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Gearing up with gizmos

Aabhas Sharma / New Delhi January 11, 2010, 0:39 IST

From anti-theft devices to 'carputers', your wheels can now have it all...

Here are some numbers for you to chew on: Last year, according to the National Crime Record Bureau, more than 40,000 cars, worth over Rs 150 crore, were stolen in the country. This piece of statistics is sure to worry all car owners, especially those who plan to have a smarter car in the near future.

So, how can you make your car safer? If you are already rich enough to drive one of the high-end cars, in all probability your car is already safe to a certain extent. For the rest, the "thrill" of a smarter anti-theft device or service can come at an extra cost. The Auto Expo 2010, which will conclude today, offers several solutions in this regard. Of these, vehicle tracking has proved to be the biggest draw, partly due to the growing consumer awareness about Global Positioning System (GPS) navigators.

Fleet management solutions company **Trak-n-Tell**, for instance, has systems that enable two-way communication. It also has hidden microphones that allow you to listen to conversations in the vehicle — really handy if your vehicle is frequently driven by your teenaged kids, or if you want to keep an eye on your drivers. At Rs 15,000, you can tune in to conversations while you aren't even in the car and track your vehicle too.

Then there's MapMyIndia, which has taken GPS devices to a new level. The company has launched a GPS system for superbikes. The system is waterproof and equipped with an FM transmitter, which allows bikers to listen to navigation instructions on their FM receivers. The gadget also comes loaded with maps of 620 Indian cities, making riding across cities simple. Priced at Rs 18,990, it is ideal for those who cannot stay away from their bikes.

Predictably, new-age car multimedia systems, too, have generated ample buzz at the Auto Expo. The message is loud and clear — in-car PC, or the "carputer", is going to be the next best thing to flaunt in your car. These carputers are touch screen machines that double up as infotainment devices on which you can have music, games and GPS — all rolled into one. Many local manufacturers are betting on carputers, with the price ranging between Rs 25,000 and Rs 40,000. Get these smart things if you see yourself surfing the web on the road or watching movies on long drives, and want to avoid the hassle of carrying a laptop. If you fret over missing out on your favourite YTV shows, then Dish TV has the answer to your worries. With its newly-launched Personal Live TV, you can watch over 70 TV channels on the move. To get a single-screen live TV in your car, you will have to fork out close to Rs 1.9 lakh, whereas a multi-screen system — for a car like Toyota Innova — would cost close to Rs 2.5 lakh.

It is comforting to see BMW replacing the bewildering array of switches, knobs and buttons with the iDrive technology. This basically bisects the car's cockpit into the driving zone, which contains all controls essential to driving, and the comfort zone, where a central console helps one regulate all the vehicle's comfort functions. Users can choose and change functions, right from communications to climate control to navigation to entertainment, by pushing the console knob forward or back, or side-to-side (just like a computer mouse). A monitor is positioned in front of the driver, just below his line of vision to the road ahead.

The Mercedes S 500L, another scene-stealer at the Auto Expo this year, elegantly carries a split "Comand" system, which allows passengers to watch separate content (films, videos, etc) on their screens. And even though the Porsche might have given the Expo a miss, its cars continue to be one of the snazzier ones. For instance, if you had the Porsche Panamera, you would surely love to show off its automatic window blinds that operate with just the click of a button. But, if you want to get this automatic feature, you will have to shell out Rs 82,000.

Even the good old car audio has been overhauled to incorporate a new design. For instance, brands like Blaupunkt have enlarged the screens on their audio systems, and that too with touch screens. These are available in high-end models. Suited for SUVs or cars with bigger dashboards, these systems cost upwards of Rs 40,000.

So, while there are gadget and gizmo galore for your wheels, you may just want to bear in mind the age-old adage: All good things in life don't come cheap!

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Company	Last (Rs)	Remarks
Va Tech Wabag Ltd	1,519.60	Reports loss of Rs 1.90 cr in Sept quarter
Nitin Fire Protection Industries Ltd	81.30	Board meet on Dec 16 to consider new biz prospects
Emami Ltd	418.25	Group plans Rs 2,000 cr capex
SpiceJet Ltd	77.75	Places order with Bombardier to buy up to 30 planes

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Company	Last (Rs)	Gain (%)	Company	Last (Rs)	Gain (%)
Reliance Infra.	811.40	3.88	ITC	167.20	-1.68
H D F C	692.80	3.60	M & M	767.90	-1.25
Hindalco Inds.	221.50	3.14	Hero Honda Motor	1,772.25	-0.66

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'Markets to remain subdued for the next five-six months'
Rashesh Shah, Chairman, Edelweiss Group

The Sensex finally ended at 19,691 up 182 points and Nifty ended at 5907 up 50 points

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