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Price hike fuels interest in carpooling

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New Delhi: Carpooling may not be a popular concept in India, but with the recent fuel price hike, the trend might just catch on. A day after the increase in prices of petrol and diesel, various carpooling websites have recorded an increase in the number of hits - some by as much as 100 per cent!

Yogesh Saini, founder of the carpool website www.carpool.in, said the number of hits on his website went up by a whopping 110 per cent a day after the hike was implemented.

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"Ever since the (likelihood of) fuel price rise has been in the news, the hit count per day on our website had increased by 20 per cent. But after it was implemented the number of hits went up by 110 per cent," Saini told IANS.

Since Wednesday midnight, petrol became dearer by Rs 5 per litre and diesel became costlier by Rs 3 per litre.

According to experts, carpooling, in which a vehicle is shared by five people, can help save fuel by 80 per cent. But, it did not click so far in India.

Despite offering free service all over India for the past two years, www.indimoto.com, another carpooling website, has till now been used successfully by only 10,000 commuters.

People who have been trying to popularise the concept say that the reasons for the lack of its popularity are many and varied.

Udit Bhandari, CEO and founder of www.indimoto.com, said that one of the major reasons for this concept not working in India is simply because people don't know about it.

"Many people, even in the metros, are not aware of carpooling. Making people conscious of its benefits is one of the keys to making them adopt the idea," said Bhandari. Agreed Saini.

"I often get queries on my website about what is carpool and how does it work. Raising awareness about it not only helps you save fuel, but also helps the environment by lowering pollution besides reducing traffic congestion. This will help the idea work," he said. But that's not all.

According to Saini, another reason for carpooling not working here is because it pinches one's ego to share somebody else's vehicle.

"If you have a vehicle, you feel why should I share somebody else's. And if you don't have a vehicle, you hesitate to ask thinking it's a favour. This mindset has to change for the concept to work," said Saini.

Then again, most women hesitate to carpool because of the safety factor.

"According to a study that we had done last year, only 16 per cent women use carpool. The major hindrance is the safety factor. But the carpooling websites give you the option to choose your carpool partner. We offer a platform for like-minded people to meet," said Bhandari.

Ashima Jain, an advertising executive in Delhi, which has the highest number of carpool users at 57 per cent followed by Mumbai, said that after initial hesitation, she decided to try it out through a carpool website. And it has worked for her.

"I was browsing through a carpooling website when I found a suitable woman partner who travels on the same route as I do, from home to work. I contacted her and it's been six months that we have been carpooling now.

"Not only does it save fuel and contributes towards betterment of the environment, but we have become great friends too," said Jain.

There is, however, a legal tangle to carpooling. According to section 66 of the Motor Vehicles Act, it is illegal for an individual to pay money to travel in a privately registered car.

This is one reason why the Petrol Conservation Research Association (a government body), has not associated with Bhandari's endeavour, although it encourages it.

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"But if you share your vehicle in rotation, it might not be an offence. Moreover, going by the Prime Minister's speech, conservation of fuel and to opt other means of commuting is required to save our next generation. Therefore, this is the call of the day. The act nevertheless needs to be amended," Saini said.

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