



Sugit Oranv, in costume at front of bike, is part of the Indian Border Security Force's Dare Devils motorcycle stunt team, which performs the 'Peacock,' honoring India's national bird. PHOTO: JESSE PESTA/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

# *There's No Easy Riding for India's Motorcycle Drill Team*

**Border Guards' Elite Stuntmen Display Feats on Wheels; 'Peacock' and 'Lotus'**

By JESSE PESTA and SAPTARISHI DUTTA

NEW DELHI—A few months ago Sugit Oranv, a motorcycle lover, graduated from high school and realized his dream: To join India's elite Border Security Force.

And this Monday he will be in front of the nation, and the world, as part of the BSF's crack team of motorcycle stuntmen—known as “Janbaz” or the Dare Devils—performing for dozens of dignitaries including President Barack Obama as part of India's annual Republic Day parade.

Mr. Oranv will be the one wearing a plastic peacock on his head.

“He's gonna make lots of girlfriends,” jokes his teammate Ashish Bhargava. “I don't think so,” Mr. Oranv says, beads

of sweat forming under his peacock helmet after the parade's final dress rehearsal on Friday.

India's paramilitary Border Security Force patrols some of the country's toughest terrain, including the Pakistani and Bangladeshi frontiers, on motorcycles and camels. Drawing on this expertise, the BSF also fields the Dare Devils, a motorcycle team whose wild displays of precision and balance are surpassed only by the surreal nature of some of the stunts.

There is the “Peacock,” honoring India's national bird, in which seven men dressed in teal helmets and shimmering teal bodysuits balance on one motorcycle, with Mr. Oranv sitting on the front fender wearing the peacock helmet. There is



BSF Dare Devils

the “Horse,” a variation on the “Peacock.”

There is the stunt where a single rider sits side-saddle, no hands on the handlebars, while sipping tea from a teacup. That one is usually

performed by Awadhesh Kumar Singh—but on Monday he’ll be mixing it up a bit. Instead of sipping tea, he will be tapping on a laptop.

Not a real laptop, though. “Too risky,” he says.

Mr. Singh designs and builds all of the team’s props, such as Mr. Oranv’s peacock helmet and a mock night-vision device that uses the bottoms of two fruit-beer cans as lenses. And he also sometimes performs the “Salute,” where a rider stands upright on the saddle of a moving motorbike and salutes at dignitaries.

According to the Dare Devils’ official

schedule, on Monday the team will perform “heart throbbing” stunts including one in which a person climbs a ladder, on a motorcycle. And one where a man balances on his belly on a bar suspended by two men riding two separate motorcycles. There will also be stunts called the “Lotus,” the “Jaguar Tri Color” and the “Harmony,” in which four riders dressed as a Hindu, a Christian, a Muslim and a Sikh ride a single bike, symbolizing religious tolerance.

Not every stunt the team conceives works out right away. “We tried juggling,” says Mr. Bhargava, Mr. Oranv’s teammate, but it was deemed too tricky to attempt on Monday because it still requires more polish. “After all, it’s on a bike,” Mr. Bhargava says.

In Monday’s performance, Mr. Bhargava will claim one of the Dare Devils’ most prominent roles. He will be carrying the Indian flag atop a pyramid of 39 people riding nine motorcycles at once.

On Friday, after their final parade rehearsal, the men of the Dare Devils relaxed over lunch in Red Fort, an ancient palace and fortress in New Delhi that once was home to Mughal royalty. Nearby, Kuldeep Choudhary, whose of-



Sugit Oranv, wearing his peacock helmet, at a Dare Devils rehearsal inside the Red Fort in New Delhi. JESSE PESTA/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



India's motorcycle Dare Devils, part of the Border Security Force, perform stunts of precision and balance at a previous Republic Day parade. Photo: AP

official title is BSF Camel Contingent Commander, prepared to tend to some of his 100 camels. They were trucked in for the parade in special trucks customized with two feet of sand.

He has the responsibility to help patrol the vast Thar Desert along the border with Pakistan, India's bitter rival. Shifting sand dunes make it impossible to maintain roads there, but that doesn't stop camels.

At the same time, the local temperature can climb well above 120 degrees in the summertime. And motorcycles overheat, Mr. Choudhary points out. But camels don't.

In Monday's parade, Mr. Choudhary, who wears a handlebar mustache, will be overseeing a performance by a 36-instrument brass band that is part of his command. The musicians will be riding camels.

It is to "promote adventure, and our camels," Mr. Choudhary says. The band will play a selection of traditional folk songs from the desert area patrolled by his men. Camels aren't maintenance-free, though. The Republic Day parade happens to coincide with the camels' mating season, Mr. Choudhary says, which makes them cranky. And by cranky he means, "They get furious"—they spit, they stop eating. Mr. Choudhary excuses himself to look in on his animals.

"Motorcycles don't have that problem," notes Vijay Kumar of the BSF.

The Dare Devils perform on Royal Enfield Bullet motorcycles, a time-tested one-cylinder bike of British design that hasn't changed much in a half-century or so, and is still manufactured in India. The only modification is that the suspension is locked so that the bikes can carry the weight of so many passengers.

The Dare Devils aren't the only military-affiliated motorcycle stunt team in the world, or even India. The U.K. has the Royal Signals Motorcycle Display Team. The Indian Army has its own, separate team that it calls the Dare Devils. And just last year India's Central Reserve Police Force formed its own motorcycle stunt team, made up entirely of women, which it also refers to as the Dare Devils. On Monday, the BSF's version of the Dare Devils, along with its camel-riding brass band, will perform as part of a two-hour extravaganza of tanks and fighter jets, along with regional displays of culture and dance, staged each January to celebrate India's constitution. Mr. Obama's attendance is a fact not lost on the Dare Devils.

"We will give our very best to enthrall everybody, including Mr. Obama," says Inspector Amit Kumar, the Dare Devils' team leader.