

# Central Locking and CNG

## A Lethal Combination



Within a couple of decades of the urban transportation revolution brought in by Maruti and its iconic product – the Maruti Suzuki 800, cars have shifted from being a plaything of the rich into a necessity of the masses. A requirement of every family today, they come in all sizes, shapes and styles, suited according to tastes and pockets.



And with this rush in demand and competitive pricing, a host of new and fabulously attractive features come into the market every year. One of the earliest such features is the central locking system. While early versions locked and unlocked the doors with the press of the car key itself, the introduction of the remote locking system on the car keys in 1982 soon created a new norm in the industry. Once considered a novelty available only in high priced cars, today the sight of a man locking/unlocking his car at the push of a button on his key fob is commonplace.



However, this most mundane and necessary feature has recently gained notoriety by acting as a death trap during road accidents. There have been numerous cases of central lock malfunctioning leading to death of car owners in recent years.



**In the last five years a number of cases have been reported where passengers were burnt alive after their car caught fire**



In a tragic incident on 3<sup>rd</sup> of October this year, five persons, including two women and one child, were burnt alive after their car fitted with a CNG engine caught fire immediately after an accident. The car had rammed into a stationary tractor trolley on the National Highway in Haryana's Palwal and the unfortunate passengers could not get out of the car as the central locking system got jammed because of the impact of the accident. This is not the first case of its kind. Consider the following cases: In May 2012, a 22-year-old man was charred to death in Najafgarh when the car he was driving caught fire and he got trapped inside due to a malfunctioning central locking system. In July 2012, four members of a family, who were trapped in a car that plunged into a rivulet near Idukki district, lost their lives because the central locking system prevented the passengers from getting out of the car. The general manager of BMW's Gujarat business partner, Parsoli Motors, and three technicians were killed in 2009 when their BMW on an inspection run crashed. The crash caused a short circuit and the BMW caught fire. They were all burnt to death, trapped in the car after its central locking system reportedly failed. It is the first such incident in the world involving a BMW.

The reason behind these tragic incidents is a very basic feature of the central locking system. The system locks and unlocks the car doors and windows at the push of a button. Similarly the driver can lock all doors and windows through a set of buttons at his fingertips. This electronic system is a very safe feature as it prevents anyone stealing the car and also protects you from the freak chance of any passenger, especially children, from opening a car door while driving. In order to achieve this aim, most modern cars built in the last 10-15 years have a 'dead

locking' feature. Once a car is locked, it is deadlocked which means that it cannot be unlocked without the remote control. Any attempts to override this will result in the locks being rendered inoperable. This ensures that when somebody breaks a window to get in or steal the car, they can't open the door as the internal handles won't work.


But like all electro-mechanical systems, this feature is also dependent on a set of wires, latches and levers- all which are susceptible to damage in the case of an accident. Once affected by the impact of the accident the hardware of the locking system gets damaged and the system is left in its default deadlocked state.

Any amount of key pressing now on the remote won't work because the system's hardware is damaged and there is no manual override. The same features which ensured the safety of your car in ordinary situation can now, in the event of an accident, imprison you in your own car with no means of escape possible.

While this problem is a global one, it is compounded further in our country due to a very unique choice of fuel. CNG, first introduced in Delhi in 1993, slowly became the fuel of choice for the middle class consumer for his daily commute. With astronomical hikes in petrol/diesel prices in recent months more and more Indians are resorting to installation of CNG kits in their cars. Also, with this hike in demand of CNG, and with the traditional *jugaad* mentality of our countrymen, a dangerous trend of using domestic LPG cylinders in cars have also caught on in recent years. What it results in is a potential fireball residing in countless car boots on Indian roads every time.




CAR CATCHES FIRE IN DELHI



An accident will most definitely result in a major fire and since the fire's heat will affect the car cables and electronics first, the chances of a central locking system malfunctioning in a CNG kitted car increases. The ultimate result of being trapped in a burning metal box with no means of escape can only be death, as is so tragically brought to notice by the details of the accidents discussed earlier.

There exists no mechanical way of addressing this problem. Any tampering with the system's functioning will only result in a serious compromise on your car's everyday security. There is only one way out of this problem. And that is good old common sense. There exist some very simple methods of ensuring that in the event of an accident you do not become a prisoner in your own car.

- Always keep the number of the Local authorities handy. All major highways now display the emergency phone numbers of the police, ambulance and fire stations. Make sure that these are noted down and kept in an easily accessible place in your car.
- Remember that the windows are glass. Carry a small hammer that can be used to shatter the panes in case of any malfunction. Carrying the tool kit under the driver's seat is also a good option as its heavy spanners can perform the same task effectively.
- Cars with manual windows do not suffer with the same problem as a fully automated car. Even if the locking system fails, remember that the windows in



**Always  
keep a  
hammer in  
your glove  
box**



## **Small safety measures save lives**



- Always carry a small fire extinguisher inside the car cabin where it can be easily reached.
- Be careful with CNG cars. The fire extinguisher is an absolute necessity. And never fit an LPG cylinder in your car. This modification has no safety features at all. A fitted CNG kit is worth every penny you will pay for it.
- Maintenance of your car is also vital. Not every accident leads to a fire and those which do can almost always be traced back to a faulty wiring or mechanical glitch that could have been detected and resolved by good car servicing.
- Lastly, remember not to panic. Your fear imprisons you far more effectively than any malfunctioning machine.

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