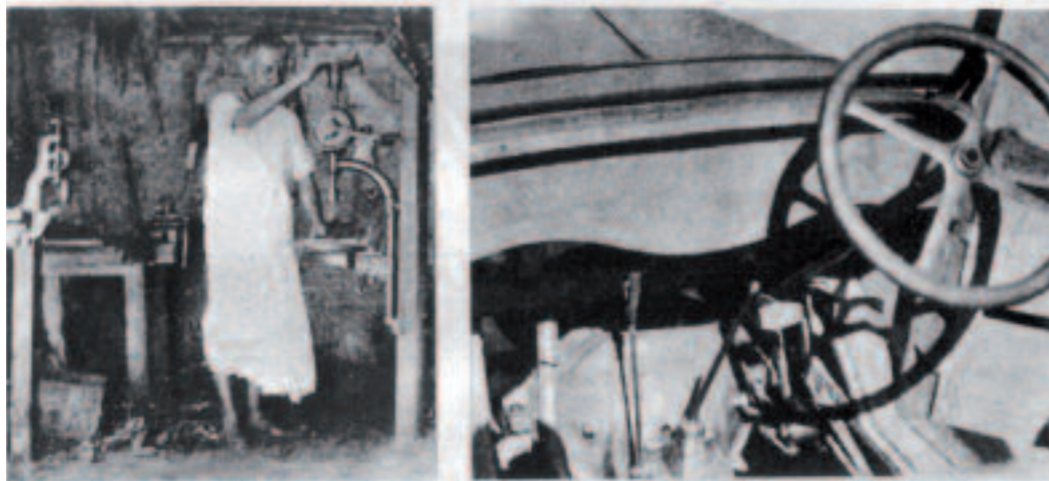
developed a meagre 8.5bhp, but it was sport nonetheless as cars weren't quite point-A-to-point-B transportation as yet. It is possible that the Calcutta–Barrackpore run was the first motorsport event in all of Asia.

It was an all-Brit event, naturally. And automotive sport in India remained largely so until the country gained independence, but it did stir up attention. Such races never became seriously competitive events, and remained languid, rally-style drives with the occasional parade and tea party thrown in. Although not exactly white-knuckle experiences, they did lay the foundations for Calcutta to become the centre of the automotive field.

At the least, four of the more significant cars featured in this book – the 1912 Brooke Swan Car, the 1928 Rolls-Royce Phantom I 17EX, the 1928 Mercedes-Benz Type K and Raja Sajid Hussain's Isotta Fraschini – spent time in Calcutta as part of some enthusiast's garage. Many of the cars that form the collections of several prominent present-day collectors, such as Pranal Bhogilal, Dr Vijay Mallya, Dharmaditya Patnaik and Dr Ravi Prakash, are vehicles that were once based in Calcutta. Keen enthusiasts such as barrister P.K. Mitter and his brother between themselves owned some of the finest cars at the time – cars like the Rolls-Royce 17EX, an Isotta Fraschini, two Duesenbergs (formerly owned by the two sons of the Nizam of

The cars line up for the Calcutta to Barrackpore run, 1904. (CMSC Collection/National Library, Calcutta)





1. विभिन्नविधों के नाम व उनके 'अवली' चित्र 2. 'अवली' के चित्र व. 'अवली' के चित्र व. विभिन्नविधों के चित्र 3. 'अवली' के चित्र व. विभिन्नविधों के चित्र

The first attempt at making an indigenous car, the Swadeshi, by Calcutta-based entrepreneur Bipin Behari Das. (CMSC Collection/National Library, Calcutta)

Hyderabad, the Prince of Berar Azam Jah and Muazzam Jah), a Mercedes-Benz 250 roadster and a Packard, among others.

Also the first attempt at putting together an all-Indian car was made in Calcutta too, when entrepreneur Bipin Behari Das's indigenously built car, the Swadeshi – echoing Mahatma Gandhi's self-reliance sentiments – was readied in the 1920s. Of course, the authorities didn't care for such thinking and so made it difficult for the parts to be imported – and the car remained just a

one-off dream. At the same time, the British did encourage India's oldest coachbuilders, Steuart & Co., which had set up base in Calcutta in 1775, to flourish (of course, it was English owned).

But it was following independence that the automotive world in India became more exciting. In 1949, a small advertisement in the 'personal' section of *The Statesman*, Calcutta's leading English-language newspaper, asked anyone interested in racing to turn up at Red Road on one Sunday afternoon. Red

A DISCOUNT OFF PRICES OF  
**NEW AND SECOND-HAND MOTOR CARS!!**  
We will allow you a discount off our prices of Motor Cars at present in stock during June & July as we want to clear to make room for New Stock.



**NEW CARS**  
28-H.P. 6-Cylinder Land Rover Co. built on similar lines to the two supplied to J.M. Rowan & Co. Limited, Bangalore. Price Rs. 11,000.  
14-H.P. 4-Cylinder Star Magneto Ignition. 4-seater. Rs. 5,000.

**SECOND-HAND CARS.**  
10-H.P. 3-Cylinder Land Rover. Magneto Ignition. 2-seater. Rs. 3,000.  
14-H.P. 4-Cylinder Valves. 4-seater. Rs. 3,125.  
10-H.P. 3-Cylinder Valves. 2-seater. Rs. 2,000.  
10-12-H.P. 4-Cylinder Rover. 4-seater. Rs. 2,700.  
10-12-H.P. 3-Cylinder Star. 4-seater. Rs. 2,300.

ALL CARS OFFER IN GOOD RUNNING ORDER. CATALOGUE ON APPLICATION.  
**W. LESLIE & CO., 5, Chowringhee Road.**

Advertisements from a car dealer and India's oldest coachbuilder, Steuart & Co, which had set up base in Calcutta in 1775. (CMSC Collection)

**ESTABLISHED 1775.**  
**COACH AND MOTOR BODY BUILDERS.**  
By Special Appointment to  
**H. R. H. THE PRINCE OF WALES and H. E. THE EARL OF MINTO.**



The illustration is that of a Thorneycroft Chassis with Body by STEUART & CO.  
Specification and Drawing of Body to suit any make of Chassis on application.

**STEUART & CO., 3, Mangoe Lane, CALCUTTA,**  
AGENTS FOR THORNEYCROFT CARS.

Road is one of Calcutta's well-known avenues, very much in the centre of the city, and is ruler straight – it was constructed as an airstrip during the Second World War for planes to land or take off in the eventuality that the Japanese Army advanced deeper into India. That didn't happen (though Calcutta did get bombed) and the airstrip became a broad avenue right at

the centre of town. It got the appellation Red Road as during the summer months when the Royal Poinciana trees lining the sides of the road are in full blossom, it is the reddest avenue in the world.

So, on that fateful Sunday, 15 petrolheads turned up and the Calcutta Motor Sports Club (CMSC) was born, with the wealthy enthusiast the Maharaja of Burdwan as patron. At the nearby



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Everything goes! From Singers, Citroëns and MGs to home-built specials. (CMSC Collection)

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Kanchrapara airfield (which used to be a base for a couple of squadrons of Supermarine Spitfires during the Second World War), the drivers took part in trials to gauge ability, and finally scratch races were organised, with competitions held every Sunday. Everything was done in a relaxed fashion, with a hat passed around for expenses and a friendly atmosphere, while skills improved imperceptibly yet steadily.

