

Digha made us a Family
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The desire to own a Bullet and take it for long rides grew in me when I was fifteen or sixteen. At that age I had a bicycle that I named Bullet. It took me another fifteen years to become the proud owner of a Royal Enfield machine – a Thunderbird. I bought my Thunder Hawk in April 2003 and began to wait to start fulfilling my next dream of taking long rides.

Being a family person my family resisted my idea of going for long rides. Thus I decided to give the joy of long rides to the leader of the opposition. Finally 12th October 2003 after Durga Puja, I decided not to wait any more. My wife Kakali also agreed to join the ride with our five year old son Spandan.

The day, 12th of October, was a Sunday and after having lunch we started packing our luggage for heading toward Calcutta's nearest and well-known beach – Digha. Digha is 200 km away from Calcutta and usually takes six hours to reach by road touching part of NH 6, NH 41 and State Highway (SH 4) of the 90 Km stretch.

When we actually started it was already 3:30 pm and we had a long way to go to our destination. It was 4:15 pm when our Hawk hit the NH 6, after stopping to top up the fuel tank to its capacity. During the initial 45 minutes we could only cover 25 Kms due to city traffic. After an hours drive on the newly built NH 6 (under the Golden Quadrangle Project of NHAI) the sun showed its beauty of going down to the west horizon as a big red ball. We enjoyed the view while cruising at a speed of 70 –80 kph. We took a fifteen minutes stop for refreshment after covering 77 kms from our home. When we restarted it was already dark.

This was my first cruising experience with my family on an unknown road, so for the first time I felt worried. We took a diversion from NH 6 to NH 41 toward Haldia. The road condition of NH 41 was not good with a lot of potholes and dust, hence we slowed down to 40-50 kph and after an hour's drive we reached a five-road crossing, a place known as Nandkumar.

Our Hawk was in top condition, so I wasn't worried about the bike but while thinking about the unknown road ahead, I was getting anxious. It was 6:30 pm and at this diversion I began to rethink about going to the Haldia port (27 Kms) for the night but my wife insisted on continuing towards Digha (90 kms) despite the fact that she was also aware that the road ahead was not safe at night for motorcyclists. Thus boosted, we changed position keeping our son behind me against his will to observe the Speedo and tachometer (until now he was sitting in front of me to see the Speedo and tachometer working and some times to honk at my request). After inquiring from locals we found the way to Digha and we continued cruising at average speed of 60-70 kph.

As is true for all rural India, rural areas get darker much earlier. At 7:00 pm we found the entire road empty with very few vehicles plying on road, especially towards Digha. Incoming traffic were more as the visitors from Digha were going back to Calcutta after spending their weekend. Soon we found ourselves alone for more than thirty minutes, no village, and no on going traffic, only few headlights from opposite direction at an incredible speed. No rules of dipper, no rules while overtaking. My wife also got worried, holding my jacket with one hand, while using the other hand for holding our sleeping son sitting between us.

I felt, we were two worried persons with an unaware kid on a brave, determined machine that could understand the owners mind. Every incoming vehicle being handled and negotiated through its high beam headlight forced the opposite driver to put their light into dimmer mode and that helped. At last we could see the backlights of a state bus moving towards Digha and my Hawk followed it.

At 8:30 pm we reached Digha and found a suitable hotel, the first criteria for selection being a safe parking space for our Hawk. We stayed at Digha for three days. During the stay I admitted to my wife that the decision to start for Digha at 3:30 pm was wrong, but my wife reserved her comments.

On 15th October we started rolling toward Calcutta, this time we started at 11:30 am. We enjoyed the excellent view of rural Bengal. We reached NH 6 at around 2:00 pm and stopped for a grand lunch at Sher-E-Punjab at Kolaghat. We restarted at 3:15 pm and reached home by 6:00 pm. Again the Hawk showed its capability and steady personality while coming back.

The best part of the trip happened after the end of the journey. Just after stopping in front of our home my wife got off the Hawk and touched its headlight, and with all her affection and love she welcomed our new family member. She thanked the Hawk for giving us a very good journey and time. Thus my endeavour succeeded.

After this trip we had the opportunity of riding to a distance of 70 Kms from Calcutta, and we're planning for longer trips for the FOUR of us.

Suggestions from my pillion after completing 400 Kms - the Hawk should have softer seat with more foam. It would be better if the backrest can be raised further for another four inches. I am planning for these modifications before starting our next long trip.