

Auto Car India

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**#SheDrives in Bengaluru**  
Ford's pro-driving school moves south

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# #SHEDRIVES AS WELL AS YOU DO

The fourth edition of the country's first pro-driving school proved yet again that gender has no role to play when it comes to having a top time behind the wheel, says **Shirish Gandhi**.

PHOTOGRAPHY KULDEEP CHAUDHARI

**I**n early December, the #SheDrives caravan travelled to Bengaluru for the fourth edition of what is now acquiring the energy of a movement – with tons of fun dialled in. In case you are late to the party, let us fill you in on the basic credo of the effort put together by Autocar India and Ford India – and that centres around breaking preconceived notions regarding women and cars,

and proving gender plays no role when it comes to having fun behind the wheel. Over the course of the last 12 months, in Mumbai, Gurugram and Guwahati, the sheer number of women who have come forward to take part in the first-ever pro-driving school of its kind has vindicated both, Ford India's and Autocar India's view. It is also in line with the increasing number of women who are breaking the glass ceiling in automotive

corporations, and the efforts by several OEMs to improve their workforce gender ratio.

Back to the December weekend, then, and there was no deviation from a tried and tested script. The participants were all set to take advantage of an opportunity to push the Ford Freestyle to its limits in controlled and safe conditions, and to realise their full potential in the driving seat.

The two days saw close to 100

participants take to the wheel. They were first familiarised with the dedicated track, courtesy a sighting lap by the instructors, to give them an idea of the track conditions. This was followed by a hot lap that gave them an idea of what it takes to drive like a pro. Each participant was then allowed to lap the track by herself to set a baseline. After a one-to-one training session, the participants were given a chance to prove their mettle and better their lap times.



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**Gang of girls:** Close to 100 participants took to the wheel over two days in Bengaluru.



**Unexpected rains failed to play spoilsport,** as the action shifted to a tarmac circuit.



Day 1 began with action on a specially laid-out autocross track featuring fast straights, chicanes, sharp turns and long sweeping corners. After a briefing session, each participant was given a go-around of the track in a completely stock Ford Freestyle. And though some were initially a bit apprehensive about driving hard on a dirt track, they quickly warmed up to the idea after their chance behind the wheel.

This was followed by a slalom course where professional rally drivers trained them in advanced driving techniques such as drifting and turning using the handbrake. Much attention was also paid to the basics that are often overlooked, such as getting the right seating position while driving and gauging the grip on a particular surface. The concept of racing lines around a race circuit was also discussed.

The training session paid rich dividends, and this was proved by

the fact that when the women had a go at the track the next time, nearly all of them managed to better their times by a significant margin and had fun while at it. Businesswoman Mini Saxena was one of them. She wanted to try out something that would give her an adrenaline rush. "So when I got to know about #SheDrives, I thought that I should give it a try. And I am so glad I did because the experience was fantastic," said Saxena.

There was more action on the second day, despite the sudden arrival of rains that made the dirt track a touch tricky to be used. But, in the end, the rain gods were not allowed to play spoilsport, and #SheDrives Bengaluru shifted to a tarmac circuit for the participants to experience all the pro driving they had signed up for.

The greater amounts of grip on the harder surface meant that participants could push the incredible handling Freestyle to the limit and register some seriously blistering lap times. Consider the fact that most women had no prior experience of pro driving and the feat comes off as all the more impressive.

While giving a glimpse of advanced driving skills was definitely one of the objectives of #SheDrives, the event was also geared towards imparting techniques that are translatable to the road. After completing the course, Rukmini Biswas, a working professional, said, "I am taking back some essential techniques that nobody generally teaches you. What #SheDrives also taught me is how to drive safely and how to drive clean."

"I love driving because it makes me feel independent. I have learned a lot here. For example, I learned that a good driver is the one who

drives cleanly, not who drives faster. Today's experience has helped build my confidence and improve my driving skills, which I feel should help me out on the road as well," commented Anusha Goel, a software engineer.

After an overwhelmingly positive response at all the four outings, Autocar India and Ford India will be taking the #SheDrives pro-driving school to another city soon. Follow our social media channels closely for more information. Stay tuned! **AI**

## VIEWS & VOICES



**RASHMI BASAVARAJ**

I totally loved using the handbrake and getting the car to drift. That was among the things I loved, apart from learning to handle sharp turns.



**YASHASWINI SHETTY**

It felt great to improve my lap times and get better in a controlled environment, all thanks to the techniques by the pro drivers at #SheDrives.



**HAFSA JZ**

This was my first ever experience of driving on a dirt track, and it was a whole lot of fun.



**Class act:** Participants getting the lowdown on Day 1.