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Design Resource **History of Indian Hatchback** Design Exploratory Seminar Project by T. Abhisek and Prof. Ravi Poovaiah IDC, IIT Bombay

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#### Design Resource History of Indian Hatchback

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#### Introduction

The Indian customer has always chosen the hatchback as the primary body style of the car. For a country whose 80% of all vehicles sold are Two-wheelers, the hatchback is the nearest to a Four-wheeler.

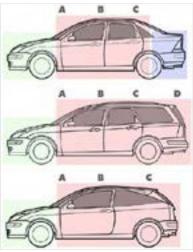
The Licence Raj or Permit Raj was the system of licenses, regulations, and accompanying red tape, that hindered the setup and running of businesses in India between 1947 and 1990. Up to 80 government agencies had to be satisfied before private companies could produce something and, if granted, the government would regulate production.

The country was pushing farm tractors to embark on the Green Revolution. Cars were still an aspirational item. By the 1970s when price controls were lifted, the Four-wheel personal mobility scene was still dominated by the PAL Padminis and HM Ambassadors.

The 1980s were the time when the first Indian "people's car" came into fruition, initially led by Sanjay Gandhi. It was a modern low-cost car with a contemporary wedge shape and a smaller architecture. It was fuel efficient too. The Maruti 800, which succeeded in becoming this people's car, would now make cars seem like a necessity rather than a status symbol.

The Maruti 800 would later spawn a newer model with a rear hatch door, essentially birthing the first commercially successful hatchback. The shape of the car would signify the people's car, the hatchback!

What is a hatchback?



Pictorial representation of 2 box and 3 box configurations of cars (Image source)

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A hatchback may be defined as a car with a rear door, or hatch, which provides direct access to the rear cargo space when opened. It usually exists in 2 box configurations, but can also have 3 box configurations at times, for example, Datsun Go Plus.

Every hatchback to be introduced later in the country would find the Maruti 800 to be an influential factor. A hatchback is supposed to be modern, small, frugal and practical, apart from the mechanical qualifications. These qualities are what made the Maruti 800 successful. As time passed by, and technology started to accelerate during the internet era in the 1990s, hatchbacks would start to become more spacious and accessible inside (ingress/egress). Comfort became a priority for daily driving, as hatchbacks became the major selling segment of the country.

Features and accessories started to gain traction, and would be added to increase their value, and present themselves as well equipped as cars of a higher value. The sedans were formally seen as luxurious cars, as passengers in the Ambassador would be driven and wealthy people would drive the Fiat cars on their own. Hence, it made sense to position hatchbacks directly against sedans and offer similar advantages for a better price.

But SUVs were always seen as a wealthy man's car, one that has time to go for longer, rougher and more enthusiastic drives in comfort. Incorporating SUVs attributes to hatchbacks would further elevate their value perception, and that allowed users to feel like they own a car of a higher value.



The Advertisement poster for the Ambassador (Image source)

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Three models for three decades of the Maruti 800 (Image source)

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#### Classification

The hatchbacks are categorized under the passenger car classification system defined by the European Commission.

A Segment - Also known as City Cars.

This segment includes cars of a length of 2.7 m to 3.7 m in length.



Tata Nano and Maruti Suzuki Alto K10 (Image source)



Renault Kwid, Maruti Suzuki Alto 800 and Datsun Redigo (Image source)

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Tata Punch and Maruti Suzuki Ignis

B Segment - Also known as Superminis.

This segment includes cars of the length of 3.7 m to 4.2 m.



Suzuki Baleno and Volkswagen Polo (Image source)



Hyundai i20 and i20 Cross , both same cars but different category (Image source)

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Honda WR-V and Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza (Image source)

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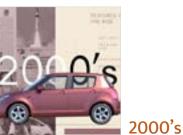
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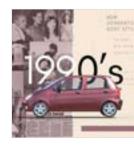
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#### Timeline



1980's





1990's



2010's

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#### 1980's

#### Introduction

The Maruti 800 was introduced as a modern people's car, with a design that was cutting edge for 1983. It was ex-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's cabinet in 1971 which proposed the creation of a car for the middle-class and emulate the Volkswagen Beetle's success in Germany.

The production of the Maruti 800 finally saw the light of the day in 1983, and it would change the way people looked at four-wheeled personal mobility forever.

It was modern, as opposed to the PAL Padmini, PAL 1100 Special, PAL 118 NE and HM Ambassador, both visually and mechanically. It had a front-wheel drive layout, had a small engine and offered great fuel efficiency. It was smaller and was not required to provide any aspirational value, rather a practical, no-frills car. And it was affordable and a brilliant choice.

In five years, the 800 spawned a newer generation which was larger and had a functional boot and an air cooler as an option.



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PAL 1100 Special (Image source)



HM Ambassador (Image source)

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Maruti 800 (Image source)

1983 - Maruti 800 SS80

The Maruti 800 SS80 was the first car to bring a Front Wheel Drive layout in a car. FWD layout coupled with a monocoque body meant the vehicle was much easier to manoeuvre compared to Ambassadors and Padmini's. Also, the lightweight monocoque body meant that it was quick and frugal.