Then, the CMSC managed to get permission to use the Alipore Mint airfield, in the southern part of the city, and the events became more serious. A track was marked out and people started turning out in droves, both in stock machinery and in specials – one-off cars knocked together from assorted parts, normally existing chassis-powertrain set-ups with lightweight bodyworks. And along with the cars came the spectators





From an SS100 (top), MGs and Morrisies to very convincing single-seaters (this car, right, is another one-off special called the Rustom), racing in Calcutta was always action-packed. (CMSC Collection)



and hangers-on. Calcutta had its own Grand Prix, the first ever in India. Robbie Robertson won the first Calcutta Grand Prix in 1953. Tutu Imam, driving a massive Lagonda (amateurishly, yet effectively modified), took the prize the next year and Eddie Isaacs – who raced an SS100 – won in 1955 and again in 1957.

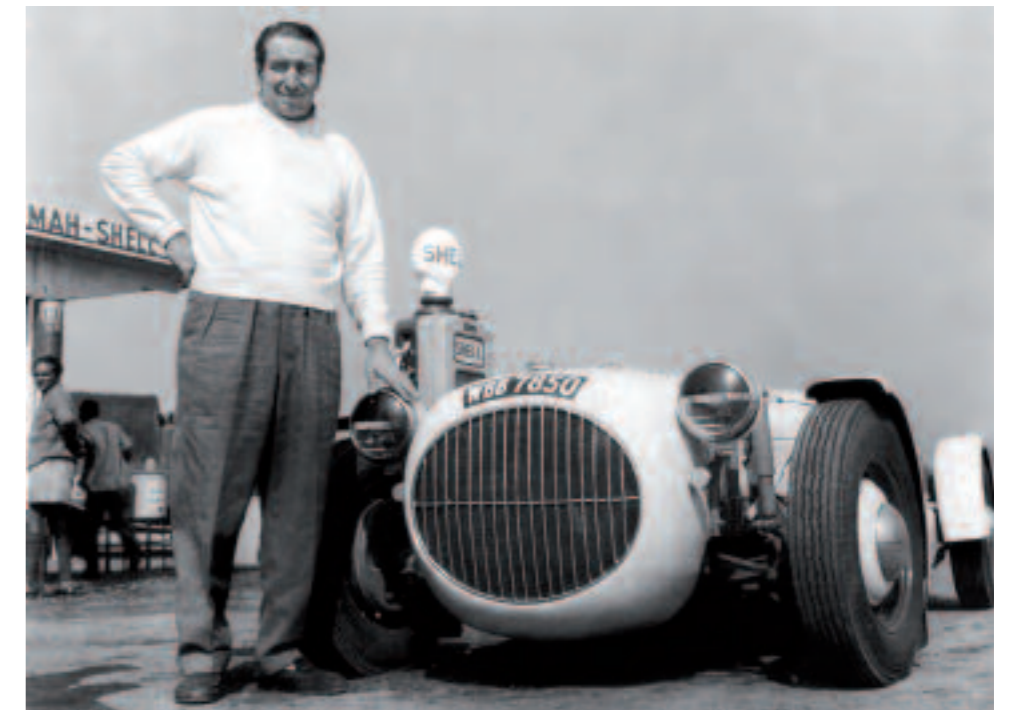
However, people turned up in pretty much anything that they could knock together, oddities like a Land Rover-based single-seater and a contraption with a Jaguar engine in an Avon chassis (or was it a Standard with an Avon body, one of the cars that is featured later?) challenged serious racers that included an Allard, a Lancia, MGs, Jaguars, a Bentley, a Lagonda, even Citroëns and Studebakers. Eventually, Calcutta had a

really serious racer in the form of an Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 Monza.

The cars were indeed fascinating, with interesting histories. The Alfa Monza, for instance, was imported into India by a British Army officer, Lieutenant Marsden, who sold it to a fellow officer by the name of Jimmy Braid some time after the end of the Second World War. Then it was acquired by a raja apparently, who exchanged this car (for an ordinary Fiat 1100) with American Howard Jackson. Though Jackson worked and lived in the industrial town of Jamshedpur (which is about 125 miles/200km west of Calcutta), the car was garaged in Calcutta. Jackson was already well known on the Calcutta racing scene,



The Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 Monza in action at the Alipore track. Though chassis no 2311206 dated from 1933, it was still a very potent racer in the 1950s. (CMSC Collection)



Hruska and his Ixion Special at the Alipore circuit, in 1955. (CMSC Collection)



The SS100 today, in Mumbai, with its proud owner, Bollywood star Jackie Shroff, and his wife, Ayesha. (Makarand Baokar)

where he was a regular in a SS100. But when he obtained the Alfa, the SS100 was disposed of to a fellow racer.

The Alfa Monza was far from new – chassis no.2311206 had been delivered new to Renato Balestrero in Genoa, Italy, way back in June 1933. Balestrero campaigned the car in several races and hill climbs and had to his credit one outright win at the Varese Campo dei Fiori hill climb. In 1934, the car recorded three sports-car-class wins at hill climbs in France, Germany and Austria. The car was also raced at the Monaco GP of 1934, but it failed to finish. In 1935, it had less success, other than a class win at the Kesselberg hill climb. The car was then sold to Giacomo de Rham (a Swiss man living in Italy) in December 1935. Participating in the 1936 edition of the Mille Miglia, chassis no.2311206 finished a creditable seventh overall.

According to Alfa Monza expert Simon Moore in his book entitled *The Legendary 2.3*, in which an entire chapter is devoted to no.2311206, the car changed hands several times, and by September 1937, it was owned by Emilio Romano, who participated in the 1938 Mille Miglia, where it failed to finish. The body was then modified – ‘modernised’ essentially – and the car was raced at the Coppa di Natale on Christmas Day in 1938 at Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, which at that time was a part of Eastern Africa that was occupied by imperialist Italy. The car stayed there during the war

years and was at that point owned by Mario Riccioni. The Monza was finally ‘liberated’ by British troops in 1942, and was taken on by Lieutenant Marsden who took it to India when he was transferred to the subcontinent.

Featuring a double-overhead cam 2.6-litre supercharged engine (with Roots-type supercharger), the Alfa’s engine was made of two blocks of four cylinders each with the geartrain for the camshafts fitted between them. What was unusual was that it had two rev counters – a typical Tazio Nuvolari requirement it seems, and that was what gave rise to the speculation that the car may have been raced by that man from Mantua, but marque historian Simon Moore confirms that that wasn’t true at all.

