

My first car almost killed me

What began as a practical solution to ease daily transport struggles quickly turned into a life-threatening ordeal. In a split second on the road, a routine drive became a near-fatal encounter, one that changed how Charity Namuswe sees driving, safety, and survival.

BY GEOFFREY OKWERA

1982

About. The Toyota Sprinter Carib is a compact station wagon produced between 1982 and 2002, known for its practicality and optional all-wheel drive (AWD) capabilities. Based on the Corolla/Sprinter, it offered 1.6L to 1.8L engines, manual or automatic transmissions.

Charity Namuswe works with the Kayunga District Local Government as an Assistant Nursing Officer in the Psychiatry department at Bbaale Health Centre IV. As many health workers serving in rural areas, she faced persistent transport challenges that made it difficult to move to and from work. To ease this burden, she decided to purchase a modest Toyota Carib, which cost her Sh56m.

However, what initially came as a solution to her transport challenges nearly cost her life when she was almost involved in a terrifying head-on collision. Fortunately, as she approached a hump on the road, she was forced to slow down.

That sudden deceleration turned out to be lifesaving, as an oncoming vehicle veered into her lane and passed in the opposite direction. The reduced speed helped prevent what could have been a fatal crash.

Today, Namuswe is grateful to be alive and courageously shares her experience in these excerpts from the interview.

Briefly tell us about your first car. Is it what you had planned to acquire?

My first car, a Toyota Carib, was never the car of my dreams. For years, I had imagined myself behind the wheel of either a Pajero or a Land Cruiser. But life has a way of shifting priorities, and my journey into car ownership began not with aspiration, but with responsibility.

The turning point came one ordinary morning while taking my children to school. Like many families, we depended on public transport.

That day, my eldest daughter, tired and frustrated, said she was exhausted from carrying her younger sibling during the taxi rides. It was such a simple statement, yet it struck me deeply. In that moment, the inconvenience and discomfort my children had endured suddenly felt heavier than my dreams of owning a bigger, more prestigious vehicle.

That remark became my motivation. It planted a sense of urgency and responsibility in me. I began to look at car ownership not as a luxury or a status symbol, but as a necessity for my family's comfort, safety, and dignity.

Did you give the car a unique name?

(Laughs) I named the car *Kibaluma*, because some people were

not happy to see me driving it. Some doubted me and even said I would not drive it for long or that it would not last. But by God's grace, I am still driving it today, and it continues to serve my family faithfully.

How did this car affect your finances in terms of repairs?

Like any second-hand car, it requires continuous investment to keep it mechanically sound and looking presentable. Soon after buying it, I had to replace the tyres and respray the body to give it a cleaner and more appealing appearance. Beyond that, I have continued to spend on routine servicing and maintenance, which are essential for keeping the car running smoothly, safely, and reliably.

What was the most embarrassing thing that happened with your first car?

I was driving to work when I suddenly realised that the brake pedals were not working. I nearly broke into a cold sweat as I noticed, ahead of me, my preferred vehicle, the Pajero, approaching from the opposite direction. I held my breath, ready to make a split-second decision, when a hump on the road came to my rescue. I hit the hump while approaching the oncoming vehicle, which passed me safely in the opposite direction. I then veered off the road until the car finally came to a stop.

When I parked the vehicle, a loud sound suddenly came from it, which was quite embarrassing. From that moment, I learnt that when you own and drive a car, you must always be prepared for unex-

ABOUT THE TOYOTA CARIB

The Toyota Carib is a compact station wagon that gained popularity for its practicality, fuel efficiency, and versatility, especially among drivers who needed a reliable everyday car with extra carrying space.

One of its strongest selling points is its wagon body style, which offers a spacious boot and foldable rear seats, perfect for small businesses, family use, or carrying farm produce.



pected expenses. I had no choice but to call my mechanic to inspect and repair the vehicle.

How attached are you to the car?

I love it as much as I love myself because it is very economical when it comes to fuel consumption. In fact, one litre can run for about 14 kilometres, which is quite impressive compared to vehicles with much larger engines that consume more fuel. This efficiency has made it very affordable for daily use, especially for long trips to work and family commitments.

Did it ever break down at the worst possible moment?

Yes, the scenario of the brake pedals not working was indeed the worst driving moment of my life. Apart from this situation, the car has been no major breakdown.

If your first car could talk, what would it reveal about you?

It would expose my trait of generosity, because since I bought the car, I have become very open and willing to help others, especially by giving lifts to friends and colleagues. I believe a giving heart attracts blessings from God, so unless the car is full to capacity, I always try to offer people a ride whenever I can.

How many battles has it fought with boda bodas, and are there scratches to show for it?

No boda boda scratches. God continues to be merciful to me so far.

What were your first driving lessons like? Did you fake expertise, or did taxis honk at your "granny" driving skills?

I actually learnt how to drive in 2009 through my friends. They would occasionally teach me, but because I had a strong desire to learn, I picked it up very quickly.

I even remember borrowing a friend's car and driving some of my belongings home. My mother was surprised at the time because I was still a young girl, and she could not understand how I managed to bypass traffic officers.

What is the strangest thing people have said about you or your car because of your driving?

Most people say I drive like a man; they say I am very confident. But wait a minute, who says women are not supposed to be confident behind the wheel? I call upon women to drive with confidence and exude strong driving skills.

What disgusts you most on the road?

Oh my God! Seeing people lower their windows to dump rubbish really annoys me. There should be more punitive measures against such behaviour because the rubbish blocks sewer points and drainage channels.



Charity Namuswe's "Kibaluma", a Toyota Carib, became more than just a first car, offering comfort and independence, but also a life-changing lesson after a near-fatal brake failure on the road. PHOTOS/COURTESY