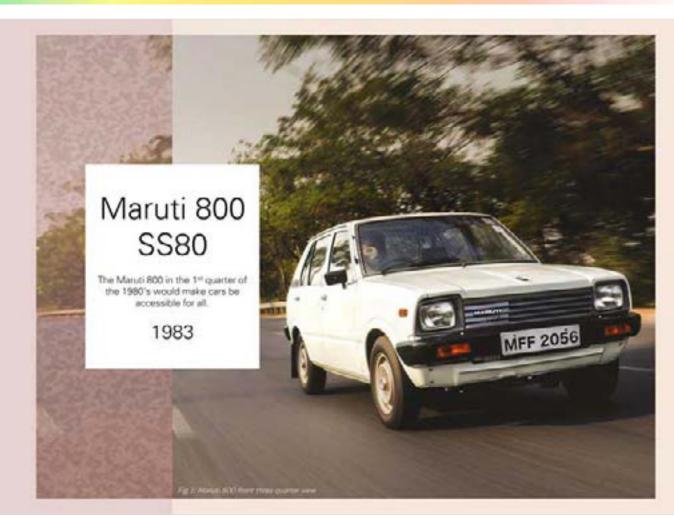
The biggest game changer isn't that it was a hatchback, that it brought about a bright red colour as an option or that it was smaller. It was the price, the price was only Rs 37,000 to Rs 45,000. It allowed the common folk to enjoy the benefit of owning a car at a pocket-friendly price.

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Maruti 800 front three quarter view (Image source)

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Maruti 800 front view

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Maruti 800 rear view (Image source)

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Maruti 800 rear view (Image source)

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1986 - Maruti 800SB308

The Maruti 800 SB308 was the first time any hatchback had a pronounced D – pillar. There is a glass window right behind the rear door, which improves visibility towards the rear end of the vehicle.

SB308 is the code word for Suzuki Body 3 door and 0.8 L Engine.

The rear had a distinctive feature of having the numberplates bordered by two lights on each side. The car was larger at around 3335 mm in length and featured a fully functional rear door.



Maruti 800 front three quarter view (Image source)

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Maruti 800 rear window (Image source)

The most noteworthy disadvantage of the Maruti 800 was the lack of a rear door. Only the rear glass could be opened, as there was a negligible amount of boot space.

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Maruti 800 rear hatch

The SB308 was longer and had a proper D- pillar and a functional rear door. This allowed the users to have easy access to the boot and essentially rendered the 2nd generation 800 as a proper 5-door car.

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Maruti 800 front three quarter view (Image source)

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Maruti 800 rear three quarter view (Image source)

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Maruti 800 Type 1 Front Grill

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Maruti 800 Type 2 Front Grill receives Maruti Logo

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Maruti 800 Type 2 Facelift receives a concealed bonnet lid hook.

The car brought about many more changes which made it worthy of being a benchmark once again. Type 1 had a monogram of its' model name on the grill itself. It also had a bonnet hook placed on top of the bonnet.

Type 2 featured the Maruti logo on the front, and the bonnet hook was moved towards the top of the grille, neatly tucked out of vision. It also came with low beam lights which were placed on the upper lip of the bumper, coupled with indicator lights.

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Maruti 800 DX Type 1



Maruti 800 Standard Trim Type 1 (Image source)

The Maruti 800 SB308 was also one of the first hatchbacks to feature a blind spot window, giving it a proper D pillar. The black protective cladding was the only distinguishing factor externally between the DX and Standard models.

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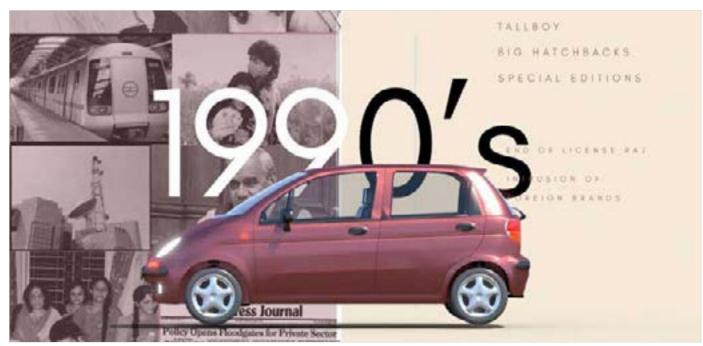
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1990's

Introduction



After the license raj ended, foreign brands and new designs started to come in multitudes. Car body designs suddenly took a progressive route and started to spawn various different architectures.

Foreign culture had started to find mainstream influence. Superstars like Pierce Brosnan who starred in his first James Bond movie known as GoldenEye started to really become huge international hits including in India. Then came Jurassic Park, Godzilla, the WWF/WWE shows, Small Wonder and other American Family shows on national televisions. TV had become the ultimate source of influence to shape one's way of living and thoughts.

Naturally, cars had started to become a necessity for the commute. The Maruti 800 was always there as a car everyone could buy, but there needed to be other options as well. The Omni wasn't exactly the choice for a person looking for something similar to the 800. It started to be seen as the poor man's car. While the 800 represented the entire hatchback segment comprising just three cars, the other two being the Sipani Dolphin and the quasi hatchback Maruti Omni, the entire hatchback segment would now be relegated to being an affordable and practical choice, rather than having an aspirational value.

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Sipani Dolphin (Image source)



A Maruti Omni seen with a Maruti 800 (Image source)

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Old and New Maruti 800 (Image source)



Sipani Rover Montego (Image source)

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Old and New Maruti 800 (Image source)



Tata Indica, the big hatchback was available at a price similar to the Maruti Suzuki Zen (Image source)

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1993 - Maruti Suzuki Zen

Zen was introduced to challenge exactly that. It had a larger 1 L engine and had already made a name for itself as being one of the most rounded designs in the first half of the 1990s. It was generations ahead in terms of design when compared with sedans like the Premier Padmini and Rover Montego.