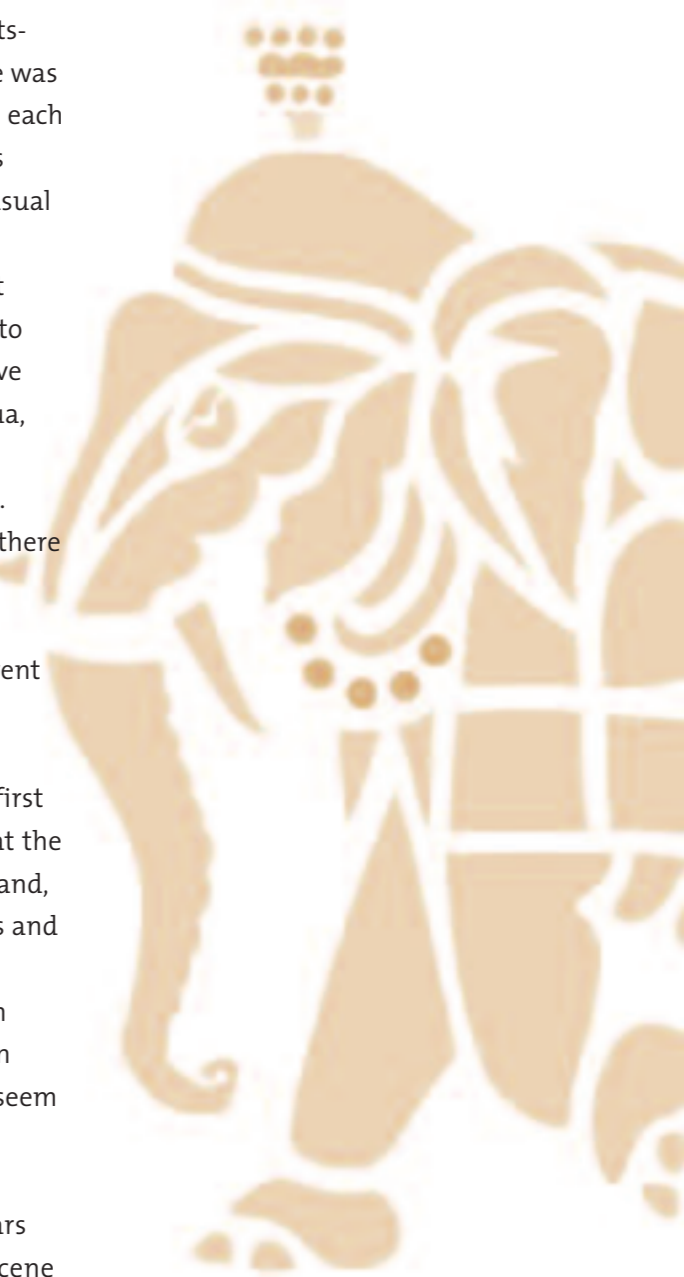
About the history of the Allard J2 there was no speculation. The car was originally delivered to Desmond Titterton in Britain – who later went on to become a Jaguar works racing driver – on 1 September 1951. After a running-in period, the car made its first public appearance on 19 April 1952, at the Mansbery hill climb in Northern Ireland, where it took two firsts, two seconds and fastest sports-car climb of the day. Subsequently, the car participated in Phoenix Park, Dublin and Dundrod in Northern Ireland, but there doesn’t seem to be much record of further wins.

Though just 99 of these J2s were made between 1951 and 1953, the cars did very well on the sports-racing scene



The SS100 in action (right) during the 1950s. (CMSC Collection)

With everything allowed, even a Studebaker President clashed fenders with Citroëns and other cars. (CMSC Collection)





The modified Lancia of Tutu Imam at the Alipore track. (CMSC Collection)

The same Lancia today: one of many cars belonging to collector Harit Trivedi. (Makarand Baakar)



in the early 1950s: an outright win at Watkins Glen in the US, a first-in-class at the 1950 Le Mans and at the Scottish Rest-and-be-Thankful race, outright wins at the Portuguese and Danish hill climb championships, as well as being declared the fastest sports car at the Brighton Speed Trials and the fastest unsupercharged car at the Swiss Vue des Alps.

Titterington became a part of the Jaguar works team and the Allard was sold off to Calcuttan Alan Ramsay, who replaced his not-so-competitive Lancia with the Anglo-American hybrid. Built mostly out of Ford parts, the Allard used a Mercury engine with Ardun aluminium heads, with overhead valve conversion. Maximum power was estimated at 140bhp at about 4,000rpm, though the red line was at 5,500rpm. On the straights at the Alipore track, the Allard usually topped 100mph/160kph in top gear. And sure enough the Allard – with Ramsay at the wheel – held the lap record at the Alipore track with an average speed of 62.86mph/100.58kph during the late 1950s.

The other Italian machinery, other than the Alfa, was a stylish little Lancia – campaigned by Alan Ramsay before he switched to the Allard – that may have been based on the chassis of an Augusta. At some point, the narrow-angle V4 engine that originally powered it seems to have expired, and it was replaced by a 1.5-litre engine from a 1936 SS saloon.

The Castrol truck as support vehicle. (CMSC Collection)

The Allard J2 of Alan Ramsay won several times at Alipore. (CMSC Collection)







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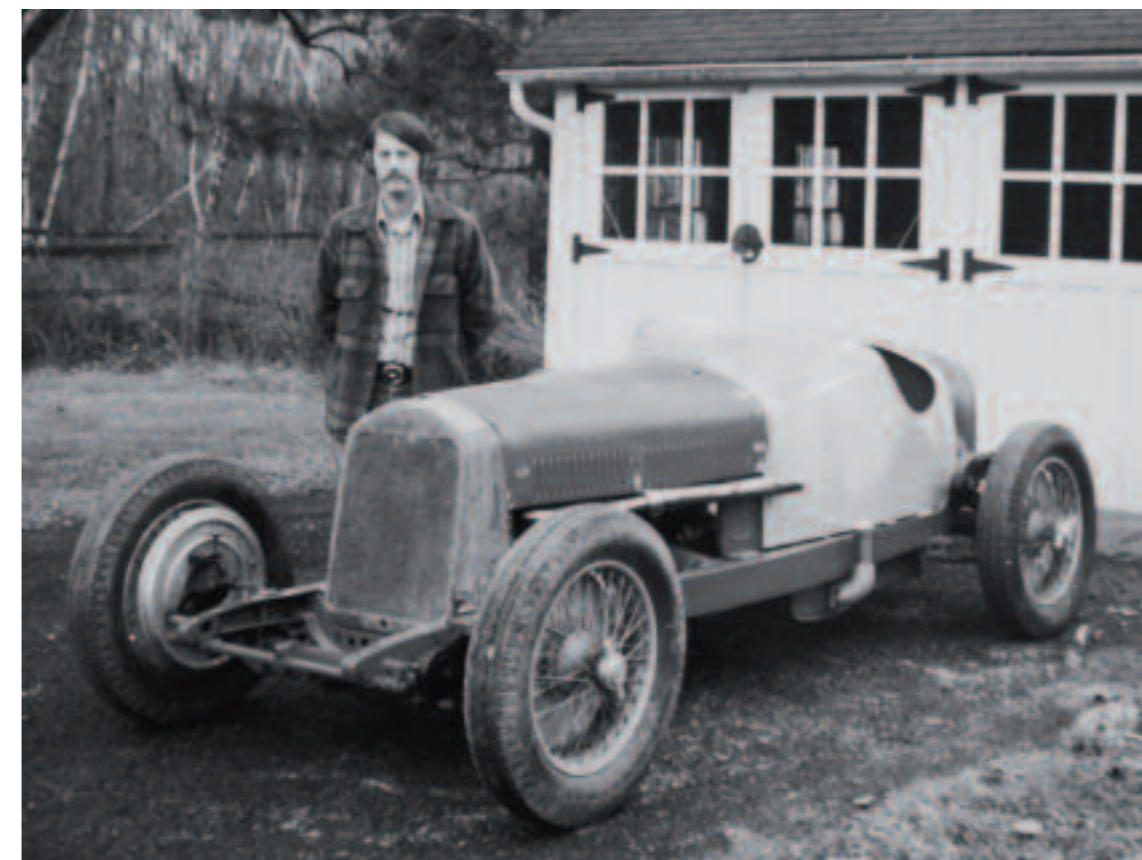
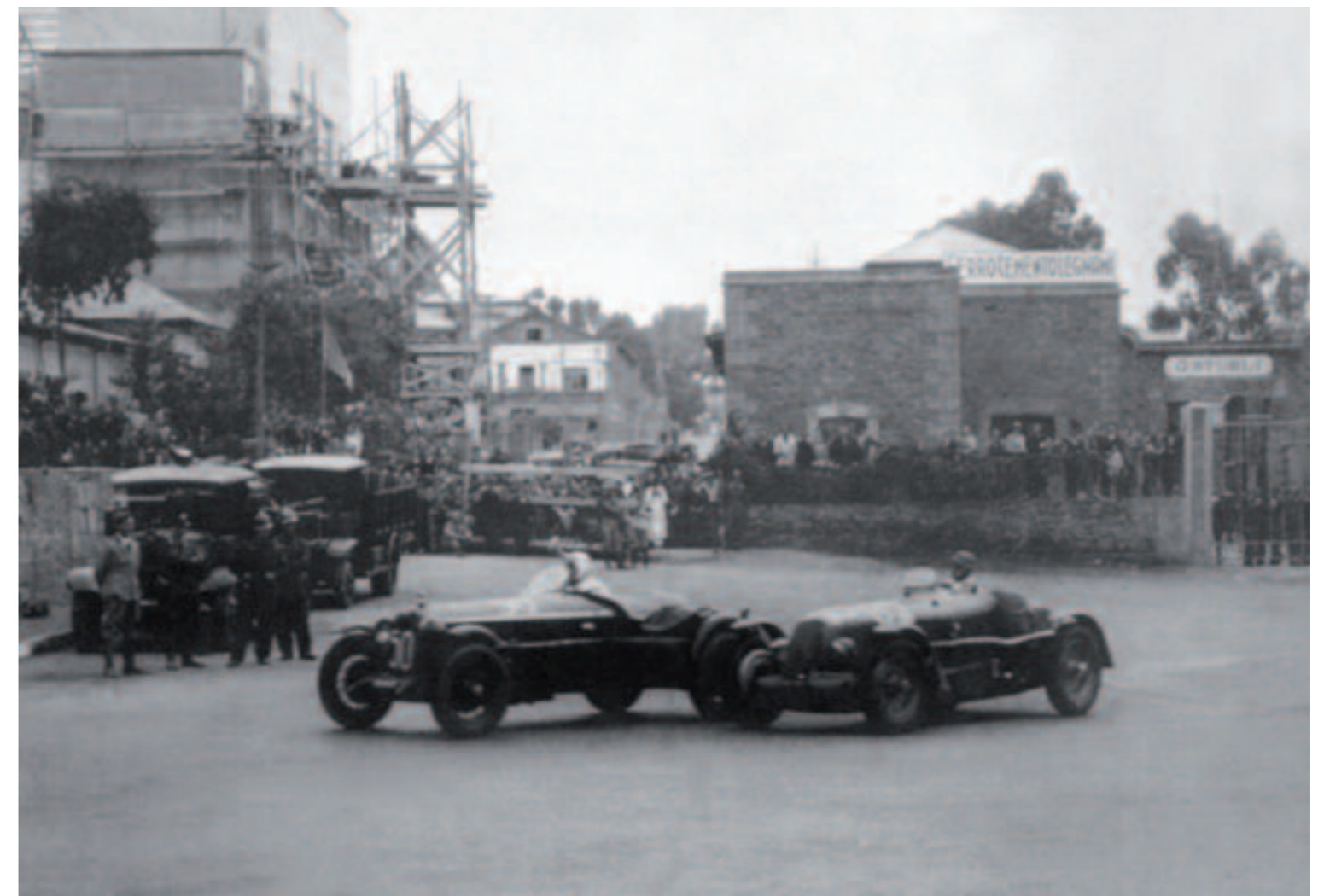
The Alfa Monza at Alipore.  
(CMSC Collection)

