

I had not ever expected that I would feel the same way Pamela Anderson feels. But when people stare at my asset(s) rather than look at me while talking, I know how she feels. I can tell you it feels unashamedly good.

Small crowds of people have gathered around and gawked, some uncouth keen to touch when stationary. When turned on and aroused, fathers have pointed, mothers have waved, old men's eyes have misted (and babies have cried).

I am talking of my Royal Enfield Bullet 500 ES. ES stands for 'electric start' (but that is another story).

I had been hankering for one ever since I was a kid. The distinctive throb of the single cylinder 4-stroke engine, and the machismo that went with it. The ride of choice of Bombay Police Inspectors. And also Hindi film villains – they who had all the fun with the girls.

### SHOPPING & ACQUISITION

So when in India last Christmas/New Year for the annual break, I visited the Royal Enfield dealership conveniently located on Linking Road, Bandra West. The dealership could not entertain an export inquiry and referred us to the factory. I spoke to the export manager who wanted me to send him an email. Stonewalling I thought to myself. So I Googled. I Googled Royal Enfield New Zealand. And to my delight not only did I find an authorised dealer in Auckland, a couple for sale on TradeMe, but also NZREOR - New Zealand Royal Enfield Owners Register!

Keep away from the domestic Indian bikes that have been privately exported was the word. Poorer components, parts and assembly, and may not comply with our WoF rules. NZREOR was most helpful.

"Let us know," the secretary said to me in June, "if you do not have a Bullet by August and we will put a word in our newsletter." "Ha," I thought. "A Bullet by 15th August, India's Independence Day would be great."

Within 48 hours, a Bullet owner from Auckland looking to unload 'only to an enthusiast' was on to me. Appears this was only the second Bullet sold in New Zealand by the dealer. 500 cc which was what I was looking for. Electric start, even better. One careful owner, only 18,000 kms on the clock.

Looking at the photographs, I was prepared to buy it 'sight unseen.' But then there was the issue to do with gears. Knowing how Bullets are so 'torquey' at the low end, and struggled to cruise on open roads, I had wanted a five-speed bike. This one was only four speed. BUT the owner had changed the sprocket so



## OLD MEN'S EYES HAVE MISTED...

that it sacrificed low end torque for better open road cruising - exactly what I was looking for, although this modification needed a test drive.

### LOVE AT FIRST RIDE

Serendipity played a hand and work took me up to Auckland the following fortnight. I had not ridden a motorbike for at least 12 years. And a Bullet is not the lightest of bikes (think cast iron motor casing). So the 'test' drive was a short one, but it was love at first ride. The bike was immaculately maintained and I could not fault it one bit. Money changed hands and I finally had a Silver Bullet!

And so after a tune up in Auckland, it was shipped down to Wellington. The dealer in Auckland could not do enough to make sure I was satisfied. He sent me manuals and instructions and was always available to me at the end of the phone for any questions I had. Good old fashioned service I thought, if only IT vendors could provide technical support like that....

### THE LICENCE SAGA

Now the fun bit. The licence. I used to ride a bike in Wellington, so I have a valid local driving licence I assumed. Checked licence. Wrong. Not endorsed. Checked previous 'lifelong' paper driving licence. Not endorsed. So have bike, but no licence. Racked brains. Idea - call Mum in India!

So I have an Indian driving license which I keep in India for use when I drive there. It is endorsed for a motorbike. Dad

answered the phone.

"Yup," he said. "No problem, will have it couriered this afternoon."

"Cool," I thought.

Got home in the evening after work, voice mail from Mum.

"Your brother has your driving license. He is using it since his has expired."

"Oh, OK (??)"

"Can you get him to send mine back please?"

"Sure," she says, "when he is back from the US."

Aaaaargh !!!!

Anyway, the brother arrives that weekend, scans the license, emails it to me as a precaution, and organises a courier. In the mean time Wellington spring is showing promise and the Bullet is fretting for lack of exercise. Off we go for a ride. Shelly Bay, Scorching Bay, Seatoun, Breaker Bay, Airport, Cobham Drive, Mt Vic Tunnel (aaah the acoustics in Mt Vic Tunnel!), down Cambridge Terrace and on to Oriental Parade heading back towards Miramar.

Practising all the time. First gear up, down to neutral, second, third and fourth down. Stop at signal. 'Please don't stall on me, please don't stall on me.' Stall. Bugger. Kick. She kicks back. I kick again. She fires. Anyway, cruising down Evans Bay, trying to bond with the bike and find the optimum speed and gear combination - I hear a siren behind me.

