

Pope Francis to Drive His Own 'Popemobile' Inside Vatican City

Pope Francis plans to drive around Vatican City at the wheel of a "popemobile" that is a lot like him: frugal, clad in white and with a fair bit of mileage.

The 1984 Renault 4 economy car with 300,000 km (186,000 miles) on the clock was given to him by a 70-year-old priest from northern Italy, Father Renzo Zocca, who took the pope for a spin inside the walls of the tiny city-state.

"I think the pope will drive it a bit himself inside the Vatican," the Holy See's deputy spokesman, Father Ciro Benedettini, said on Thursday.

After the pope appealed to priests several months ago not to drive expensive cars but to save money and give it to the poor, Zocca wrote him a letter saying he had used the same car for decades and wanted to give it to the pope as a symbolic gift.

He brought it last weekend, along with some of his parishioners, to the Vatican, where the pope told him he knew how to drive it because he had had a Renault 4 in Argentina.

The pope, 76, then got in and drove it, Zocca told the Italian Catholic magazine *Famiglia Cristiana* (Christian Family).

Francis, who, as a cardinal in Buenos Aires, travelled by subway, has shown a predilection for simple means of transport even after his election in March as the first non-European pope in 1,300 years.

On the night of his election, he shunned the bulletproof papal Mercedes limousine and rode in a minibus with the cardinals

who had chosen him to lead the Roman Catholic church.

During his trip to Brazil in July he was driven around Rio de Janeiro in a small silver Fiat at his own request, and when he visited a refugee centre in Rome on Tuesday, he used a Ford Focus from the Vatican's car pool.

Francis has shunned the spacious and luxurious papal apartments used by his predecessors and has opted to live in a small suite in a Vatican guesthouse.

And while Francis will likely never need them in Rome, which is hit by serious snow only about once every 25 years, Zocca's snow tyres are still in the trunk.

"You never know," he told Famiglia Cristiana.

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