While the Zen did present itself as a funky and fashionable option for the small car buyer, what it needed to do most is offer space that would really allow the small car buyer to feel as dignified as someone looking for a sedan.

Big cars with big footprints like the Fiat Uno, Palio and the Indica allowed consumers to feel like riding on a much larger car.

The tallboy designs like the Matiz, Santro and WagonR took space and visibility very diligently and offered a great viewing space. They were good options for the mature audience who seemingly didn't want to bend over while entering. The ingress/egress was as convenient as compact SUVs like the Jeeps and Maruti Gypsys.



Maruti 800 front three quarter view (Image source)

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Maruti Zen Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Zen Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Zen Side Profile (Image source)

The Maruti Zen was a larger derivative of the Maruti 800, and also the global version of its successor. Known as the Alto Cervo/Cervo Mode overseas, the Zen had a longer front overhang due to carrying a larger 1 L engine.

It had curves, instead of geometrical edges. This made the car look more organic and lively compared to other cars available at the time. The rounded corners gave birth to the nickname enthusiasts lovingly called "the jellybean'. For its time, the Zen truly was a looker and made the Mercedes Benz E Class of the same year feel 'boxy' and prehistoric. Thus, it became a landmark in terms of manufacturers putting serious effort into exterior designs of smaller cars.

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Maruti Zen Type 2 (Silver) and Type 1 (White) (Image source)

Owning a Zen in the late '90s was sensational. It was faster than the Maruti 800, offered a lower seating posture and allowed users to imitate a sports-car type experience. The Zen, even today is regarded in various enthusiasts' circles as the poor man's go-kart.

The Maruti Zen in its 1998 avatar brought about a subtle change which would justify a hatchback to have premium value – body-coloured bumpers. The body-coloured bumpers were previously only exclusive to sedans or limited to special edition versions of other segments.

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#### 1996 - Fiat Uno

The Fiat Uno was the first hatchback to have a length above 3.5 m and a diesel engine. This was the first time a manufacturer had tried to repackage a hatchback to be more than an economy car but rather an aspirational vehicle.



Fiat Uno front three view (Image source)

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Fiat Uno Side Profile (Image source)

#### 1998 - Daewoo Matiz

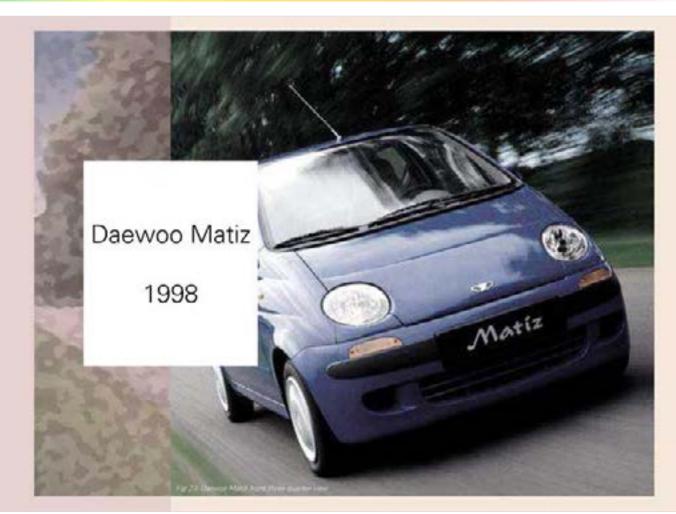
The Matiz took a "rounded' shape to another level. In fact, the original design was based on the European "Fiat Cinquecento", designed by Fabrizio Giugiaro at Italdesign.

This was the first time a set of clear-lens headlamps was used in the hatchback segment. The Matiz had a taller architecture and offered decent headroom and legroom at the back. More space can be accessed if the rear seats are folded. The taller driving position gave the impression of driving a larger car.

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Daewoo Matiz front three quarter view (Image source)

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Daewoo Matiz Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)



Daewoo Matiz Front Headlight (Image source)

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Daewoo Matiz Side Profile (Image source)

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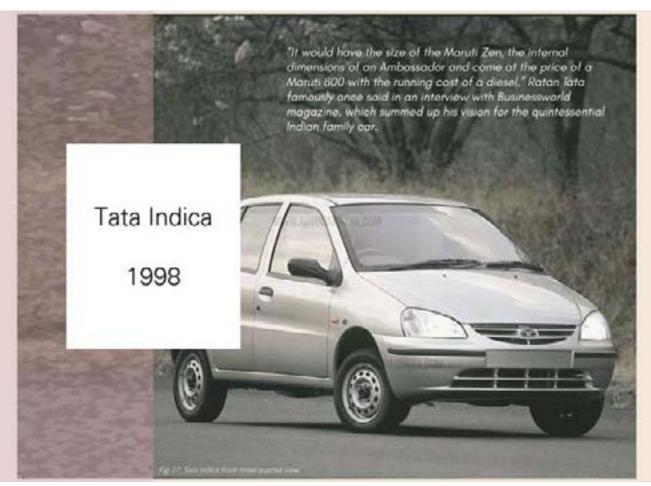
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#### 1998 - Tata Indica

The Tata Indica was the first indigenously developed car in the country. The vehicle was launched in 1998, with the tagline "More Car Per Car", as the vehicle was similar in size to the Uno, but at the selling price of a Maruti Suzuki Zen. There were a lot of unique features on offers, such as a dashboard watch and protective bumper claddings.

