Bani Yadav

1. How did your interest in car rallying start? At what age you started? How long you have been doing it?

Cars have always fascinated me, as my father always loved cars and he himself used to drive cars very fast. If somebody came looking for him, you would always find him either under the bonnet or under the cars trying to do some modification to it. My mother also used to do The Himalayan Rally in her college days, now called Raid de Himalaya. I have always driven cars fast and as the saying goes “It runs in the Blood”. Though the passion in me got ignited at the age of 13, but I actually started into Cross Country Rallying exactly 2 years back, Raid De Himalaya – 2014 being my 1st cross country Rally. My first cross country event, I did at the age of 43 years, normally when people think of retiring from sports J.

1. Did you straight away start with car rallying? If not please explain to me what kind of racing you did first and how you switched to this?

I Started with small track events and then moved on to cross country rallies. Now I do various formats of rallies like Indian Rally Championship ( IRC ),   track events, Cross country extreme rallies and TSD rallies. My initial start in motorsport, kicked off with Autocrosses in 2012~2013. So in all its 3 years into motorsports now and by the grace of God, no stopping &  no looking back.

1. How dangerous do you consider the rallying in the likes Himalaya and Shimla and so on?

What precautions do you take?

This is defiantly a dangerous game and it has its pitfalls. I have had my share of accidents also, but every game has its pitfalls. One needs to always be cautious about the safety measures which are mandatory in motorsports to avoid any grievous injuries. Motorsports requires a hundred percent attention & concentration at all times especially in Maruti Suzuki Raid De Himalaya, as even a second of loss of concentration can lead to a mishap. Our vehicles are also specially prepared to drive in such Extreme category of motorsport events. The safety gears of the drivers are also to be ensured, such as your fire proof Rally suits, Helmets etc. which are all FIA approved. The FMSCI norms make these things mandatory to pass scrutiny of a vehicle and driver before going into an event. Some of the top organizers in motorsports like Himalayan Motorsports, Northern Motorsports, Motorsport Incorporation organize the  three biggest cross country Rallies of our country i.e. Raid De Himalayas, Maruti Suzuki Desert Storm and Maruti Suzuki Dakshin Dare, also ensure a flawless Scrutiny of the Vehicles & Drivers. Organizers of all other format of Rallies be it Autocrosses, Rallycrosses, Sprints, TSD Rallies etc., ensure that all the vehicles and participating drivers follow the laid down Safety norms by FMSCI, before they take a start in the event.

1. These are usually considered to be men's sports. So what made you to chose this path?

I have never been a conformist in the true sense and believe in carving my own path.  I have always chosen to do what I have truly believed in, in both personal and professional life. There is really nothing as a men’s sport or women’s sport. It is what you choose to do and it becomes yours. Traditionally men are considered to be daring hence the tag “A man’s sport “ My parents have always taught me to be a strong person and to believe in myself. They have never differentiated between a girl or a boy and that is what I have grown up believing.  Speed & cars runs in the family and I couldn’t keep myself away although did enter the sport quite late in the life, but yet again you are as old as you think. After my marriage, my husband and In laws have been my support system who kept pushing me to follow my dreams and left no stone unturned to make things fall in place for me.

1. How have you enjoyed it so far?

Motorsports has been kind to me and given me the privilege to live my dreams. I am enjoying every moment of it and hope to keep living it as long as it is physically possible. With so much of support from some of the top drivers of country, one never feels out of place. Be it Gaurav Gill, Suresh Rana, Sandeep Sharma, Lohit Urs, Sunny Siddhu, Samrat Yadav, Harpreet Bawa and so many others, if I start naming them all the space would run out, they have always helped me in sharpening my skills on the track and they also are the support system when on a track. The support of colleagues in motorsports, ensures That one thoroughly enjoys life on the Track.

1. Will you also recommend other women to take similar kinds of sport?

Of course, more and more women should join the sports, I see so many more women driving on the roads now than ever before and it is always more the merrier. Would love to see more women coming out of their shells and taking up adventure sports. Sky is the limit and age is never a factor, the ladies and girls should just have the passion to take up the sports. It is never too late to start and I am a living example to it. I personally have so many youngsters coming to me during and off the motorsport event to have an understanding of the sport.  I ensure that I devote full time on and off the track, to sharpen their skills. I share my experiences & techniques with them to motivate them to overcome their fear and phobia about motorsport. I also engage as a Guest & Motivational speaker with some major Corporates and Institution (educational & professional both), in their different kind of Summits / Seminars / Conferences and especially on occasions such as Womens Day, Safety Day etc.

1. Do you do this as your full-time profession or part-time?

This is purely a part time hobby which is also my passion. I professionally pursue a career in the corporate sector with the telecom giant “Bharti Airtel Ltd”.  Airtel fully supports me in pursuing my passion of motorsports, which I find is lacking in most of the corporates now a days.