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No less fascinating were the homegrown specials. Inspired by racing cars in Europe and elsewhere, the enthusiasts of Calcutta built a series of surprisingly quick one-off single-seaters, which were competitive despite the inexperience of their makers. One such special was the Ixion, an interesting looking single-seater that was powered by a much-modified Ford V8 with Mercury crankshaft, Edelbrock high-compression aluminium heads and Allard racing camshafts, with the engine fed by two big Stromberg carburettors. All these goodies made the Ixion a quick beast that went on to win at least a dozen-odd times at the Alipore track.

Another special was called the Rustam – it was clearly inspired by the mid-engined Coopers and Lotuses of that period. Designed by B.P. Ferozeshah (and named after his son), the first Rustam used the powertrain from the Fiat 1100, but the gearbox broke soon enough. That was followed by the Rustam II which featured a Vincent 998cc motorcycle engine and sequential gearbox (not from a Black Shadow, but in all likelihood from a Black Knight). And this little single-seater was a real giant-killer.

The Delilah was a special that had clearly been inspired by the Maserati 250F. Unfortunately, it housed a more modest 1.5-litre Riley four, but had to be fed by as many as four carburettors (one for each cylinder!) along with cross-flow



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The Monza at the Eritrean Grand Prix, before the Second World War.  
(Gordon Barrett Collection)

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The Alfa Monza with Gordon Barrett during the 1980s.  
(Gordon Barrett Collection)

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There was a special category for Indian-assembled Fiat Millecentos too. (CMSC Collection)



The strangely modified Lagonda that was campaigned by Tutu Imam and Mike Griffiths. (CMSC Collection)



Calcutta's racing star: Kinny Lal posing with trophy next to his 'aerodynamically' enhanced Standard Herald. (CMSC Collection)



high-compression cylinder head with hemispherical combustion chambers. But as the cars got quicker, there was a problem, however, with the track. New construction creeping up on the airfield meant that they had to use a smaller track each year and finally they gave up on Alipore. The action then shifted to a dirt track in Barrackpore, and the grassroots feel of the early years returned. The racing, though, got even stronger. Specials were getting serious, and some like Dickie Richards' Bijou were indeed works of art. Finally, India got its own sports car, the gorgeous Cheetah, designed and made by Imperial Chemical Industries' (ICI) boss, Mike Satow. A reliable car, the Cheetah was at the same time an excellent handler, and thus it achieved considerable success on the tracks. That was followed by the Q'marri, a series of hand-built racers based on the mechanicals of cars made in India, namely the Standard Herald and the Hindustan Ambassador.

As many of the expats and the Anglo-Indians left – heading back to England or emigrating to newer pastures in Australia and New Zealand – more and more Indian names were to be seen among the racers. The Kumar brothers, Ravi and Rishi, Niaz Ali, Sajid Moujee, Shantanu Roychowdhury and Madhukar Birla were some of the newer stars. But the best of the bunch was Diwan Rahul 'Kinny' Lal. Starting off in the soap-box derby in Delhi, Kinny Lal (as he was popularly known) went to Europe where he raced in Formula 3 and Formula 2

The Q'marri, made by Suresh Kumar and Kinny Lal, in wheel-to-wheel action with the Triumph TR3 of Dr Vijay Mallya (owner of the 2010 Formula 1 team, Force India). (CMSC Collection)





The first Indian sports car, the beautiful Cheetah. (CMSC Collection)

News report on the Barrackpore races in a Calcutta newspaper. (CMSC Collection)

events, becoming the first Indian to compete seriously at top-level racing internationally. Coming back to India, he made the racing scene in Calcutta his own.

And Calcutta, with its cosmopolitan and more liberal outlook, also had its share of very fast ladies. There was the young Miss Minnie Dhingra, known as the Lady on the Lambretta, going handlebar to handlebar with the boys in their Ariels, BSAs, Hondas, Triumphs, Suzukis and Nortons. Then there was the lovely Miss Leesa Lumsdaine, whose father raced a Bentley, while she competed in an SSII. Most unforgettable was the redoubtable Minnie Pan, one of Calcutta's many Chinese immigrants. She went bumper to bumper in her Citroën 6 with the men in their specials. The Maharani of Cooch Behar also raced and even won a class at the Alipore track in her Q'marri 1000 Coupé.

The Q'marri is still around with the family that made it, now owned and used occasionally by Ravi Kumar and his brother, Rishi Kumar, the sons of former CMSC chairman Suresh Kumar (Ravi is the

current chairman of CMSC). The Delilah is still there – in Calcutta – with a collector. And so is the Lancia – with a collector, Harit Trivedi, in Mumbai. The Rustam, the Ixion, the Cheetah, the Allard and many others, though, have disappeared over time. But the Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 Monza is still alive – though not in India anymore, but with the private collector Oscar Davis in the US.