It was also taller, at above 1.5 m, and allowed a total of 5 passengers to sit comfortably. The Indica was designed by IDEA Institute in Italy. It was also the first hatchback to offer a proper 5-passenger seat configuration.



Tata Indica front three quarter view

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Tata Indica Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Tata Indica Rear Three Quarter View

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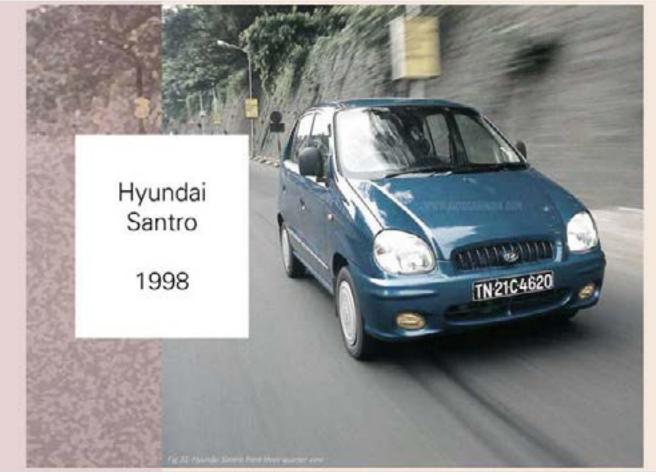
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1998 - Hyundai Santro

The Hyundai Santro was bulbous in appearance and boasted of providing a roomy interior. It was tall, at around 1.6 m in height, and that meant a person did not require to bend down much to get inside the car. It also provided a roomier interior, and a big glass area meant there was ample visibility.

The Santro still managed to be similar to the Matiz and Zen in terms of length, and hence was a better manageable car than both. While the Indica preferred to be wide and long, the Santro was taller and offered better ingress/egress.



Hyundai Santro front three quarter view (Image source)

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Hyundai Santro Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Hyundai Santro Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Hyundai Santro Side Profile (Image source)

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Hyundai Santro (Image source)

The Hyundai Santro Type 2 introduced rear spoilers for hatchbacks, a rear wiper and a segment-first set of fog lamps.

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1999 - Maruti Suzuki WagonR

The WagonR was Maruti Udyog's second attempt at offering a boxy people mover similar to the size of a hatchback. The WagonR, unlike the Maruti Omni, had a semi-cab forward design, and door opening mechanisms similar to a normal hatchback. It was essentially a taller and a boxier hatchback focused on providing space and improved ingress/egress. The roof rails were seen for the first time in a hatchback, and the WagonR promised to be a hatchback and a MUV rolled into one.



Maruti WagonR front three quarter view (Image source)

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Maruti WagonR Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti WagonR frontThree Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti WagonR Side Profile (Image source)

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Maruti WagonR Rear Split Folding Seats

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Maruti WagonR Rear Folded Seats made a lot of space. (Image source)

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Maruti WagonR Rear Door Open (Image source)

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The WagonR also introduced split seats in a hatchback. The split seats made way for a lot of cargo space and justified the "Multi-Activity Vehicle" tagline.



Maruti WagonR Advertisement Print from 2000 (Image source)

The Maruti Suzuki WagonR was strongly advertised as a Utility Vehicle, but positioned in the hatchback segment. This concept is successful to this day and may have contributed to the rise of the current Crossover Hatchback segment.

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1999 - Maruti Suzuki Zen Classic

The Maruti Suzuki Zen Classic was an attempt at introducing neo-retro design which was gaining popularity in Japan. The cars at the time were the Mitsuoka Viewt, Subaru Impreza Casa Blanca and Daihatsu Mira.

As Kei cars were finding commercial success in India, the Zen Classic was an experiment to gauge consumer response to Japanese retro designs in India. It was not successful, and Maruti Suzuki continued selling the regular Zen.



Maruti Suzuki Zen Classic (Image source)

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Maruti Zen Classic Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Zen Classic Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Zen Classic Side Profile (Image source)

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At a time when the craze for fast cars and sedans was at an all-time high, there was an issue that prohibited people from enjoying being involved in the craze. That was the purchase price.

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A petrol Maruti Esteem, one of the most affordable sedans during the early 2000s, would cost above Rs. 4.5 lakhs for the base model. People required high performance and fuel efficiency, it was the time when safety wasn't a priority, and action movies were the norm to achieve blockbuster status. This only escalated further after the Dhoom movies, Don remake, Taarzan and Fast and the Furious movies promoted hooliganism. The original advertisement for the WagonR and the Bajaj Pulsar both displayed testosterone-triggering stunts.

Hooliganism was at its peak, and carmakers wanted to fulfil the wants of the common man looking for an affordable performance car. The stickering jobs and special edition colours of practical everyday cars like the Maruti 800 and Daewoo Matiz simply weren't taken seriously anymore. The Tata Indica V2, in 2003 suddenly became one of the best sellers as it brought about a diesel engine (good for cab drivers as diesel was cheaper than petrol at Rs 24 in 2004) and a sporty body kit.



Maruti Zen Classic Side Profile (Image source)

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Maruti 800 Special Edition

That is when the 5 Speed version of the Maruti 800 came in. It was a short-lived model to be later replaced by the Alto but found tremendous success during its production years.

