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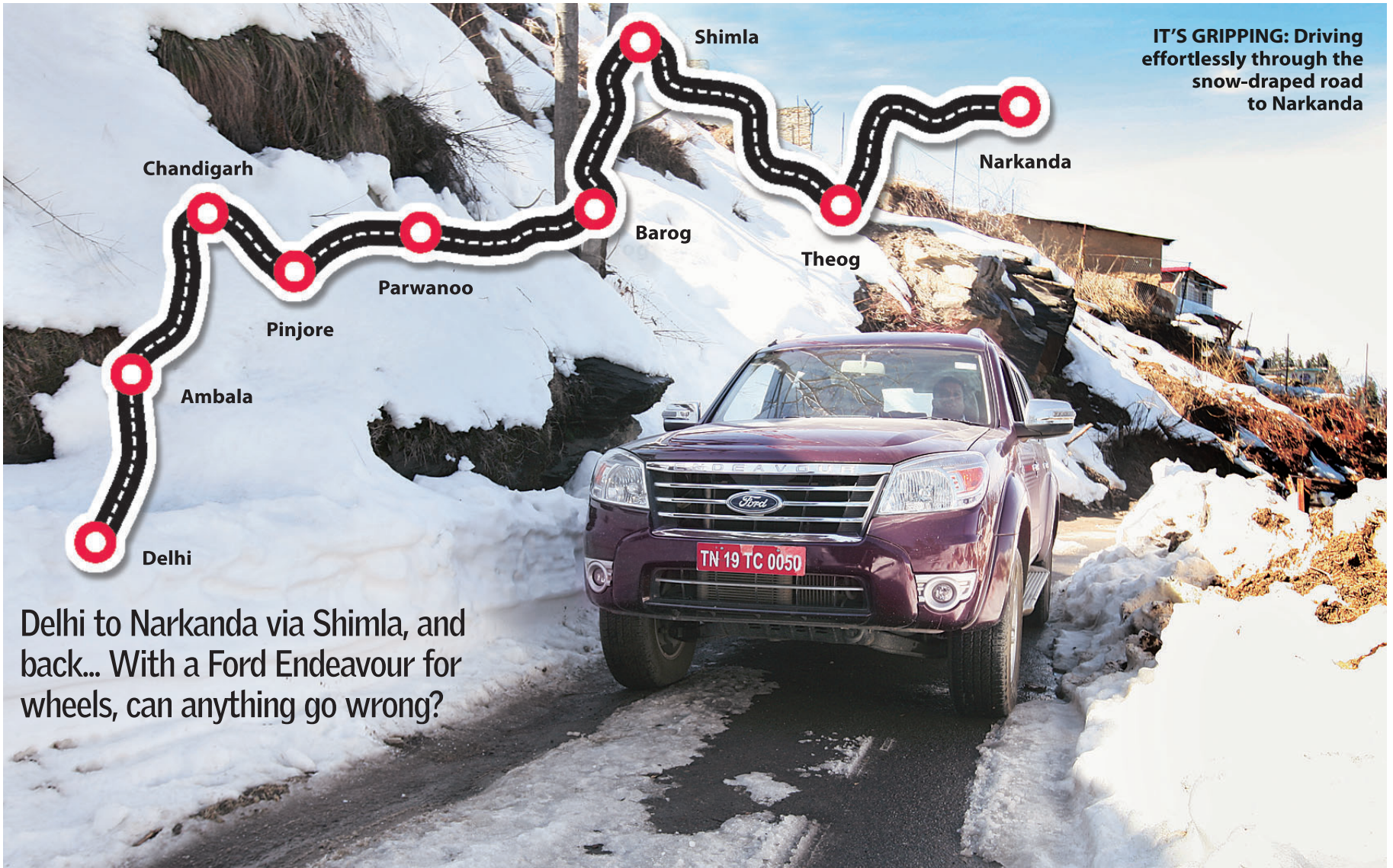
WE TAKE YOU PLACES

# Traveller



Turn to Pg 27

PHOTOS: Prakhar Pandey and Abhay Desai



**IT'S GRIPPING:** Driving effortlessly through the snow-draped road to Narkanda

Delhi to Narkanda via Shimla, and back... With a Ford Endeavour for wheels, can anything go wrong?