With the change in the political climate in West Bengal in the 1970s, industry started shifting away from the city – along with many of the cars – and Calcutta lost its pre-eminent position in the scheme of things. In addition, the City of Palaces' image changed for the worse as Mother Teresa and her Sisters of Charity and Dominique Lapierre and his City of Joy fostered the image of Calcutta as a place of poverty, deprivation, filth and slums.

Even if destiny had not been kind to the city, there were still treasures to be discovered in Calcutta. And unearthing them was a certain gentleman, who was a true son of the city of automotive joy.



Racing at Barrackpore from the 1980s: the white single-seater is the Formula 1 Ensign N177 of Dr Vijay Mallya. (CMSC Collection)

One of the beauties racing with beasts in Calcutta. (CMSC Collection)

The legendary Formula 1 driver Stirling Moss handing over a trophy to Ravi Kumar, the current chairman of CMSC. (CMSC Collection)



## CHAPTER 2

# A SON OF THE CITY

In 1991, 12 November fell just after Diwali – India’s festival of lights – when, for the people who knew Protap Roy, it seemed that the lights had just been switched off on a life led to the full. Protap Roy was a young 61-year-old when he suddenly passed away. For the family, surely, it was a tragedy, but so it was for automotive enthusiasts across India too.

Protap Roy was the eldest grandson of Maharaja The Honourable Sir Manmathanath Roy Choudhary of Santosh, a princely state that was in former East Bengal (Bangladesh today). His father was Maharajkumar Rabindranath Roy Choudhary, better known as Maharajkumar Robin Roy, a well-known sculptor and artist of the then burgeoning Bengal School of Art. The family houses in Calcutta and Darjeeling overflowed with artists, poets

and intellectuals. The British Raj had not ended, the country had not yet been partitioned into India and Pakistan, and in 1931 the Governor of Bengal, Sir Stanley Jackson, opened the Legislative Council of what then was known as ‘undivided’ Bengal.

Protap’s grandfather became the first Indian president of the Council. Maharaja Sir Manmathanath Roy Choudhary of Santosh drove to the Legislative Council in his Rolls-Royce. Like several other prominent Bengalis from Calcutta, he owned more than one car in an era when individuality in design and craftsmanship in finish were hallmarks of car manufacturing. But, nevertheless, he would always drive to the Council in his Rolls-Royce, a Phantom I, bought in the late 1920s. Before that he had already owned two Rolls-Royce Silver



Protap Roy on the start-line at the Alipore track; an MG, a Singer SM and a Standard 8 Tourer are all set to be flagged off. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



Protap Roy’s grandfather, Maharaja Sir Manmathanath Roy Choudhary of Santosh, next to his Chenard & Walcker. (Suchandra Roy Collection)

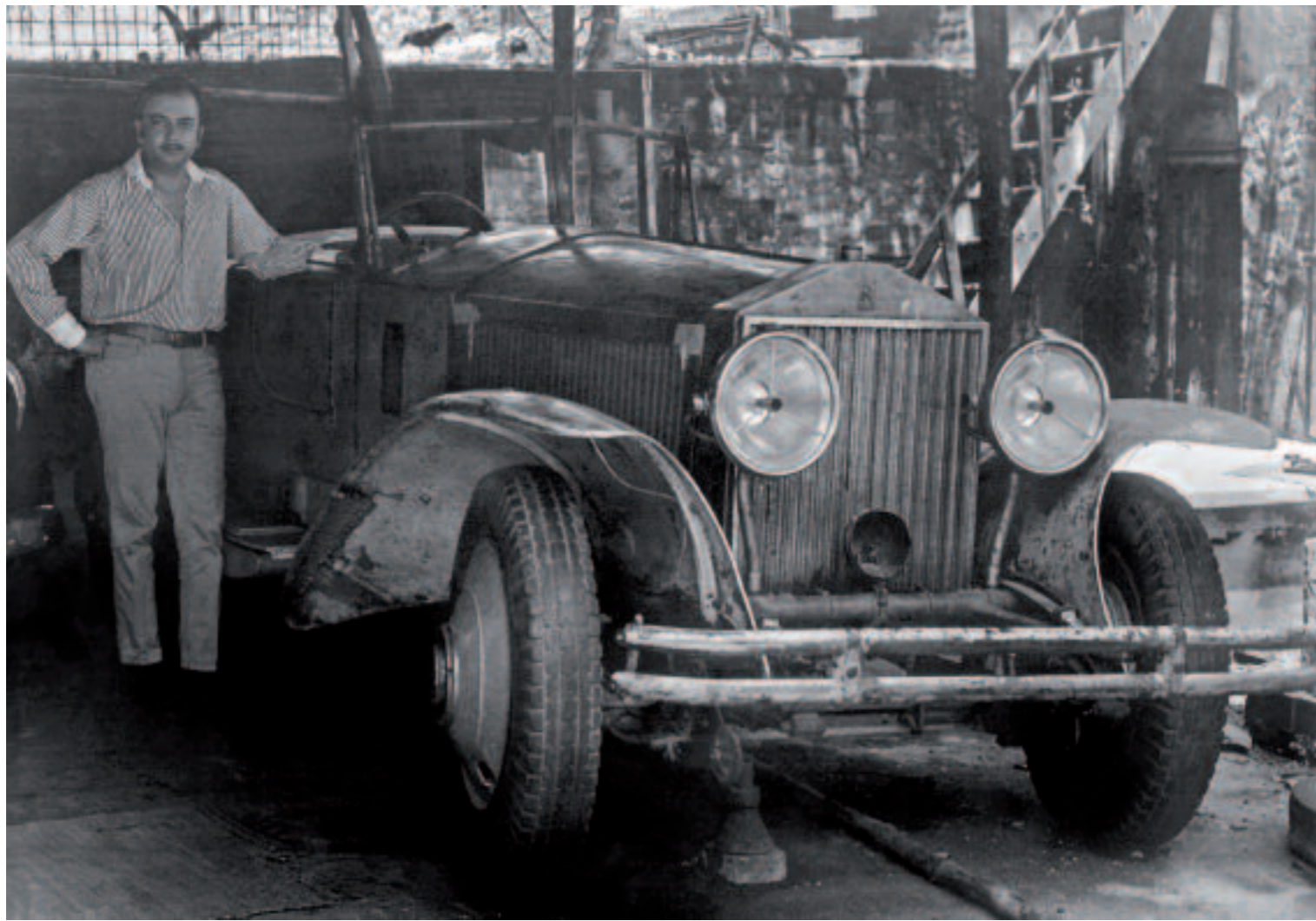


Protap Roy and his wife Suchandra, with a Fiat behind them. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



Protap Roy. (Suchandra Roy Collection)

Protap Roy receives a trophy for his Rolls-Royce Phantom I. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



Protap Roy poses next to the Rolls-Royce Phantom I 17EX. (Suchandra Roy Collection)

Ghosts – a very early 1912 Ghost (chassis no.2221) that was first ordered by a British resident of Calcutta, W.A. Duncan, from whom the Maharaja had acquired this Barker-bodied tourer in 1920; and that was followed by a brand new Silver Ghost – chassis no.47AG – in 1921. Ordered by Rolls-Royce’s Calcutta agent, G. Mein Austin, 47AG arrived in chassis form and the car was given aluminium coachwork by Calcutta-based coachbuilders Steuart & Co.

It is quite possible that the car originally had Stephen Grebel headlamps and a running board-mounted tiger-hunting spotlight, fittings that can be seen on the car today, now owned by James and Marion Caldwell in the US. Both these cars were sold off, 2221 in 1926 to a fellow

Calcuttan, Babu Anilendra Nath Das, and 47AG was bought by a certain Parisienne, Madame Buchard, in 1927. The Phantom I must have come into the family subsequently.