Fiat followed suit and brought a special edition Palio which was actually quicker and boasted a few new features and add-ons.

Hyundai brought big engines and interior space with the Getz hatchback and Maruti Udyog brought safety features and a global car for the first time, via the Swift.

Both the Getz and the Swift were commercially successful. They also broke the stigma of relegating fun cars to the elite class only. Now performance can be had in smaller packages.

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The architecture changed from the small Zen in 2005 to the Swift in late 2005, and their proportional commercial success meant that the people were finally ready for a sedan alternative. The hatchbacks were now larger and offer around the same level of features and safety as a sedan.



Maruti Suzuki 800 5 Speed (Image source)



Maruti Suzuki 800 5 Speed (Image source)

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Maruti Suzuki Swift and Swift DZire (Image source)

This is the time when hatchbacks became larger and their sedan alternatives became shorter. The Indigo CS was the pioneer of this segment, and this was done to blur the lines between hatchbacks and sedans, the other reason being an upgrade to hatchback taxis.

#### 2002 - Fiat Palio S10

The Fiat Palio S10 was a high-performance variant of the Palio, which was only available in the signature Canary Yellow. It came with alloy wheels, rear spoilers and a rear wiper. It had fenders on both sides which were pasted to the body. It also had a spoiler covering the entire rear glass. Mechanically, Gear 3 and Gear 5 were short ratios for improved mid-range.

There was a production run of only 500 units.

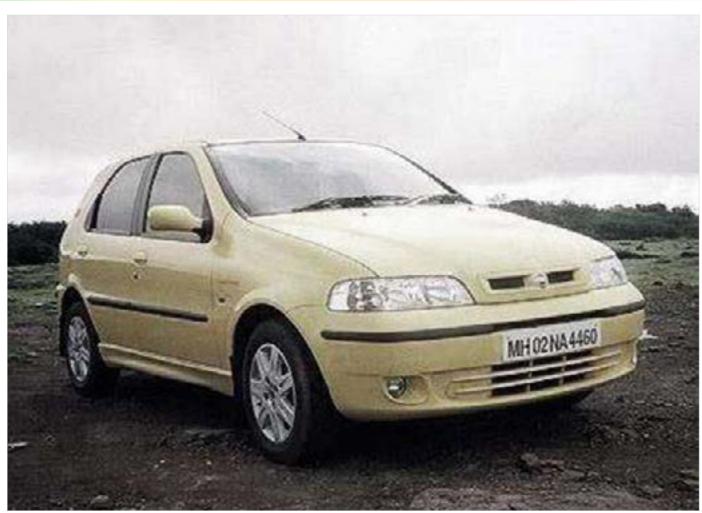


Fiat Palio S10 front view

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Fiat Palio S10 Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Fiat Palio S10 Rear Three Quarter View

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Fiat Palio S10 Side Profile (Image source)

The Fiat Palio S10 was special in being a legitimate high-performance car than just being a marketing gimmick. It received a lot of badges of Sachin Tendulkar's signatures. The owners would receive a certificate of authenticity, an autobiography book of Sachin Tendulkar and a cricket bat signed by the maestro himself.

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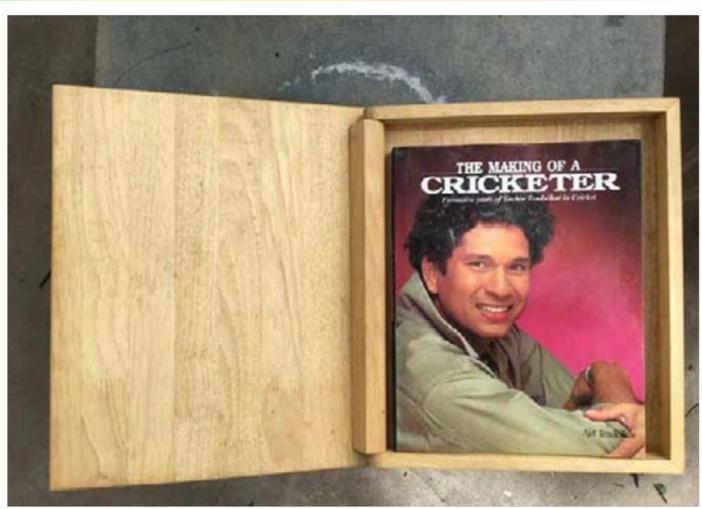
Cricket Bat signed by Sachin Tendulkar (Image source)

Certificate of Autheticity (Image source)

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Autobiography book of Sachin Tendulkar penned by his brother Ajit Tendulkar (Image source)

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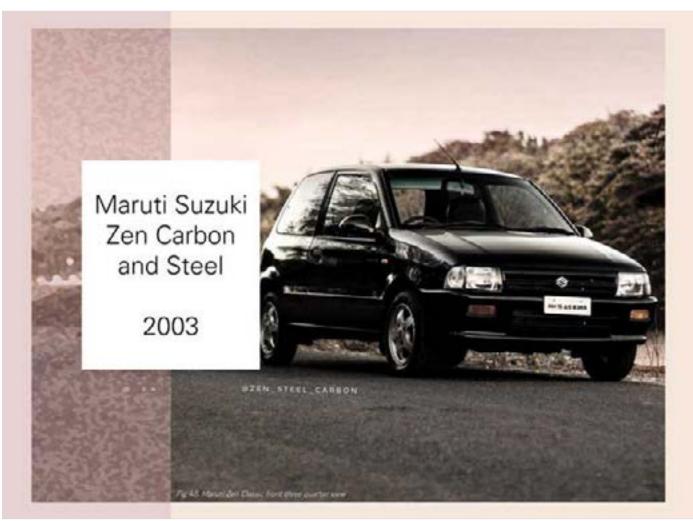
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#### 2003 - Maruti Suzuki Zen Carbon and Steel

The Maruti Suzuki Zen Steel and Classic were two colour options for the three-door versions. The cars were initially export models meant for sale in Europe, but due to some inconvenience, Suzuki had no option left but to sell them in India itself. There were a total of 600 units, of two colours each.