1. What is you short term and long term plans?

One starts with baby steps, the same way I would look at being a part of World Rally Championships somewhere down the line. I hope to get some sponsorship from the Centre & Haryana State Governments and Private Players to be able to take this forward to the next level for my motorsport career, as well as I would like to start a Driving & Motorsport Academy in Haryana to uplift the youth and especially the girls of Haryana. Given an opportunity, I would love to get associated with our Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narender Modi’s drive of “BETI PADHOO BETI BACHAO YOJNA”. Besides also getting associated with our State’s Honourable Chief Minister Shri Manohar Lal Khattar for up-liftment of women and youth of Haryana. Delhi / NCR youth have so much potential and we together with the respective governments can do so much for them.

Maruti Suzuki India Limited has been my backing in motorsports and without their support it would have been practically impossible to come this far, as a good amount of money is spent in every rally , like for preparation of the vehicle and other things such as the entry fees and sundry expenses. Maruti Suzuki Motorsports supports their team members so whole heartedly that it becomes your driving force and make you a loyalist for a lifetime.  Driven by Mr RS Kalsi, who himself is a big fan and motorsport enthusiast, the motorsports division ignites the passion further and inspires you to chart new courses.

1. How long do you want to continue your racing career?

As long as my reflexes permit me,  as the level of concentration and focus has to be 100% at all times. I am sure there is still some time before I will call it quits, life has just started !!!! and with my sponsors Maruti Suzuki Motorsports behind me, SKY is the limit.

1. How excited are you about the Maruti Suzuki Raid De Himalaya? What are your targets this time?

Maruti Suzuki Raid De Himalaya is known to be one of the toughest rallies of the world and also the rally which is at the highest altitude. It is a dream for every rally driver to be a part of this great rally. Thanks to Maruti Suzuki’s support, I will again be traversing the Himalayas  and God willing, look forward to finishing it safely & successfully. Achieving a podium position or not, hardly matters to the true sports persons, as long as one is satisfied by their performance.

1. Please tell about your activists experience and also brief about the NGO's which you are involved with and the main aim of those NGO's? How long have you been a social activist?

I am actively involved in social activities related to women empowerment and upliftment of the girl child. I am engaged in activities with Badlaav – Ek Umeed ki Kiran Welfare Trust which works in this field and helps to provide support and employment opportunities to the women at the lowest level of the society like rag pickers, scavengers and slum dwellers.

I am also involved with Animal NGO’s for the protection of the stray animals and rehabilitation of abandoned and hurt animals. I work for Everything Meow which specifically takes care of stray cats,  abandoned or hurt cats. As traditionally cats are considered to be signs of bad omen in India, but trust me they are actually one of the most loving creations of God and the felines remind you of the majestic Tigers & Leopards.   
I also work for Sonadi Dogs NGO which provides medical treatment and a home to stray dogs. I myself foster many stray dogs and cats. I have a lot of stray dogs in my colony whom I take care of by getting them sterilized, vaccinated, giving them food and shelter etc. I have Two dogs and have adopted Six stray cats which stay at my home like my own children. I have been involved for many years now in these activities. I do look towards the Centre and Haryana State governments and Gurgaon Administration Bodies to help me by giving a piece of land for making an animal farm for the stray animals.

1. As a mother how do you manage your time with your kids and on the racing track as well as being an activist?

Being a mother is always the top priority for me. My children are extremely supportive of what I pursue on the track, as well as being an activist. It is their support which lets me take time out for all the activities I want to do. There are times when I have to give it a miss to some events, as my kids are my lifelines and they require me to be with them at those particular times. That is all being part of motherhood and I strongly believe in standing behind my children through thick & thin. In fact this has been the major reason of my starting so late in life in motorsports as my priorities in life were to manage my family and to give a quality upbringing to my children.

1. Please tell us a bit about your personal life and family?

Both me and my Husband work in the corporate sector and both my sons are grown up now. My elder son Karan Rao is in his final year MBA and younger one Arjun Rao is doing his 12 grade. Like I said speed runs in the family. Arjun is following my footsteps in the motorsports and would soon overshadow me, which will be a proud moment for all of us in the family. I am fortunate to have Suresh Yadav as my life partner, no one understands me better than him. We had been together since our kinder garden days. Having an inter-caste love marriage in those days, 25 years back was looked upon as crime in the society and we have had our share of up & downs together. I am proud to say, that now my parents give more weightage to Suresh than me, in all their decision making and equally proud I am of my In-Laws family to have them support me in all endeavours . My father in law Major Hari Singh Yadav (Retd) has been instrumental in pursuing my passion of motorsports.

1. What are your other hobbies?

I love to travel, explore the world, being with nature gives me a sense of peace and makes me marvel at the enormity of the universe. Taking care of stray animals is again something which is very close to my heart and brings a sense of joy and contentment. I would definitely open an animal farm to take care of stray & hurt animals and look for support from the government agencies for this.

1. Also what is your role with Airtel and how long have you been working there?

I Have been working with Airtel for over 10 years and am part of the Director’s office. As I mentioned earlier as well, Airtel’s support is unparalled in terms of helping me to pursue my passion. It is an extremely rare thing to find a company that let’s it’s employees go beyond the boundaries of maintaining a work life balance, as motorsports is a very demanding sports and involves a lot of time and energy and keeps me away from office sometimes for days at end and it is only with Airtel’s support that I am able to juggle my time well.