It was into this kind of a background that Protap Roy was born. He collected paintings and was a very fine artist himself. He also collected other forms of art, antiques, guns, dogs, but above all, classic and vintage cars – and these were the true loves of his life.

He inherited the family genes for painting. He studied art under Ranada Ukil, a leading light of the Bengal School, and the legendary Sailoz Mukherjee. He was a Tagore Gold Medallist, having been awarded this honour while still in his early teens. At university, Protap Roy and Utpal Dutt forged a friendship that



The Mercedes-Benz 500 K, with Roy standing next to the car. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



The same Mercedes in profile. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



The 500 K, restored and repainted in off-white and black by its current owner, and seen here at Mumbai’s Cartier *concours d’élégance* in November 2008. (Makarand Baokar)

Suchandra Roy in the 1923 Hispano-Suiza Boulogne (chassis no.10651) of the Maharaja of Alwar, which Roy purchased in the 1960s. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



The facia of the same Hispano. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



was to last both their lifetimes. Utpal went on to become one of India's most famous theatre and film personalities and an active communist. They were among the first Indians to work in British actor-manager Geoffrey Kendall's theatre repertory company, the Shakespearana Repertory Company, which used to tour India frequently, and on which the James Ivory film *Shakespeare Wallah* was loosely based. However, his carefree days were reaching the crossroads of change.

With India's independence, came the partition of the country. India was divided into India and Pakistan, the latter made up of West and East

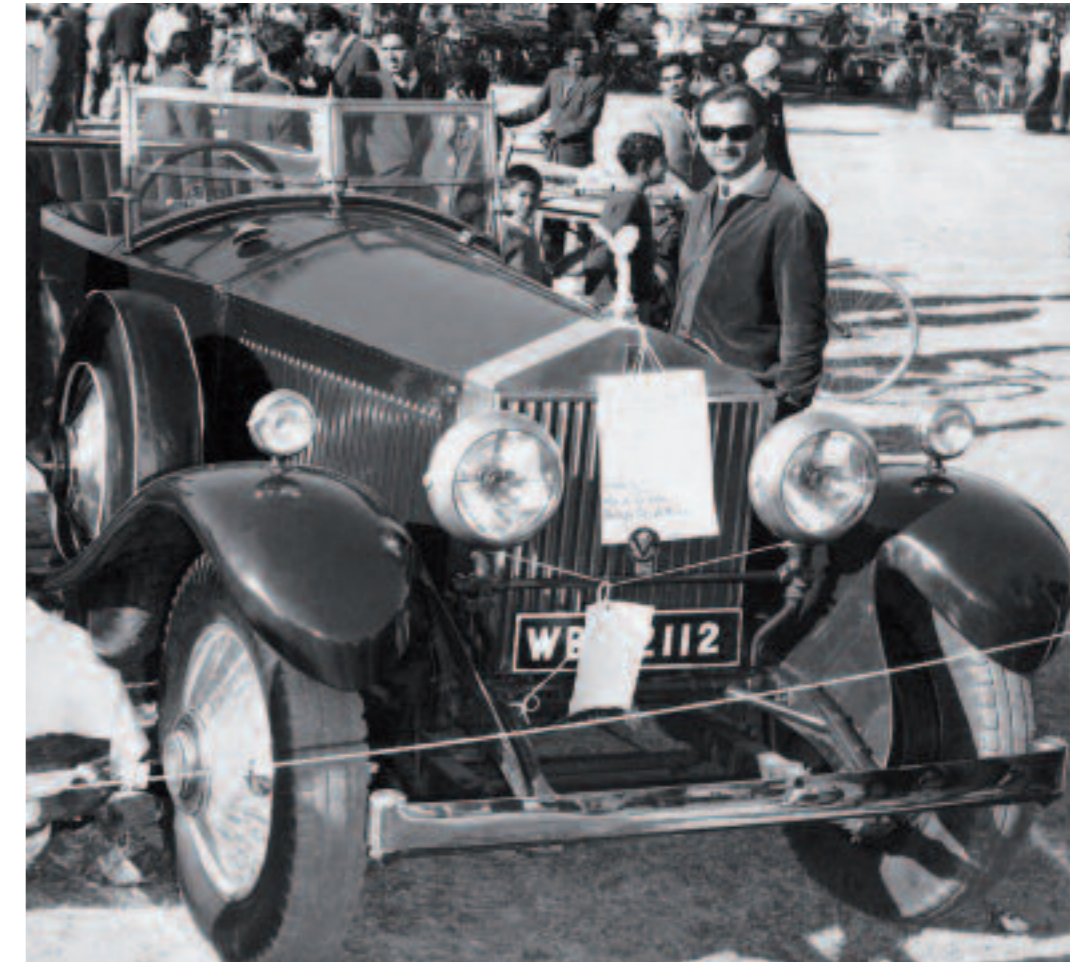
Pakistan (which became the independent country of Bangladesh in 1971), some 1,000 miles apart. The partition of India caused the greatest transmigration in the history of humankind when more than 12 million people either crossed over from the newly formed Islamic state of Pakistan to India, or the other way around, with Muslims taking refuge in Pakistan and Hindus in India. The ensuing riots and violence killed perhaps ½ million people.

Overnight, Protap Roy's home and family's estate of Santosh was now a part of a 'foreign' country. And with the death of Protap Roy's grandfather, the Maharaja, there were substantial

financial implications. Protap had to start thinking of a professional career. Rather unexpectedly, he was pushed into advertising. Protap and Utpal Dutt were planning to stage Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and were collecting advertisements for a proposed programme, which Protap had designed. On alternating pages he had sketched his own version of advertisements for popular products that had some associations with Shakespeare's comedies. Falstaff, for instance, was shown as a Dunlop tyre!

To the Calcutta office of the advertising firm J. Walter Thompson (JWT) he sent in the prototype of the programme, hoping to get an advertisement. After some time he was called in to sit across the desk from two Englishmen, Charles Moorhouse and Tom Mason. They asked him who had made the 'dummy' and who had written the 'copy'. Protap was indignant. He insisted that it was an original work and not a 'copy' and the work was surely not that of a 'dummy'... The confusion was patiently sorted out by Moorhouse and Protap was invited to join JWT as a trainee. As Protap started climbing the corporate ladder, his interest in the theatre and art became sidelined, and these became hobbies, but his abiding love for cars still involved active participation – sometimes with disastrous results. As a youngster Protap would race his jalopy at the old Alipore

Protap Roy and his Rolls-Royce Phantom I (chassis no.45AL). (Suchandra Roy Collection)



Another of Alwar's 15 Hispano-Suizas, a H6C from 1930, chassis no.12417, with A.Mulliner coachwork, photographed in the garage of the Alwar palace. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



The Isotta Fraschini of Raja Sajid Hussain, which features later in the book. (Suchandra Roy Collection)

A Wolseley Hornet. (Suchandra Roy Collection)

The 1936 Bentley with stunning J.Gurney Nutting coachwork, for the Maharaja of Indore, Yashwantrao Holkar. (Suchandra Roy Collection)

race tracks with the other racing enthusiasts of Calcutta. On one occasion his car turned turtle and exploded into flames. Charles Moorhouse (who adored Protap) was watching. The story goes that as the unconscious Protap was being carried away, the pressing crowd only allowed Moorhouse a glimpse of a limp arm dragging along the track. He got up, went home and got quietly drunk convinced that he'd seen the end of Protap.