The black version was called Carbon and the silver version was called Steel.



Maruti Zen Classic front three quarter view (Image source)

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Maruti Zen Steel Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Zen Steel Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Zen Steel Side Profile (Image source)

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2004 - Hyundai Getz

The Hyundai Getz was launched in 2004 as the first premium hatchback in India. It offered standard body-coloured bumpers, an engine above 1 L in size and at a starting price of around Rs 5 lakhs, which pit it directly against sedans. The Hyundai Getz, unlike other hatchbacks, was dimensionally similar to sedans (except the length) and pitted as a 5-door sedan alternative.

Unlike the majority of the bright-coloured and sporty hatchbacks available in India, the Getz had metallic colours and a very mature design.



Hyundai Getz front three quarter view

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Hyundai Getz Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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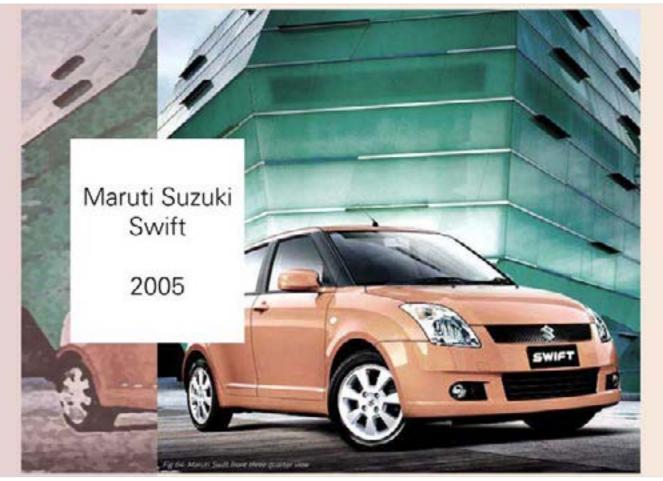
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2005 - Maruti Suzuki Swift

The Maruti Suzuki Swift was the first time features like ABS and Airbags were advertised as a selling point. It offered big 14-inch wheels for the top-end versions and was a car at a global level in terms of recency. It was the first time in a long while that India had gotten a car which was launched at the same time as the rest of the world.

The Swift was modern, provided a floating roof design for the first time, and big wheels meant it had a sporty stance.



Maruti Swift front three quarter view (Image source)

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Maruti Swift Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Swift Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Swift Side Profile

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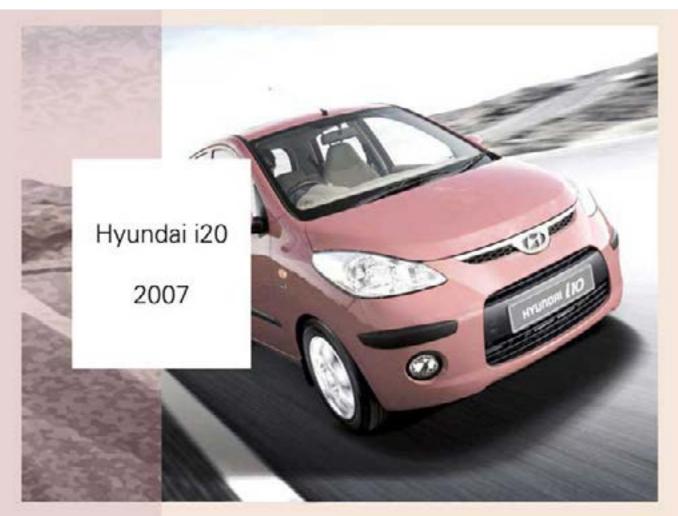
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2007 - Hyundai i10

Following suit the Maruti Swift, the Hyundai i10 too was a global car for India. It was also the first time a hatchback received a sunroof as an option.

Having a sunroof now in almost any car is seen as a standard requirement and not having a sunroof in any variant is seen as a lack.



Hyundai i10 front three quarter view (Image source)

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Hyundai i10 Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Hyundai i10 Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Hyundai i10 Side Profile (Image source)

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2008 - Skoda Fabia



Skoda Fabia front view (Image source)

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Front Three Quarter View of Skoda Fabia (Image source)

Projector Headlamp in Skoda Fabia (Image source)

The Skoda Fabia was another entrant in the premium hatchback segment. It had a floating roof design similar to the Maruti Suzuki Swift.

The Skoda Fabia was significant in the history of the city car world in India as it introduced projector headlamps for the first time in a hatchback.

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#### 2008 - Tata Indica Vista

The Tata Indica Vista was a bigger and premium alternative to the Indica, as it was bigger and provided a lot more features. The Vista also had a unique dashboard which had a centrally mounted center console.