## @ 140 kmph +

By Abhay Desai

**E**xhilaration: A state of being that's refreshed, elated and stimulated....

It's stark 4 am, but I am out of my bed in a flash, switching off the alarm in a frenzy. The night is still fresh and the neighbour are fast asleep. I head for a wash when a sudden thought knocks in my head: 'It's cold!' Or is it? You must be thinking I'm in love all over again, but know what, it's something far better. I am scheduled for my first test drive of the new Ford Endeavour taking the 'hunk of pure muscle' into the Himalayas. Can't wait to get behind the wheel!

### He power at its best

With my backpack on, I quickly run down to stick to the schedule only to be hypnotised by the aggression the morello coloured car seems to emote. There she is, highlighted by the street light, as I take



in its lovely deep colour, clean strong lines and bumpers flaring like rippling muscles. She? No way can you call her that. For me, it's a he! I get in humming the tunes of Deep Purple's *Highway Star*, chuckling at my cliché choice of song, but then, hey, who cares?

Despite its imposing size, the engine serves up power efficiently. The feel and smell of fresh leather stimulate my senses. As I reach out for the gear shift, I realise that it is a five-speed auto. For a pure manual shift man like me who love the feel of the gear shift, it's a bit disappointing. I shift into the 'R' mode and, to my surprise, the rear camera kicks in a nice bright view of everything behind me. Well, I will have to get used to this. It's 5 am now and I am driving to pick up my colleagues, testing at the same time, the pulling power of the Ford Endeavour. I push the gas pedal as far as it can go. The engine purrs and gets about its business. The vehicle remains stable and before I know I am effortlessly speeding up to 140+ kmph.

A quick pick up and as we head towards our first stop, Murthal, just out of Delhi, we were hit by a dense fog. I am glad that the fog lights are great which helps me drive easier. Anyone who has travelled this route will understand the necessity of the 'paratha stop' at the famous Ahuja No.1. We try the *Pehalwan Parathas* — hot, *chatpata parathas* with dollops of white butter. The morning fog

seems to clear and we notice a few travellers gathering around the SUV, even as I strut around feeling important, before getting behind the wheel again. We are making great time, only that our lensman insists on frequent photo breaks.

### The land of Endeavour



When you see the Ford Endeavour on the road, you can't deny its impressive brawns. It has never been a wishy-washy soft off-roader. It's a bully of a vehicle on the winding roads of Punjab, 'the land of Endeavour'. The conversations are getting tiresome, so we pick up some music at the only available retail outlet on a petrol pump and top up on the fuel. The *taau* on the diesel pump looks taken aback and ask, "Sirji, *kounse department ki gaddi hai yeh? Badi acchi lag rahi hai!*" It's the red number plate that gets him scratching his beard. We leave cranking up the Kenwood system, the surround sound pumping us up. A much required milk break is taken at a Verka outlet outside Chandigarh. Luck-

ily, we grab a special parking spot, thanks, I guess, to the 'presence' of the vehicle or maybe the number plate.

We now head towards Parwanoo from Kalka. Having lived in Parwanoo for a few years, I am surprised at its transformation from a sleepy town tucked away in the Shivalik hills into an industrial hub. Our jumpy photographer can't seem to get enough of the car, and make us stop a million times to click 'him'. We surrender and stop at Captains Inn for a cold beer and some chicken *achaar*. One should risk the sinfully oily and delicious *achaar* (chicken, mutton, *chana*, ginger and mushroom) only if one has a strong constitution, my co-driver Ramesh discovers regretfully later.

### Orange break

As we get into the vehicle, it seems to proclaim its SUV roots with pride. It handles rugged terrains like a pro and is in its element especially on dirt roads. The Endeavour's humungous tyres and rigid chassis soak up bumps easily.

The colour orange dominates the route from Panchkula to Shimla. No, we are not talking about any party flags, but fresh oranges. At just Rs 25 a glass, the freshly squeezed orange juice is a steal.