Later, Protap went on to work for companies such as Nestlé, thanks to whom he was the first Indian to complete the higher management course at IMEDE in Lausanne, Switzerland. Eventually, he joined Godrej Soaps, one of India's premier consumer products companies, in a very senior capacity. He had finally reached the stage of his life and career when he could indulge his interest in classic and vintage cars in a serious way.

This was also the time when his fiancée discovered Protap's other passion. As Suchandra Roy related to this author, 'It was surreal, a mysterious bulky shape dangling from the hook of a massive crane silhouetted against a hot Delhi sky. A few days earlier, Protap had disappeared into the depths of Assam supposedly on work. He returned to announce that he had discovered a 500 KI!'

'What's that?' asked his fiancée unwisely. She had to accompany him immediately to the railway station. A



Protap Roy's MG TC. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



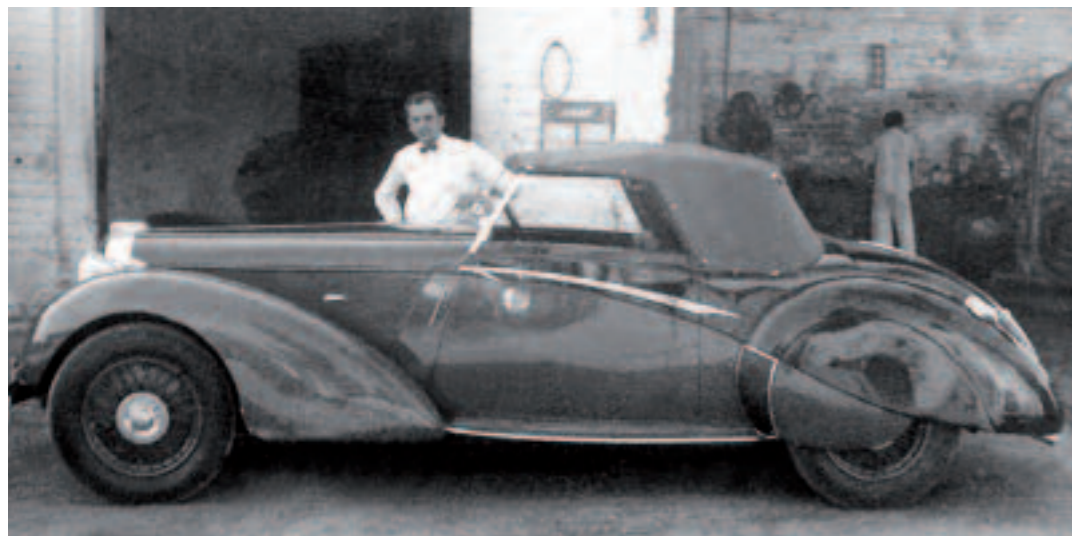
The Lagonda M45 originally acquired by the Maharaja of Bikaner, now with R.N.Seth and Babi Nobis. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



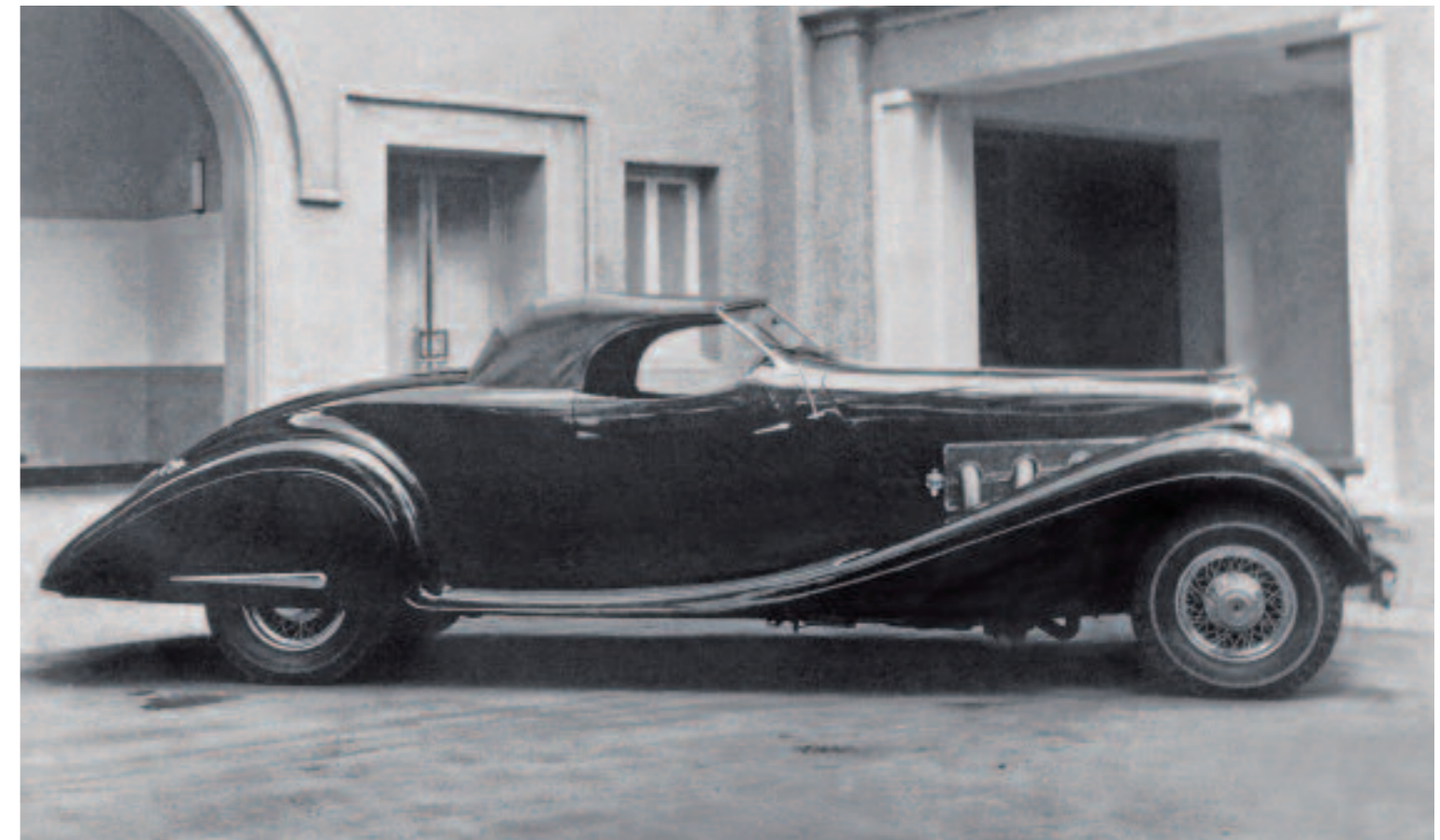
Mercedes-Benz 500 K had travelled from Assam to Delhi by train, had been pushed down a ramp onto the siding and the crane was now being used to load it on to the truck that was to drive it home. It was slow, tedious work and the future Mrs Roy was getting cross – what was all the fuss about? The car looked shabby and dirty, though very noticeable were those exhausts on the side, coiled like cobras. She made the mistake of shutting the car door with a loud thwack and was icily told by Protap that this was a rare car and should be handled gently, like a 16-year-old’s waist.

The engine and chassis numbers were sent to the Mercedes-Benz museum in Stuttgart. They sent the microfilm of the car and there was much excitement with the added information received that it may have once belonged to a certain Heinrich Himmler. *The Statesman’s* annual classic and vintage car rally in 1967 became the event to debut the recently restored 500 K. The Mercedes, painted a dark maroon with black mudguards, cruised easily along through the rally until at the last stretch, from Faridabad to Delhi, Protap decided to turn on the supercharger. The car growled and to quote Suchandra Roy began to ‘devour the miles like a hungry cheetah’.

