



PACE MAKER

Car modification doesn't need you to sell an arm or a leg. You can always start with the basics, says **Debabrata Sarkar**.

Photography: Kiran Jadhav

YOU DON'T NEED TO BE A CHEF TO KNOW HOW much of a difference a dash of spices, or a pinch of salt, or a touch of pepper, or a cube of butter even can make to a dish. Similarly, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure out that there are certain things called 'tuning' boxes that can inject a fair amount of life even into your mundane, practical, everyday hatch. But, we know all the little fancy twirling of hand by a chef with a pinch of seasoning works wonderfully well, but do these little 'tuning' boxes work just as well?

Well we thought we'd put one of the more popular tuner's product through its paces in a good ol' fashioned *TG* road test routine, just to check up on the claims. For the experiment we picked on our most efficient Lifer, the Ritz. Yes, I know the Punto needs it more desperately and the Superb with a chip just sounds delicious, but unfortunately, the Pete's tuning box is currently available only for diesel motors. Anyway, moving on. Since our long term test Ritz had already done close to 20,000km and was due for a service, we decided to get that out of the way before attempting this test, just to get the playing field as even as possible. Then we ran the stock engine, still producing a modest 75bhp and 190Nm of torque, through the entire range of tests to conclude that it was doing as well as a brand new one. ☺

Following this process and jotting down some interesting numbers, it was off to a friend's garage for some help getting the box fitted in correctly. It does look pretty simple with a couple of cables required to be plugged in, but then there is also a line on the instruction manual, which warns you that if you get it wrong, your 28,000-rupee tuning box will be just that – a box and nothing more. So, having a professional close at hand to at least make sure what you've done is right, is a good idea. The fitment itself takes all of five minutes with the cable to the ECU being re-routed through the Pete's box. The securing of the box is a bit more tricky as there aren't any clamps that you can hook or bolt on. Instead you just need to grab a couple of fasteners and find a little recess behind the engine to tie it down to. Just to make sure the ECU resets without any hiccups, disconnect the battery as well and re-connect it once you are done. Peter Chacko of Pete's, of course, wanted us to have another piece of kit as well, the Green Cotton air-filter which was duly swapped with the original one as well to help the car breathe better.