Tata Indica Vista front three quarter view

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Dashboard of the Tata Indica Vista.

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#### 2008 - Tata Nano

The Tata Nano was a rear-engine rear-wheel drive car, that had a taller seating stance and better headroom, as opposed to the Maruti 800. It was marketed as the most affordable car in the world and sported an unopenable rear, similar to the Maruti 800 SS80. It also had a single wiper blade and remains the only 2-cylinder Indian car in production in the 20th century. The later versions did provide an openable rear door and a usable boot space. The fuel inlet was accessible by opening the hood. It was below 3.4 m in length, shorter than even the Maruti 800, but was able to provide interior space and visibility comparable to bigger hatchbacks due to its tall boy design and semi-forward cab architecture.



Tata Nano front view (Image source)

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Tata Nano Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Tata Nano Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Tata Nano Side Profile (Image source)

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#### 2009 - Honda Jazz

The Jazz was a premium hatchback in the same segment as the Hyundai Getz, and the later Hyundai i20.

The Jazz sported a unique semi-forward cab design and a glass area ahead of the front doors. This provided enhanced visibility and remains one of the rare hatchbacks to provide an E – pillar.



Honda Jazz front three quarter view (Image source)

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Honda Jazz Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Honda Jazz Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Honda Jazz Side Profile (Image source)

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#### 2009 - Chevrolet

In December 2008, Karl Slym, the then General Manager of General Motors promised two all-new models from the Chevrolet lineup for India, the Beat and the Cruze. The Beat was launched on January 4, 2009, and was targeted at the urban user, as it was strictly a four-seater car.

It was a bold design for the time as it had a huge grill in the front, the placing of a rear door handle placed away from the panel to give it a three-door car look, and bright colours. The Beat exuded an air of hooliganism. It was radical and carried many design elements which continue to find relevance even today.



Chevrolet Beat front three quarter view (Image source)

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Chevrolet Beat Front Three Quarter View

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Chevrolet Beat Rear Three Quarter View

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Chevrolet Beat Side Profile (Image source)

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Rear Door Handle mounted along the window area (Image source)



Opening of the rear door handle (Image source)



Maruti Swift Side Profile, rear door style inspired by the Beat

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Tata Altroz Side Profile, rear door style also inspired by the Beat (Image source)



Mahindra KUV 100 Side Profile, rear door style inspired by the Beat

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Taillamp of the Chevrolet Spark (Image source)



Taillamp of Honda Brio (Image source)



Taillamp of Tata Nexon (Image source)

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The ORVMs fold the other way around too. This helps as a protective measure against breaking off during impact with badly behaved cyclists and other inconveniences while driving (Image source)

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2009 - Maruti Suzuki Ritz

The Maruti Suzuki Ritz was a taller and more practical alternative to the Swift. Due to its tallboy architecture and wealth of girth, it was more spacious than any tallboy hatchback. It had a unique concave rear design and the shape remains one of the most easily identifiable silhouettes.

Due to the higher seating position, the driver has a good view of the road. The MPV-like stance of the front windscreen lends to an airy feel inside the cabin.



Maruti Ritz front three quarter view (Image source)

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Maruti Ritz Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Ritz Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Maruti Ritz Side Profile (Image source)

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The beginning of the 2010s started with the return of the Mahindra MM Series Short Body Jeeps, re-introduced as the Thar. The Force Gurkha followed suit. Mahindra aggressively started advertising a club full of Mahindra owners who were enthusiastic about going the trail roads. The catchphrase went "Live Young. Live Free!"

In the 2 wheeler world, Hero had just introduced the Impulse, a mini dual sport adventure motorcycle. The introduction of the Royal Enfield Classic meant the craze for long-distance riding only grew intense.

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Then, in Bollywood, Singham appeared turning a Mahindra Scorpio and a Mahindra Classic in the same movie, with obnoxiously stylish stunts. It was brilliantly done.

In 2012, the 4x4 wars had just shifted a gear above. The Tata Aria, a vehicle which looked like a van, can handle rough terrains like an SUV and is advertised as a larger alternative for sedans. Then came the Mahindra XUV 500, with a lot of features that would make the interior of a Toyota Fortuner look spartan. It had a monocoque architecture, and that meant it would drive like a car.



Mahindra Thar (Image source)



Tata Aria (Image source)

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Mahindra XUV 500 and Skoda Yeti, two of the most innovatively designed Crossover SUVs (Image source)

Anil Kapoor rocked the 24 series in a newly launched Tata Safari Storme, with the tagline "The Real SUV."

The Renault Duster and Ford EcoSport came around the same year, and would eventually change the Indian automotive scene for years. SUVs need not require to be big, slow and a rugged alternative to a minivan anymore. The stigma was broken.

Before this SUVs were always positioned to be above sedans in terms of stature. They were expensive to purchase and maintain. But the fact that people could now enjoy the benefit of sitting at a higher position, having a rugged, fuel-efficient vehicle and appearing as a high-status user without adding to a huge amount of purchases meant that the small car needed to undergo a change in its architecture.

And thus, compact crossovers were born. Crossover, as in the cross between an SUV and an urban car. The formula was simple, make an economy car with high seating, and good space and exude a rugged look.



Tata Safari Storme (Image source)

IDC, IIT Bombay

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Renault Duster and Ford EcoSport (Image source)



The hugely successful sub 4 m compact crossover SUV segment (Image source)

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2011 - Honda Brio

The Brio introduced a rear glass door which makes for another quickly identifiable design. The little hatchback's rear design has influenced many designs which are commercially successful today.

