

<https://theprint.in/india/victoria-carriages-are-back-to-show-you-around-mumbai-only-this-time-theyre-e-victorias/792326/>

‘Victoria’ carriages are back to show you around Mumbai. Only this time, they’re e-Victorias

Victorias were tourist attractions, also featured in Hindi film 'Victoria No.203'. The battery-operated versions hit the roads in late 2021, and take customers around South Mumbai.

PURVA CHITNIS

2 January, 2022 08:00 am IST



A new e-Victoria on a street in south Mumbai | By special arrangement

Mumbai: Victoria horse carriages, a remnant of the British Raj, were for decades a major tourist attraction in Bombay, as it then was. Taking in the charms of British-era Gothic architecture from the low-slung vantage point of the Victoria was historically apt, before they were consigned to memory and museum on the instructions of the Bombay High Court in 2015.

But now, the sightseeing staple has made a comeback on Mumbai's streets, as a battery operated vehicle without the horses.

Starting late in 2021, Mumbaikars and the many tourists to the city have the option to experience landmarks at a stately pace, riding these e-Victorias.

The new four-seater e-carriages are conceptualised by UBO Ridez company, and the Khaki Tours company arranges curated tours. Ketan Kadam of UBO Ridez tells ThePrint that being battery operated, the e-Victorias are completely eco-friendly. Currently, seven such cars are out on the roads, and their speed is under 20km/hr.

The rides start at Rs 500 for 10 minutes, and go up to Rs 2,000 for a 40-minute ride without a curator, Kadam informs. With curators giving one a perfect vision of heritage Mumbai, the price for a one-hour ride can even go up to Rs 5,000 for the entire carriage, informs Bharat Gothoskar of Khaki Tours.

From Victoria to e-Victoria via Bollywood

French in origin and related to the light phaeton and brougham, Victorias in the 19th century had a partial canopy and space to stretch one's legs on a winter's ramble down Marine Drive, its slender, elegant frame belittling other cruder forms of transport. At night, the gas flashlight by the coachman's box would throw a feeble light into the dark streets echoing with the clip-clop of hooves. The Bombay version was sturdier, seated more than the usual two, and carried British and Indian notables around town.

This later version was celebrated in the Hindi film *Victoria 203* (1972), a crime caper in which the lovable villains Raja and

Rana, played by the inimitable Ashok Kumar and Pran, dashed around town in the titled carriage, driven by a disguised Saira Banu!

Earlier, the horse carriages were owned and run by private individuals. Out of the 130 licensed carriages, [four individuals](#) owned 32.

But in 2012, PETA approached the Bombay High Court, citing animal cruelty and asking for a ban. It won a favourable verdict three years later.

That is when Ketan Kadam thought of preserving these heritage vehicles.

“Even the mayor of New York had announced that Central Park would be rid of horses and electric vehicles would take over. Then I realised there is obviously an opportunity, since somebody has thought about it,” Kadam tells ThePrint.

He approached the carriage owners, took specifications of the carriages, and discussed it with a company in China. He asked the company to design these carriages with lithium ion battery and a motor whose speed would not exceed 20km/hr. On a single charge, the carriages can run for 60-70 km. There are over 30 drivers being trained on these carriages.

The e-Victorias have been given a heritage look, are fitted with British coach lanterns and currently operate in the South Mumbai area.

The original plan was to launch the e-Victorias by 2019, but it got delayed to 2020. Then, the pandemic-induced lockdown intervened.

They were finally introduced in October 2021, and Kadam says despite the recent rise in Covid restrictions that shuts down the

service early, “our number of rides have increased compared to what we used to have, by almost 50 per cent”.

The interesting meld of a traditional-modern experience is brought to the public by Khaki Tours, which is all about “magical story-telling”, says Gothoskar of Khaki Tours, which conducts various heritage walks across the city, including an urban safari. For these reasons, Gothoskar was approached personally by Kadam to join the venture.

“These curated story-telling rides last about 45-50 minutes, where we engage with people and tell them about the city, because we want the maximum number of people to experience history and heritage.”

The feel of a ride

The carriages can be found at such iconic places as Kala Ghoda, Nariman Point and the Gateway of India. Tours start from these locations and take tourists to the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus via Hutatma Chowk and Dr DN Road.

On curated rides, a member of the Khaki Tours team narrates to the passengers the historic importance of each building on its itinerary.

“For example, when we tell them that Regal Cinema in Colaba was the first air-conditioned theatre in Asia, they are genuinely surprised. Likewise, when we tell them why the roof of Bombay High court is so steep, or that the Taj hotel is older than the Gateway of India,” says Gothoskar.

Coachmen back in business

When the horse-driven carriages were stopped in 2015, about 30-35 coachmen who gave rides to tourists lost their jobs. But e-Victorias

gave them back their beloved profession. After being hired, the drivers were given training for around a month.