At about this time – in the 1960s – among the many cars that Protap Roy was tracking down was a Rolls-Royce Phantom I special, the car known as the 17EX; the car and how he acquired it is



Protap Roy next to a Lagonda V12 Rapide, originally purchased by the Maharaja of Jodhpur, now with Delhite Awini Ambuj Shanker. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



detailed in Chapter 18. At the same time, Roy also had a Rolls-Royce Twenty ‘doctor’s coupé’. But his greatest love affair was with another Rolls-Royce, a 1928 Phantom 1 Torpedo Tourer with Hooper bodywork (chassis no.45AL). With a body that was long and straight and going on forever, there were many exclusive touches: the sides had a bevelled razor finish, the original wind shield was V-shaped and the car featured Stephen Grebel swivel lamps that could be operated from the driver’s seat, other than Stephen Grebel wing lamps. Mounted on the dashboard was an unusual gradient load meter. It also had two cabinets in the rear compartment with centre folding table and special art deco nautical funnels on the cowl.

Originally purchased by a gentleman called H.R.P. Poddar, the car had been in the Santosh family for three generations and had been sitting in a garage in



The Duesenberg SJN, also with J.Gurney Nutting body, specially made for Yashwantrao Holkar, the Maharaja of Indore. (Suchandra Roy Collection)

A strangely modified Bentley from the 1920s, perhaps the one that was raced in Calcutta. (Suchandra Roy Collection)





A Rolls-Royce Phantom I limousine from 1925, chassis no.4RC, with Hooper coachwork, bought originally by Krishnaraja IV, the Maharaja of Mysore; currently with L.Rebello. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



1936 Rolls-Royce limousine, chassis no.GTL30, with Windovers coachwork, bought in 1944 for the Bengal governor, now with collector Yohan Poonawalla in Pune. (Suchandra Roy Collection)

A Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost tourer from 1921, chassis no.113LG, with Maythorn coachwork, still with its original owner, the Wankaner royal family. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



Protap Roy with a Porsche 356 that he briefly owned. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



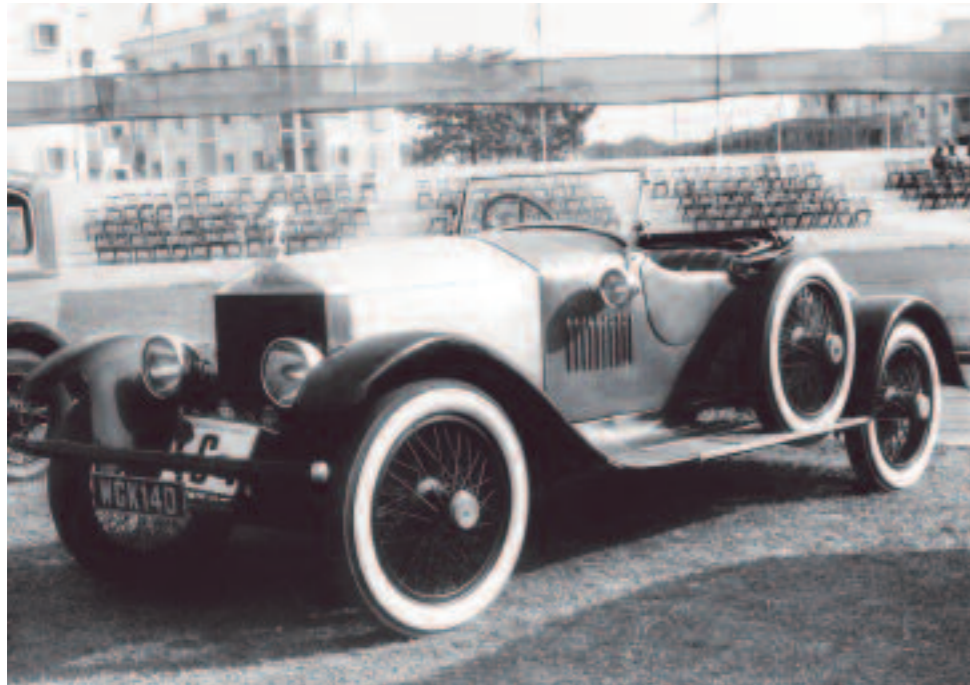
A 1913 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, chassis no.SG2366, with coachwork by Stuart's of Calcutta. The car left India many years ago and is currently owned by Dr William Allen from Glasgow. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



Calcutta until Protap brought it to Delhi. The car sprang to life at the very first attempt and very little restoration work was required. It was painted a very dark purple to suit its sophisticated air, the colour matched to one of Suchandra Roy's saris, incidentally. Freshly restored, the Phantom I went on to win the *concours d'élégance* at the 1967 *Statesman* Vintage Car Rally.

Sharing garage space with the Rolls-Royces and the Mercedes-Benz 500 K was also a very rare and special short chassis Hispano-Suiza Boulogne, one of just 24 ever made. Originally acquired by Francophile and Hispano fan, the Maharaja of Alwar, Jai Singh, Roy's Hispano was one of the most distinctive of the 15 Hispanos that the maharaja had owned. Chassis no.10651 from 1923, this short wheelbase, Kellner-bodied Hispano-Suiza originally had the 102mm x 140mm engine (as compared to the 100mm x 140mm of the H6B), making it a true Boulogne, according to Hispano-Suiza historian Jules Heumann. Roy sold it to an English collector and the car – the only survivor among all the short chassis Boulognes – eventually found its way into the hands of prominent American collector Arturo Keller, having only clocked up about 6,000 miles/10,000km to date.

This Hispano, the Mercedes and the purple Phantom (the car, incidentally, is with a Swiss collector at present) were



A 1923 Rolls-Royce Twenty, chassis no.59S3, bought originally by Dinshaw & Sorabjee from Mumbai, now with Calcutta-based collector Shrivardhan Kanoria. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



Rolls-Royce Silver Wraith, chassis no.WXA37, with Park Ward coachwork, first owner Sayajirao Gaekwad III, the Maharaja of Baroda, currently owned by D.J.Jamshedji (Suchandra Roy Collection)

not just trophy cars. Indeed, none of Protap's cars were – Protap preferred to drive his classics and vintages, not only because of their masterly craftsmanship but because they had been made to be used. Over the years, he also acquired some usable classics such as a 1934 Riley Imp (which may have been from the Wankaner royal family). Smaller, but no less dashing was a 1947 MG TC. The air-conditioned Hindustan Ambassador provided by Godrej Soaps as a company car was used just to ferry him to work and back – during the evenings and the weekends he clearly preferred his classics.

Even more than acquiring the cars, Protap's true passion was tracing and locating rarities. His work took him around India and he made a point of travelling to the remotest of places, where he found cars, photographed them and occasionally managed to ferret them out to enthusiasts who could buy, restore and use once again these beautiful machines. From an early Porsche 356 to a Fiat 2300 S Ghia to Alfa Romeos, Bentleys, Cords, Duesenbergs, Hispanos, Isotta Fraschinis, Lagondas and scores of Rolls-Royces, Roy 'rediscovered' many of India's classic-car wonders. The list of cars discovered and restored, acquired and lost is long. But for Protap Roy – and his wife – it was always an 'affair to remember', though not always with each other!



1937 Rolls-Royce 25/30HP, chassis no.GR059, with J.Gurney Nutting tourer coachwork, originally owned by Harindar Singh, the Raja of Faridkot. (Suchandra Roy Collection)



Rolls-Royce Phantom III from 1936, chassis no.3AZ178, with Thrupp & Maberly coachwork, originally purchased by Maharaja Kameshwar Singh of Darbhanga. Currently the car is in the US. (Suchandra Roy Collection)