

## When Herbie goes flying

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I remind the reader that I refer to my motorised wheelchair as Herbie so as to avoid harping on the impersonal ‘wheelchair’. It is the fact that he has a visible battery to underline his motorised stature that has led to an innumerable number of minor hassles. It is precisely because of the wide range of the hassle-content that I am trying to see if there can’t be a simple way out of these hassles. Let me illustrate with some examples of this divergence (in perception and implementation of the rules).

A recent journey of mine involved my flying from Chennai to Tuticorin and later from Thiruvananthapuram to Chennai. The onward journey started by looking problematic. When we went as usual to have our check-in baggage scanned by the x-ray machine, one person asked us to open the battery so he could see if it was a potential hazard. We had to explain that the battery was a dry cell one which couldn’t be opened and that what we could do was to just lock the battery and remove the key as well as remove the joy-stick along with the wire connecting it to the battery. Then when we asked (at the time of checking in) where we would be re-united with the partially dis-membered Herbie, we were told it would have to be at the baggage claim because there would be rules about collecting it on the tarmac itself and driving it from there.

And surprise, surprise! When we landed in Tuticorin, and were able to get out of the craft after all the non-handicapped people had done so, imagine my surprise to find that the airport was a really tiny one, and better still, I found Herbie just being removed from the craft. And I had fortunately been allowed to carry the joy-stick in my back-pack after the security personnel at Chennai airport had run it through the x-ray machine a second time to convince themselves that it was not a security-hazard. So I was able to ask the airline staff if I could just drive Herbie off after having connected the joy-stick, and my request was promptly acceded to, with the result that that must have been my fastest exit from an airport after landing! Thank God for small airports, I told myself.

But when we came to Thiruvananthapuram airport, and I tried taking the joy-stick in my back-pack, the security personnel would have none of that. They insisted that it should be checked in and the poor

airline staff had to keep them and me happy by doing a make-shift packing job with old newspapers so the joy-stick would not get hurt in transit!

I can go on and on about airports in Hyderabad or Delhi or Mumbai, airlines SpiceJet, Jet Airways and Air India/Indian Airlines, and the particular twist that the personnel in the particular airport/airline gave to their perception of what is, or is not allowed, but I will spare you the gory details! I just want to know what it will take to get some piece of documentation which will ensure that I am not subject to the vagaries of the mood of the officer at the security check in airports! Can't there be a standard rule adhered to by all airports and airlines - such as the maximum weight allowed per passenger - so the entire experience of flying with Herbie does not resemble a game of Russian roulette?