The taillamps have an aftermarket feel due to the transparent clear lens treatment and are one of the rarest designs along with the taillamps of the Chevrolet Beat.



Honda Brio Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Honda Brio Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Honda Brio Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Honda Brio Side Profile (Image source)

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Hyundai i20 rear view, very similar or inspired from the Brio (Image source)

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Tata Altroz rear view, very similar or inspired from the Brio

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Honda Brio rear view (Image source)

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The Honda CR-Z may have perhaps inspired the Brio's rear design (Image source)

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2013 - Ford Ecosport

The Ford EcoSport was the first time a Stepney was put in a hatchback, which also provided an SUV rivalling ground clearance. It was marketed as a compact SUV, and hence kicked off a new variant of the SUV segment. A new sub-4 m SUV segment was born.

Although the first hatchback to provide a Stepney at the rear was Premier Rio, it was never commercially successful and hence failed to influence design evolution in hatchbacks, unlike the EcoSport.



Ford EcoSport front three quarter view (Image source)

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Ford EcoSport Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Ford EcoSport Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Ford EcoSport rear three quarter view (Image source)

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Ford EcoSport Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

Premier Rio was launched nearly two years prior to the EcoSport but it wasn't as commercially successful. The EcoSport turned out to be a blockbuster, and then in the same year, the Fiat Urban Cross was unveiled, to have a similar Stepney, by due coincidence.

The Stepney attached to the EcoSport is a distinguishing factor for the vehicle itself. This makes the EcoSport instantly recognizable.

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Premier Rio Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Fiat Urban Cross Avventura rear three quarter view (Image source)

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2013 - Volkswagen Cross Polo

The Polo Cross was essentially a variant extension with body-side claddings to imitate the stance of an SUV. It was the first of its kind, to later be followed by the Toyota Etios Cross, Ford Freestyle, Maruti Suzuki Celerio X and Tata Tiago NRG.

The claddings are a part of its rugged identity and are aimed at the niche audience who are a bit enthusiastic about weekend offroad trials.

The Polo Cross was influential in terms of influencing other manufacturers to make cross SUV variants of their hatchbacks.

Across various hatchback segments, there are now crossover versions of the same.

And thus began the sub-groups of the cross-hatchback segment of today.



Volkswagen Cross Polo front view (Image source)

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Volkswagen Cross Polo Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Volkswagen Cross Polo Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Volkswagen Cross Polo Side Profile (Image source)

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Toyota Etios Cross Side Profile (Image source)



Volkswagen Polo Cross Side Profile (Image source)

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Hyundai i20 Active Side Profil (Image source)

2014 - Datsun Go Plus

The Datsun Go Plus remains as the only 3- box hatchback along with the Renault Triber in production. It was essentially a stretched version of the Datsun Go.

The Datsun Go Plus still presents itself as a micro-utility vehicle, but it is essentially a Datsun Go with bigger boot space. The seats at the rear are unusable even for small kids, and the vehicle is best used as a mini-estate car.



Datsun Go Plus front three quarter view (Image source)

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Datsun Go Plus Front Three Quarter View (Image source)



Datsun Go Plus Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Datsun Go Plus Side Profile (Image source)

2015 - Renault Kwid

The Renault Kwid is a sub-compact hatchback with a ground clearance of above 180 mm. This proved to be a boon for economy car buyers who have always wanted a smaller car which can handle bad roads easier than Altos and Indicas.

The Kwid has always presented itself to be an SUV for the budget conscious. But yet, Renault has never mentioned "SUV" as the expectation of an SUV is to have ample space, robustness and toughness, which isn't possible in a budget car. The success of the Renault Kwid led to the influence and creation of the micro SUV segment dominated by the Kwid itself and the Maruti Espresso.



Renault Kwid front three quarter view (Image source)

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Renault Kwid Front Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Renault Kwid Rear Three Quarter View (Image source)

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Renault Kwid Side Profile (Image source)

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2016 - Mahindra KUV100

The Mahindra KUV 100 provided a tall-boy design with body claddings similar to an SUV. It follows the same philosophy the original Maruti WagonR did with better ground clearance and a slightly larger size.

This gave rise to a new sub-compact crossover segment which also includes the recently launched Tata Punch.



Mahindra KUV 100 Front Three Quarter View

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Mahindra KUV 100 Front Three Quarter View

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Mahindra KUV 100 Rear Three Quarter View

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Mahindra KUV 100 Side Profile

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### Conclusion

From the days when printed media and television were the only sources of information and influence, the middle-class user has also involved into a buyer who is aware of new safety standards, additional costs which come along after purchase and global car launches. It is due to this reason, that there is a sudden spurt of car models being made available in India at the same time as in other developed countries.

The body shapes have evolved to provide more space, better ingress/egress, visibility and ground clearance. Ergonomics plays a major role in deciding the form of a car. Hatchbacks have seemingly improved and moved past being practical, now it is a perception war for which hatchback offers the best value for money.

Currently, aesthetics play a huge part in determining the segment to which a particular car belongs. For example, a Volkswagen Polo may belong to the mainstream premium hatchback category, while a Polo Cross, which is essentially a Polo will be considered a small urban SUV or a mini crossover simply because it has attachments which make it look more rugged.

The sizes of hatchbacks continue to increase and have now become the primary body style of choice by the mainstream Indian buyer.



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