

# Bajaj Auto strikes 'Tiger Zinda Hai' note as first CNG bike hits the road

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Twenty-five years ago, when Bajaj Auto launched India's first CNG three-wheeler, Managing Director Rajiv Bajaj received a peculiar call from his Delhi team — a group of autorickshaw drivers had shattered the glass facades of a showroom of the company. "I was taken aback," Bajaj recalled, "I thought the CNG autorickshaw offered a great value proposition."

The drivers, however, were frustrated. "At that time, there was only one CNG fuel pump in Delhi and they had to wait for 10-12 hours in queues to fuel their vehicles, which effectively,

**Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari along with Bajaj Auto MD Rajiv Bajaj at the launch of the world's first CNG bike, the Freedom 125, in Pune on Friday**

## THE 'GAMECHANGER'

▶ Bajaj Freedom 125 CNG bike competes against conventional 125 cc petrol bikes

▶ Hero Glamour 125 cc starts from ₹83,000; Bajaj Pulsar 125 cc is priced at around ₹82,000

▶ Freedom 125 costs ₹95,000-1.1 lakh ex-showroom in Delhi

▶ It offers a 330 km range with full petrol and CNG tank

negated the savings they made," Bajaj recollected on Friday — the day when Bajaj Auto unveiled the world's first CNG motorcycle, the Freedom 125, with three variants, seven colours, and ex-showroom prices ranging from ₹95,000 to ₹1.1 lakh.

Now, the CNG landscape has

dramatically changed. India now boasts 6,000 CNG fuel stations across 335 cities, and this number continues to grow.

Bajaj hailed the Freedom 125 as a "gamechanger", offering "freedom from petrol imports, harmful emissions, skyrocketing petrol prices, range anxiety, and the struggle to find charging stations." A visibly emotional Bajaj, launching what could be the company's 100th product in his 34-year career, said: "I miss my father deeply today." Perfecting the technology took Bajaj Auto two and a half years. The Freedom 125 allows commuters to switch seamlessly between CNG and petrol at the click of a button, even while riding.

This bike, the company said, promises 50 per cent cost savings by reducing fuel expenses compared to petrol motorcycles. The CNG tank provides a range of over 200 km on 2 kg of CNG, while the 2-litre petrol tank

offers an additional 130 km, culminating in a total range of 330 km for a full tank, said the two-wheeler major.

Consumers save around ₹15,000 annually on fuel bills, effectively recovering the cost difference between the CNG bike and its petrol counterpart, said Bajaj Auto, which is in discussions with oil marketing companies to expand the CNG station network and include dedicated two-wheeler segments for consumer convenience.

The Freedom 125 features the "longest seat" in its category — "26 per cent longer" than conventional 125 cc motorcycles. Environmentally, the company claimed, the new motorcycle reduces CO2 emissions by 26.7 per cent compared to petrol, alongside an 85 per cent reduction in non-methane hydrocarbons and a 43 per cent reduction in nitrogen oxides.

Bajaj advocated for reducing the tax rate on cleaner fuel vehicles from the

current 28 per cent to around 12 per cent, noting that EVs in India are taxed at 5 per cent.

Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari expressed his "mission" to reduce air pollution and fossil fuel imports (India imports ₹20 trillion worth of fossil fuels). He highlighted ongoing projects for making CNG from rice straw (bio-CNG), with 60 projects operational and 400 more in the pipeline. He suggested Bajaj Auto consider a bike running on 100 per cent bioethanol, noting that the company already offers flex-fuel options for ethanol and petrol-powered bikes in its Pulsar and Dominar ranges.

Bajaj Auto is looking to capture a significant share of the entry-level bike segment with the Freedom 125. Approximately 900,000 motorcycles are sold in India each month, with 100 cc and 125 cc bikes accounting for nearly 650,000 units.

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# Freedom 125 could be a milestone moment for segment: Bajaj

Despite previous attempts, Bajaj Auto has struggled to penetrate this segment. "We sell around 150,000-175,000 bikes in this segment now every month. In the 125 cc segment, we have a 25-26 per cent share," Bajaj said.

In CNG three-wheelers, the company dominates with an 88 per cent market share and expects to replicate this success in motorcycles. Over 60 per cent of all three-wheeler

sales are CNG variants (about 70 per cent of Bajaj Auto's three-wheeler sales are CNG variants). In cities with strong CNG networks, 30 per cent of car sales are now CNG. "If among entry-level motorcycles CNG penetration touches 30 per cent, we are looking at close to 200,000 units a month," Bajaj said.

Reflecting on the 1990s when scooters dominated the market, he recalled how rising

fuel prices led to a shift towards motorcycles. The introduction of the four-stroke Hero Honda motorcycle, offering double the mileage of scooters, transformed the market. "We are offering the same proposition now," Bajaj said, suggesting this could be among "milestone moments" for the two-wheeler industry. Bajaj Auto will initially produce 10,000 units of the Freedom 125 monthly, retailing initially in Gujarat and

Maharashtra, with plans to scale up to 40,000 units by the financial year's end. Executive Director Rakesh Sharma mentioned that the automaker is also considering more models with flexi-CNG-petrol technology if this product succeeds.

The firm has identified six export markets for the bike, but initial focus remains on India. "Then we will look at exporting to Egypt, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Indonesia,

Columbia, and Peru," Sharma said. Recalling the late 1990s when Hero Honda overtook Bajaj Auto as the two-wheeler leader, Bajaj shared a dealer conference anecdote. Dealers congratulated then Hero Honda's Chairman Brijmohan Lall Munjal, who, fond of Bajaj, remarked they must now be careful as "the tiger is wounded." "Thirty years later, my message is '*Tiger Zinda Hai*'", a candid Bajaj told reporters.