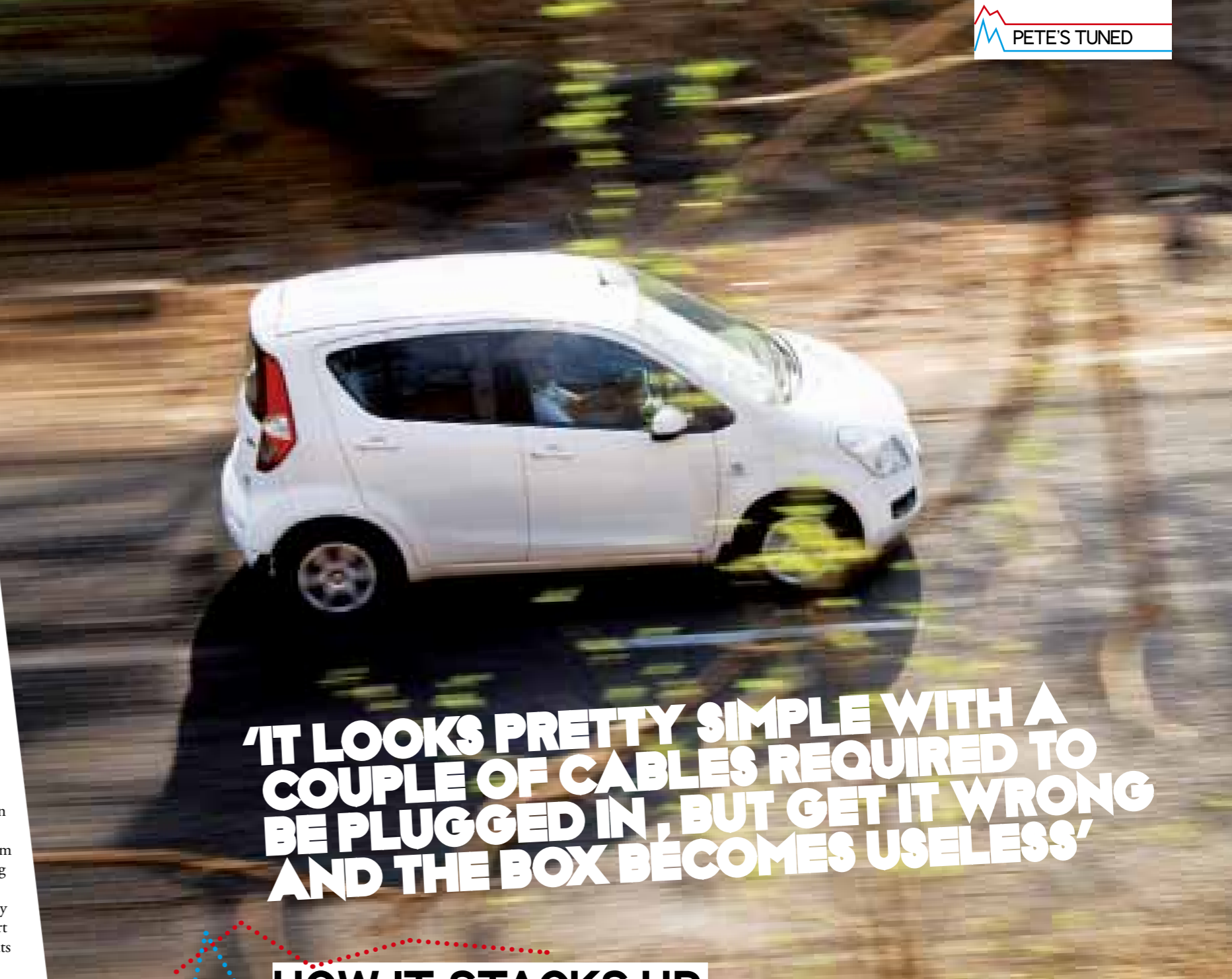


Oh the enthusiasm. Not sure the Ritz particularly likes it

Equipped with our shiny new modifications, we headed out once more to run the same routine of tests again. The difference in power delivery becomes apparent from the word go. Power seems to flow in a more linear manner and the turbo kicks in with more punch than before. Bottom end performance does not really gain much from the altered engine mapping, but let the revs climb and the turbo spool up past 1800rpm and you can feel the difference. I know the question that is haunting you at this moment, does fitting a box like this mean fuel efficiency goes out the window? Well,

guess what, there's good news. This gain in power doesn't tax fuel economy. Having run the same route with the stock engine and then with the tuning box, at similar times of the day and averaging similar sort of speeds, we recorded a difference of less than 1.5kpl with the engine in stock form returning 22.8kpl and then 21.4kpl with its altered engine map. This marginal difference in economy is simply because of varying traffic conditions on a given day and doesn't really confer any difference of consequence.

What is of consequence is whether the 28 grand you spend on the box delivers where it really matters. Does it inject that extra bit of adrenaline when you step on the gas, which of course is directly related to how much of a difference it makes on the go. The initial results aren't as impressive as we were hoping. Bottom end performance remains largely un-altered. In fact, it possibly becomes marginally worse as our in-gear acceleration times show, but put the pedal to the floor and the Pete's box works its magic. In a race against the clock, 100kph came up in 14.7 seconds for the Ritz in stock form and then 13.2 seconds with the box attached. And although the difference might look a lot like the inconsequential loss in mileage I had mentioned earlier, this gain in acceleration is nothing short of astonishing. The Ritz immediately goes from the, similarly equipped, Punto-beating category to breathing down the pipes of a Honda Jazz (which incidentally has 15 extra bhp and is petrol powered). All this while doing nearly twice as many kilometres to every litre of fuel. So is this sort of gain worth the 28,000 you spend on the box? The results are in front of you. Do you still need convincing? 📺



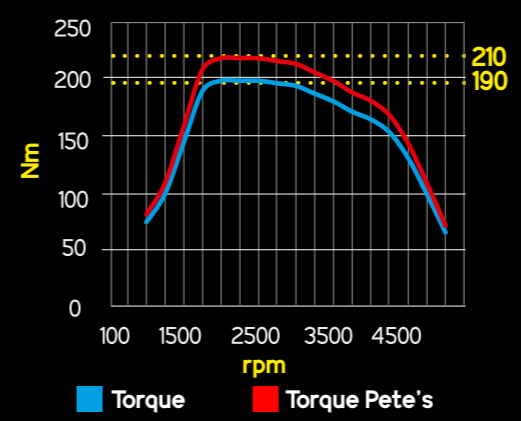
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HOW IT STACKS UP



Cables connected, box harnessed, filter fitted. Ready for action



FLAT OUT		
kph	stock	Pete's
10	0.68	0.68
20	1.57	1.52
40	3.28	3.25
60	5.99	5.47
80	9.55	8.78
100	14.76	13.28
120	22.83	19.47
125	25.57	21.33