"You were doing 68 km/h in a 50 zone



Sunit's Bullet was the second sold here by the New Zealand importer and came complete with (look closely!) bullet shell choke lever. A nice touch!

sir," she says. "Can I see your licence."

I hand her my New Zealand licence cursing my luck. She goes back to her car and does the checks. Comes back.

"This is not endorsed for a motorcycle."

"Oh yes. I am on an overseas driving licence for the bike," I said.

"When did you come to New Zealand?"

"This Easter." And so on and so forth.

Net result: speeding ticket and a traffic offence notice. "I will have to escort you home now sir, and I have to tell you that if you are stopped again without a New Zealand driving licence, we will have to arrest you".

With that, the Royal Bullet, accustomed to escorting the Indian President

along Rajpath was given a New Zealand Police escort home. Got home. The DHL van was in the driveway.

"Would you like to see my overseas driving licence?" I offered.

So that was that. With the speeding fine I am now certified as the world's fastest Indian in New Zealand; and certainly faster than a speeding Bullet. Since then, and on the basis of my overseas driving licence fast-tracked my way to a 'full' New Zealand motorcycle driving licence.

### THE RIDE AND DYNAMICS

Now for the leathers. Imported to New Zealand from Sialkot, Pakistan. How would the dynamics work out I wonder. Or will they at all, with an Indian rider, on an Indian bike, with Pakistani leathers.....

In the mean time I have more pressing things to tackle. As I drop the handlebar into a corner around Massey Memorial, the corner winds even tighter as I go into it, as they do only in Wellington, and at the peak of the turn, a smidgen of wet dirt from the bank above, right in my line.

"Oh s\*\*t, oh s\*\*t." In the rear view mirror I catch a glimpse of Wellington in the light of the setting sun... and all is good again.

And my relatives in India nod approvingly when I tell them about my acquisition. And at the Indian Independence Day function, the boys came around and gawked at it – all pleased, proud and surprised.

And I open up the throttle, she sings. And fathers point. And mothers wave. And old men's eyes mist. And babies cry.

### IN A TIME WARP

I am in a time warp. Am I in New Zealand? Or am I in India? 20 years younger. With my first love. And like a bat out of hell I am gone, gone, gone....



## About the bullet, India and two wheelers

The Royal Enfield Bullet was originally manufactured in Redditch, UK and assembly of R.E. Bullets began in India in 1955 from parts sourced from Britain. By 1962 the bikes were being manufactured by Enfield of India, which purchased the rights to the Royal Enfield name in 1995 and is now known as Royal Enfield of India.

Their website says; 'from North America to Europe in the West, and Japan to Australia in the East today Royal Enfield has pride of place across the globe. In fact Royal Enfield was ranked among the top 10 selling brands in UK in the 125-500 cc category.'

India is the world's largest manufacturer of two-wheelers. Up to the early 80s the lion's share of the market was held by scooters of the Vespa and Lambretta variety. Bajaj is the generic name for a two-wheeler in many South Asian countries, just like Honda used to be in the past for mopeds (at least in India).

With the opening up of the Indian

economy in the early 80s, Indian manufacturers entered into joint ventures and technical collaboration with major Japanese manufacturers and the market exploded with motorcycles. Some like Hero from a bicycle manufacturing heritage, some like Escorts & Eicher from a heavy earth moving heritage.

Anecdotally the author can tell you, anyone who used to walk in India now bikes. Anyone who used to bike now is on a scooter or motorbike. Anyone who had a motorised two wheeler has a car. Anyone who had a car, now has two cars.

India has been exporting two-wheelers for many years. Vespas from India are sold in at least one Wellington scooter shop. Bullets however are a different matter. These are exports of a heritage marque, to a class of people in developed countries hankering after a bygone era – Nortons Triumphs, BSAs, Ariels - and do not carry the Bad Boy image that Harley has.

A whole nostalgia/adventure travel

industry has grown around the exports of the Royal Enfield Bullet. You can now join groups of riders in India to ride in the Himalayas, or ride from palace to palace in Rajasthan.

The author can also tell you from personal experience that interest in Bullets is exceedingly high. A twitter tweet on IT Service Management or India-NZ Free Trade Agreement will get you one or two uninterested comments back if you are lucky. One single FaceBook post or tweet on the Bullet on the other hand, gets instant worldwide attention.

**About the author** Sunit Prakash is an IT and management consultant based in Wellington. He writes on India, IT Service Management, Lean Management and sometimes on the intersection of some of these. In his spare time he enjoys 4 wheel driving, following cricket, travelling and of course riding his motorbike. For more information: [www.sunit.co.nz](http://www.sunit.co.nz)