Sajid, who has driven horse carriages for 10-12 years, now expertly manoeuvres the e-Victoria around Mumbai.

“This is much better now. With the horse, it was high maintenance, and there is no stable around anyway. Even though we have lost the case, this arrangement is much better,” says Sajid.



Sajid in his e-Victoria | By special arrangement

He adds that during weekends, he does about 10-12 rides a day, and some six-seven rides on weekdays. “People are happy. Demand is more for the longer rides that last about an hour,” he says.

Plans for expansion

Khaki Tours and UBO Ridez plan to expand the e-Victoria service across Mumbai, and then to other cities in Maharashtra. The plan is to get 20 more cars by the end of January 2022 and expand to the entire city of Mumbai, including Bandra, Juhu, Five Gardens and Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

By March, the entire city will have been covered, along with neighbouring Thane and Vashi. Later, Pune and Nagpur would join in too, with two e-Victorias earmarked for each of those cities.

UBO Ridez are also in talks about introducing the e-Victorias with authorities in Matheran, the hill station in the Western Ghats where tourists often take horse rides. They also want to include Nashik in their journey, within the charmed circle of savouring heritage at a slow march.

(Edited by Saikat Niyogi)

Printed from

MumbaiMirror

Mumbai: Victoria 2.0 set to return next month, slice of heritage gets an electric push

/ Feb 14, 2021, 12.10 PM IST



Ten Victorias will roll out initially in south Mumbai.

MUMBAI: You will soon be able to ride on those quaint Victoria tongas, minus the clip-clop sound of horses' hooves. The battery-operated carriages are set to roll out in parts of south Mumbai from next month. The state transport department has cleared a proposal to allow the electric carriages around Gateway of India where the traditional horse-drawn carriages careened for close to a century.

Initially, 10 carriages, each of which can carry six persons, will run on routes near Gateway of India, Marine Drive and Nariman Point, said officials. The fare for a ride is still to be fixed.

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Licences to ride the e-carriages will be issued to those who had lost their livelihood after Bombay high court banned horse-driven Victorias in June 2015. The carriages were a familiar sight on the streets of south Mumbai since colonial times. Gradually, Victorias attained the status of being vintage and drew tourists. History has it that the horse-driven carriages were used for transport in the 19th century. Later, the carriages transformed from a mode of travel to a symbol of leisure and heritage.

Transport minister Anil Parab told TOI, "We have given in-principle approval to the electric Victoria plan. It will be rolled out soon..."

A senior official from the transport department said that a government resolution will be issued next week. "Victorias were a part of the city's heritage... It will be great to have them back. By giving licences to the old riders, we will also be able to rehabilitate them."

Mumbaikars, ready to take a ride on an electric Victoria carriage?

TNN | Mar 15, 2021, 11.50 PM IST



This weekend, travel back in time. No, nothing sci-fi here! Just clamber aboard a Victoria carriage and sit back as you ride past the city's landmarks and edifices. That's right. These beautiful carriages – that Bombay of yore was famous for – are back on the roads this week, but this time, sans the horses. Maharashtra's Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray inaugurated the carriages on Sunday, and this week, Mumbai will see the battery-operated e-buggies giving a taste of the colonial city, albeit in their upgraded avatar!

Victoria 2.0 is eco-friendly and hi-tech

These electric carriages were to hit Mumbai's streets a year ago, but the COVID-19 pandemic threw a proverbial spoke in the wheel. In 2021, now that things are inching back towards normalcy, the carriages are finally set

to take Mumbaikars on a ride.

Ketan Kadam, who's bringing the carriages to the city, says, "It feels really good to unveil the Victoria e-buggies for everyone. The iconic horse-led carriages from the British era were such a big part of the city's history at one point, and these are similar to that."

For now, in the first phase, the e-carriages will run at the Gateway of India, Marine Drive and Nariman Point. They will have sanitisation stands and be cleaned after each ride, and everyone is expected to wear a mask on board as per the protocols. The new Victoria carriages will run on GPS, have bluetooth facility for music and for history buffs, there are speakers that will give information about the city's history when the carriages pass by iconic landmarks. The horseless carriages have another

clear advantage from their predecessors. Adds Ketan, “They are completely electric, running on lithium-ion batteries, which are eco-friendly.”

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Providing a livelihood to former horse carriage owners



A few years ago, Mumbai's horse carriage owners and riders lost their jobs when a ban citing animal cruelty got the horse carriages off the roads. It is these people who will now be operating the new carriages, giving them an employment opportunity. Ketan informs, "The transport department has given out permission to these riders to ply the carriages. For most of these folks, they are skilled in this format, and this is also something they love doing, so this gives them a chance to get that back. It's nostalgic for them, for sure."