

Brenwin Naidu on the Sunday Times' latest addition

 By Jessica Tennant

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Tiso Blackstar Group's automotive standalone supplement, *Sunday Times Motoring* is going to be inserted into the *Sunday Times Lifestyle* magazine section, as *Lifestyle Motoring*, with the first edition featuring this Sunday, 24 September 2017. Thereafter each edition will be published in the last edition of the paper each month.

The *Sunday Times* has been making huge investments in content of late. "Our decision to extend the reach of this supplement to the entire run of the *Sunday Times* is further proof of that," says editor-in-chief Bongani Siqoko. "We also realise that there is a lifestyle element to motoring that we have not yet explored. This change will allow us to make motoring exciting for all our readers," he went on to say.

Brenwin Naidu, editor of the supplement's predecessor will continue as editor of the updated version, as well as of the weekly motoring sections in *The Times* and *Sowetan* newspapers, in addition to his role as a contributing presenter on the Ignition television channel, also owned by Tiso Blackstar Group.

I interviewed Naidu to find out more about the publication, how he paces himself working across multiple titles and platforms, and what motivates (or moves) him...

❏ **Tell us more about the decision to move the supplement into the Lifestyle magazine section and how this affects you.**

For the sake of context, let's take it back a little. *Sunday Times Motoring* was launched in September 2015 as a standalone supplement aimed at selected subscribers. The monthly insert had a print run of 75,000 copies, inserted into the 7-10 LSM group of the *Sunday Times* subscriber base. It was published once a month. From the start, the plan was to continuously evaluate its traction and increase the print run in accordance to reception and engagement from readers. This move heeds the call for more automotive content, for the entire *Sunday Times* database. From a business perspective, the increased reach is also bound to make the title more attractive to advertisers. In its new guise, *Lifestyle Motoring* lays claim to being the largest monthly motoring title in South Africa and will feature in the last week of each month.

❏ **What can readers expect from the Lifestyle Motoring section?**

Drawing from the format of its predecessor, *Lifestyle Motoring* promises to deliver automotive content that is entertaining, incisive and informative – with features that delve beyond what manufacturer press machines disseminate. In addition to the expected news and reviews from the monthly motoring circuit, readers can look forward to stories that explore the more arcane, curious aspects of the automotive world and the social aspects of motoring. Sections include motorcycling, travel, motorsport, insights from the classic car sphere, comparative tests and profiles on industry influencers.

❏ **What are your plans for the section? What's at the top of your to-do list?**

The *Lifestyle* supplement of the *Sunday Times* has a distinctive approach towards showcasing the aspects that everyone lives for when they are not slogging at work. Literature, food, culture, music, travel, good times – the interesting parts of human existence. My first task is adapting our content to the voice of *Lifestyle*, which, inevitably means casting aside the tone that defines conventional automotive journalism. But obviously, my to-do list right now features the more practical



Brenwin Naidu

elements of putting the section together. We have photography sessions planned, layout templates to compare, cars to source, tests to conduct and mileage to be covered locally and abroad.

🔱 **What are you looking forward to?**

The self-proclaimed 'hardcore' automotive scribes of the industry tend to scoff at the connotations of the term 'lifestyle' when it comes to cars. It is often forgotten that the average person shopping for a car could care less about outputs, yaw, MacPherson struts and other technical bits. That is not to undermine the knowledge of readers with such interests, of course. However, our task here is to make these parts palatable. The directive is not to dilute or soften the nuts-and-bolts elements of the craft, but to make them entertaining. Primarily we are zoning-in on what is central to cars: people. The motoring tapestry in South Africa is overwhelmingly varied and there are countless stories to be told. A foreword in a Jeremy Clarkson book once read, "It is not the cars that matter, but what people do with them." As much as I loathe falling victim to the car enthusiast cliché of quoting the man, he really does have a point.

🔱 **How would you say the journalist's or editor's role has changed, and how do you cope with the workload/different areas of focus, working on multiple sections and platforms?**

The newsroom structure has changed, so has the flow of content – and the way in which it is peddled. Journalists and editors are expected to stretch towards different roles to stay relevant. The reasons for and merits of that will inevitably be debated by long-standing newshounds. In our world of multiple media platforms, synergies and a willingness to diversify is a must. Working across titles, it is imperative to stay mindful of the requirements of each platform; content needs to resonate with the audience in question. Maybe this goes without saying, but forward-planning is essential, as is staying abreast of different deadlines. With all this in mind, the privilege of being responsible for more than one outlet through which to feed motoring content far outweighs any challenge. I love my job!

🔱 **What moves you?**

My passion for the craft, without a doubt. And the knowledge that our team invests itself tirelessly into putting these supplements together. Yes, there are difficulties – as with anything – but when the result comes together as planned one is always left encouraged and raring to get started on the next task list. The word 'passion' seems to be a bit of a platitude given how frequently it is thrown. But the feeling I get when a feature comes together after strenuous planning and logistical hiccups (sometimes), is a great one.

🔱 **What are you currently reading/listening to for work?**

My nightly ritual is picking a TedX talk before bedtime. Edifying stuff. The traffic drive is always accompanied by Talk Radio 702, except for Fridays, when the music inventory is brought out. As you would expect, our desks are always filled with motoring-related reading material from the local and international scenes. This is in addition to the devouring of stories via the smartphone screen as the day progresses. Does anyone ever stop reading for work? I do enjoy reading things unrelated to cars, too. I am trying to finish *The State of Africa* by Martin Meredith.

🔱 **Tell us something about yourself not generally known.**

I started my career in journalism as an editorial cadet at Caxton Community Newspapers. This was in 2011 and I was 18. I am not sure I could have received a better baptism. The group editor-in-chief started me off by asking me to interview and profile nearly everyone in our building, from the person in payroll to the most seasoned reporter. After some time, he sent me out with a notepad and a camera and asked me to find five interesting happenings on Jan Smuts Avenue in Johannesburg worth writing about. Eventually I was assigned as a reporter to newspapers covering three different parts of the city. From stories about potholes, burst water pipes, brothels hidden in swanky suburbs and land disputes, the exposure was fantastic. Grasping the fundamentals of journalism is obviously quite important.

“ *The mechanics of telling a good story are the same, whether you are talking about cars or unkempt facilities on a suburban playground.* ”

🔱 **So true. Last words?**

The opportunity to take the helm of *Sunday Times Motoring* was a significant personal milestone. Being associated with a title boasting such weight and credibility remains a huge honour and to witness its growth gives me immeasurable joy. The gratitude flows freely. There were many who were willing to offer mentorship and support in my progression. I count myself privileged to work alongside dedicated professionals and true guardians of the craft. This list includes our motoring production editor Bruce Fraser and Lerato Matebese, senior reporter at *Business Day Motor News*, unflinching in his determination to provide cogent, hard-hitting motoring evaluations. There is Lindsay Vine-Smyth, the executive producer for Ignition TV, who pulls no punches in striving to maintain the channel's position as an authoritative voice on all things motoring. Wynter Murdoch, former group motoring editor (who once edited the *Sunday Times Lifestyle* supplement too) played a major role in my development within this industry. It would be unfair to not mention the manufacturers, particularly those that continue to appreciate the value of the motoring press. I am thankful to our readers, always eager to offer praise and criticism. They can be assured that we will continue to keep the pedal to the metal, in bringing objective, insightful, fun content on the glorious wheeled machines that keep us going.

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