Niche Guys Finish First

Leave the cricket or Bollywood star endorsements for the boring mainstream chaps. Royal Enfield boss Siddhartha Lal has embodied the ethos of his bikes and charted his own route to success.

What are the key drivers of your success? You have to be in tune with the business and be able to be extremely long-term in approach. The timescale is not a quarter or a year. It is all about where do we go in the next couple of decades.

“Five or six years ago, if you were to ask me about our ambition, I wouldn’t have said where we are today. It would have been three shades less. We have been able to achieve what we have more because we have been able to carve a space for ourselves whereas we grew even better than we expected.

Do you keep your targets lower than what you want to achieve? Not at all. What we wanted to achieve was very big. We wanted to create a leisure motorcycle market in India and we wanted to be the leader in the segment.

Now, our ambition is tremendously large. We want to be the leader as well as grow the segment of middleweight motorcycles across the world.

When the numbers were out putting RE over Harley Davidson, how did you react? At one level, it was a big milestone. But it was also just another day. Everyone has their own trajectories. It just marks an occasion that we are doing well in India. We are still the underdog but not the smallest underdog. Every day is not a struggle anymore. With that engine going and it is generating a lot of cash for us, we now move into a new trajectory, which is becoming a global player.
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PIC: ASHWANI NAGPAL

You say you're an underdog. Are you being modest or there still remains a lot to be achieved? There is no modesty. If you look at numbers, we are, even in India, still a 3 per cent market share player. Maybe the visibility is higher but we are still small. At a global level, we are still a speck in the motorcycling world, a shining one but still a speck.

How do you respond to competition or does it not matter to you?
Of course, it matters to me. A traditional way of responding to competition is to say that 'competition is doing A, B, C things and so, let us do A1, B1, C1 or something related to what it is doing'.

Our way of responding to competition is to firstly, truly understand what they are up to and then go 180 degrees. Our brand is built on being very different.

In our opinion, there is a set of customers in India that look at Indo-Japanese motorcycles. Then they see us. And we are quite different. Some of it is our history but a lot of it is our design.

The types of customers we want to attract have a different take on life. They don't need an endorsement from a movie star or a cricket star. We don't need that crutch.

Nonetheless, when Harley says RE is not competition or when another player trash talks, does it not affect you?
In the larger scheme of things, all of this is positive. They might be trying to draw us into a conversation, but it is futile because we are going on our own trajectory.

Business aside, what keeps you busy?
I am more of a family guy. I like to read, going to the beach, I swim. I trek in the mountains, but not that I am extremely active all the time.

Apparently, you rode to work when the office was in Delhi. You still do that now in Gurgaon?
No, I don't. Delhi to Gurgaon is not for the faint-hearted. I don't commute on a motorcycle anymore, but I ride whenever I can.