

Different shades: Black is the new white for car buyers

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The preference for white cars among Indians is on the decline as shades like black, blue, and grey have emerged as the new favourites.

In 2021, 43.9 per cent of Indians opted for white cars. That dropped to 42.2 per cent in 2022 and further to 39 per cent in 2023, according to Jato Dynamics's data, reviewed by *Business Standard*.

"The new-age Indian consumer is experimenting and embracing a more 'colourful' lifestyle by being bolder in their choices, whether it is for the apparel they wear, the accessories they adorn, or the car they drive," said Ajay Jain, head of Tata Motors Design Studio.

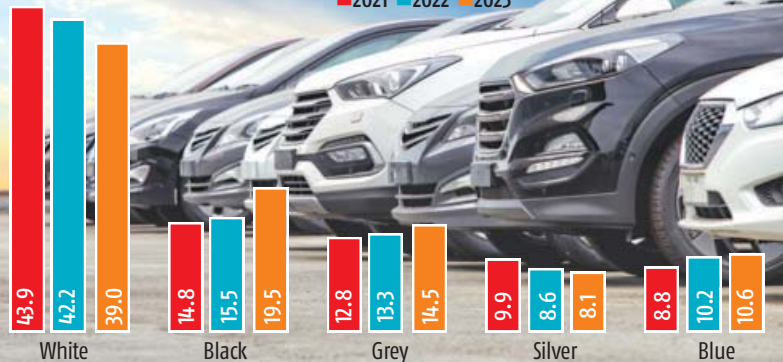
In 2021, only 14.8 per cent of the cars sold in India were black. That increased to 15.5 per cent in 2022 and further to 19.5 per cent in 2023.

White has long dominated the Indian car scene due to its classic elegance, association with purity and peace, effective heat management in the tropical climate, and high resale value, according to Ravi Bhatia, president of Jato Dynamics India. In recent years, India has witnessed a shift in colour

PAINTING THE ROADS BLACK, BLUE & GREY

Top 5 colours of cars sold in India. Colour's share in total car sales (%)

■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023



Source: Jato Dynamics

preferences, which can be attributed to the evolving trends in profiles of cars and their buyers. Sport utility vehicles (SUVs) have become more popular at the expense of sedans and hatchbacks in the past several years.

Dark shades make small vehicles look smaller, and consequently, they were not the preferred choices before. Vehicle designs are now much edgier and aggressive with distinct lines where

colours other than white stand out, said Shashank Srivastava, senior executive officer (marketing & sales) at Maruti Suzuki India.

The average car buyer today is younger, and has greater wealth and better global exposure, affecting colour preferences, according to him. As darker shades become more acceptable, their resale value has come on a par with white vehicles, he said.

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For a single-car household, white was the most acceptable colour among different family members. Now, as households are buying more than one car, non-white colours are also being picked, Srivastava said.

Hyundai Motor India Chief Operating Officer Tarun Garg said buyers aged less than 30 years now comprised about 27 per cent of the company's customers as compared to just 12 per cent in 2018. These buyers are more experimental and individualistic about colour preferences. Therefore, 30 per cent of

sales of Hyundai's newly-launched Exter is in ranger khaki colour. "For the Creta, black now accounts for nearly 32 per cent of sales as against only 9 per cent in 2018. Similarly, 40 per cent of Verna sales are of Abyss Black colour, as compared to 26 per cent in 2018," Garg said.

The Exter, Creta, and Venue are SUVs. According to Jato Dynamics, the preference for white in the SUV segment has been steadily diminishing over the past three years in India. In 2021, 45.8 per cent of customers bought white SUVs, but this percentage dropped to 38.7 per cent in 2023.

Pratap Bose, chief design and creative officer at Mahindra & Mahindra, said: "The decrease in the popularity of white cars and the rise in preference for

darker colours like black, grey, and blue over the past three years reflect changing consumer attitudes." As passenger cars are evolving from simple commuter vehicles to symbols of aspiration, people are becoming increasingly mindful that white is primarily associated with taxis and shared mobility, he said. "Consequently, they are choosing colours that signify style, elegance, and personal identity," Bose said.

Mahindra & Mahindra makes only SUVs. It has no sedan or hatchback in its portfolio. A total of 4.137 million cars were sold in India in 2023, recording an 8.3 per cent annual growth rate.

Several companies maintained consistent ex-showroom prices for a car model regardless

of the selected colour.

For instance, Hyundai Verna's ex-showroom price on the company's website remains consistent at ₹10.96 lakh, regardless of the chosen colour.

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However, the proposed move was deferred till October 30 after the industry aired concerns that it could lead to the return of "licence raj" that was characterised by strict government controls. In October, in a climb-down from its earlier position, the government said India would not restrict the import of laptops and other IT hardware products but put in place a contactless import authorisation system.