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FOR THE EVOLVED MAN

007 MACHINE

The all-new Aston
Martin DB11 blitzed
through the streets
of Mumbai

GAUTAM SINGHANIA

*"You've got to be very careful
when you put every brick"*



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WARMTH AT GOA'S
SURYA KIRAN
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ACTORS | SPORTSMEN | ENTREPRENEURS | INSPIRATIONS

MAN IN THE FAST LANE

Raymond Group chairman Gautam Hari
Singhania has motorsport on his mind

WORDS ANAND MOHAN

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RAYMOND IS A 93-YEAR OLD BRAND and a household name across India. The man at the helm, Gautam Singhania, is taking Raymond to new heights. Raymond has over 1000 stores spread across the country; the brand is reinventing itself and launched a new Khadi collection recently, blending heritage design and contemporary styling, so clearly he's got a lot on his plate. Yet Mr Singhania continues to enjoy his love for cars, runs an automotive components business and is now even on the World Motor Sports Council. We spoke to him about everything from Raymond to motorsport in a quick chat at Raymond's flagship store in Mumbai.

"It's an honour and privilege to be associated with this brand and company. The Raymond brand is a brand of the people in India. It is a national asset and we are only custodians of it. We've got to balance out our responsibilities towards fashion and the





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people. It is like a thin, long tower that can topple easily so you've got to be very careful when you put every brick. You've got 93 years of heritage to take care of."

There was an expectation to dress formally at functions, so Singhania has been wearing suits from a young age. He recalls, "I remember that era, maybe 40 years ago when at some point, a young guy wants to be more fashionable and Raymond in those days was less fashionable. So I would buy imported suits from foreign brands but what came with that was very interesting. Those suits were far better than what we made and I always had this quest for quality and benchmarked what we did against those companies. As a result, today I can say that

our suits are probably the best in the world."

Times are changing quickly with the availability of online mediums to purchase clothes. With over 1000 stores and a product that requires the customer to walk in to the store to sample, are these worrying times? To that, he says, "I don't think online (sales) are that big yet. In India, fashion is an impulse purchase. You go for a movie in a mall and you end up buying a t-shirt, or it is a destination purchase – you have got to go for a wedding in the family and you need to go for it. Now this shopping is not going to be done online. It is easier to buy a Ferrari online than to buy a suit. A Ferrari at some level is a commodity and you know exactly what you are getting. And I have actually

bought a Ferrari online (chuckles)."

The Khadi collection has become a huge initiative, says the Raymond boss. "I'm shocked how big it has become for us. We are saving the artisans that are there in India and honouring them for their work. We are working with them and buying products from them, so it has been a huge initiative for us." He believes the Khadi collection will grow many fold and because of Raymond's emotional connection with people and its legacy and heritage, khadi comes naturally to Raymond. "I think we have fashionised khadi to some extent so it should do well."

Gautam Singhania started training at Raymond 33 years ago and he believes every day is a learning experience, from learning the ropes to taking decisions as the captain of



Left: Singhania gives Jean Todt, the president of the FIA a tour of the Raymond store; Right: At the Raymond flagship store in Mumbai; Bottom: Gautam Singhania with Valentino Balboni, Lamborghini's chief test driver at the Parx Supercar show





Left: Singhanian is very passionate about drifting and has even built a drift track in Thane; Bottom: at the top step of the podium in Mugello, Italy after winning a race at the Ferrari challenge in 2015



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There is a commitment from me that I will do whatever it takes for motorsport as a neutral person

the ship. “There are no two similar days. I’m always at the job and I’m also involved with the FIA in the World Motor Sports Council.” The world of motorsports and fast cars isn’t alien to Gautam Singhanian as many know about his drifting, drag racing, and racing competency. “There’s a 2013 Toro Rosso F1 car that will come up for testing so I want to do that for sure. As the generations change on these cars, they become much better. I’ve driven the 2011 Williams last year so I am looking forward to driving the Toro Rosso.” He is also building an off-road twin-turbo 1200 horsepower buggy in the USA.

“It’s a four-wheeled car that will go on two wheels all the time. It will do a wheelie.” Being elected to the WMSC lights up Gautam Singhanian like you’d expect any automotive enthusiast to be. He is one of 14 members elected to the council. The council meets four times a year to decide on rules and regulations and other concerns affecting global motorsport. It’s early days since his late 2017 appointment so there’s little body of work to speak about; however, he’s got big plans for the future. “One of the main things I have done after being elected to the WMSC is attended a meeting and met


a lot of people there. I also had a meeting with a lot of stakeholders in motorsport in India. There are a lot of areas where there are niggling problems, whether they have to be taken up with people internationally or with the Sports Ministry of India, I think there are issues that can be sorted. There is a commitment from me that I will do whatever it takes as a neutral person. People associate me with JK tyres because JK is a group company, but I am independent.” One of his plans is to increase the localised number of events. The national karting championship has its rounds spread out





Above: Singhania posing with the different styles in shirts - cuffs and collars; Facing page: The Ferrari challenge car and Singhania before and after a win

across the country and that actually doesn't work too well. The cheaper and more localized they can make it, the better it is. They have to increase the number of races the participants can take part in. "If I can say run 30 events in Mumbai, it makes it worth my while to find a sponsor and buy a kart and even try to make a business out of it. This will also promote small race teams." Singhania is trying to tweak the grassroots level to promote motorsport. "You've got to make it accessible and affordable," he signs off.

As expected, Gautam Singhania concludes with motorsport on his mind. It hasn't got its due in India as motorsports is an expensive sport and not even a handful of Indian racers get the opportunity or have the skills to compete internationally. But a good grassroots programme could change things for the better. Here's wishing Gautam Singhania and Indian motorsport a turnaround in fortunes and a legacy that's as strong in the next hundred years as Raymond comes with now. 



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