

# Xtremely capable

The Force Gurkha has been given an overhaul under the hood, and the result is the most extreme, most hardcore Gurkha yet

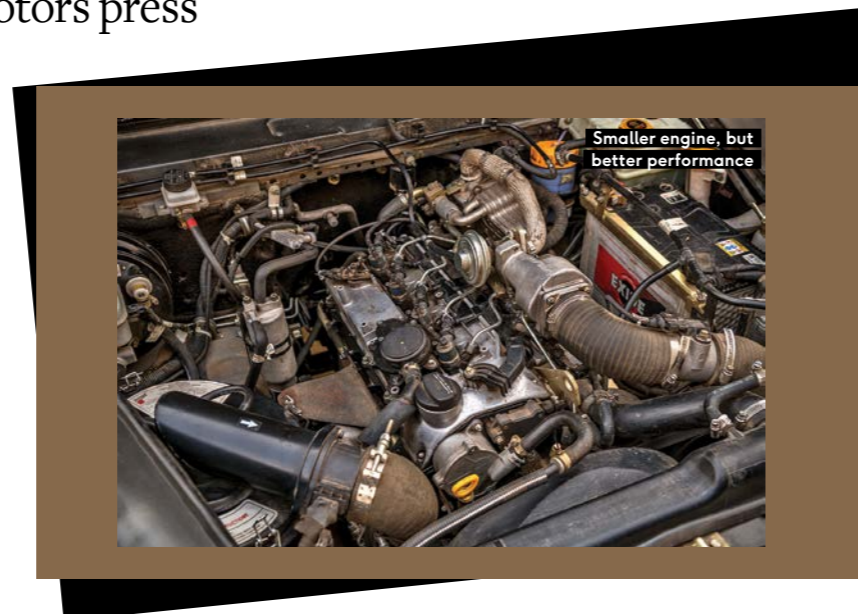
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“Styled on the lines of the legendary Mercedes-Benz Gelandewagen”, reads the Force Motors press release about the Gurka. Many marques would shy away from making a brazen statement, but the honesty of the Gurkha is endearing. There’s no mistaking the fact that it draws inspiration from the OG.

The original G-Wagen, mind you. And though the modern-day Mercedes-AMG G63 seems to appeal to the other bunch of OGs (actual gangsters, this time) or even people pretending to be OGs, the Gurkha’s appeal is far less pretentious. It may not have the same level of bling, but it doesn’t need any to go marching through forests and wading through swamps.

This Gurkha is unlike any Gurkha we have seen before. But before I explain what is different on this one, let me explain the entire Gurkha range to you because it can get mighty confusing.



It took me ten minutes of making an ass of myself with stupid questions at the product briefing to get things clear in my head. The most basic one is the Gurkha Xpedition – it comes only available as a five-door, and only gets two-wheel drive. A glorified people mover with a snorkel, then. One rung above the Xpedition is the Xplorer. This is where the Gurkha’s real capabilities lie. You can spec this one as a three-door or a five-door, and it gets 4x4 with a low-ratio transfer case, and a locking differential on each axle. Hardcore off-roader. What is the Gurkha you see on these pages then? Well, Force picked up a dictionary, found another word we could pronounce the same sans the first letter, and built a Gurkha to match it.

Meet the Gurkha Xtreme. It may look awfully like the Xplorer, but it’s properly overhauled underneath. Out goes that dinosaur of an engine the 2.6-litre Mercedes-Benz OM616 was and is replaced by a more modern OM611 (also a Mercedes-derived engine). The OM616 is a reliable motor, but it is dated. With just two valves per cylinder head, it made a total of 84bhp and 230Nm, which was just about adequate for this heavy SUV. The 2.2-litre OM611 is far more modern. It’s the same engine that we first saw in the W201 C-Class and W210 E-Class. With a DOHC set up and four valves per cylinder, it makes more power and torque. With the turbocharger hooked on to it, it has a peak output of 18bhp, and 321Nm of torque, a significant increase over what the other variants of the Gurkha make. It is competition-tested too, it is the same engine used in the mad Gurkhas that used to take part in the RFC.

But it isn’t just the engine that is new – the entire drivetrain has been overhauled. The gearbox is a G32 unit, that has a higher torque rating than the G28 on the other variants. Also, the transfer case is now sourced from BorgWarner instead of the in-house built unit that the Xplorer gets. All of this considerably improves the refinement of the Gurkha.



You know any SUV with this lever means business



**“THE GURKHA MAY NOT HAVE THE BLING OF THE G63, BUT IT DOESN’T NEED ANY TO GO MARCHING THROUGH FORESTS AND SWAMPS”**



Another major change on the Gurkha is the front axle. The Xplorer has an independent front axle, and that can be limiting as the lower-hanging arms can get snagged on rocks while off-roading. Instead, Force has taken a more uncompromising approach with a rigid front axle in the Xpedition. The Gurkha also has the distinction of getting coil-springs on all four wheels, unlike rivals such as the Mahindra Thar which has a cruder leaf spring set up at the rear.

The Gurkha is built for the outdoors. Yes, I am very aware that tarmac roads are out-of-doors too but you know what I'm getting at. The wild outdoors. Where roads aren't just hard to find, but impossible to build. The Gurkha is built to tackle trails, and will create them in places where they don't exist. But the Gurkha will have to drive its fair share of tarmac before it can reach said trails, and so I have had to keep my road-tester hat on while driving it out on the blacktop too. One highlight of the Gurkha on the road is its ride quality. The coil springs on all corners really make the ride supple and it deals with undulations with poise. The switch to a live axle would ideally hamper this – an independent suspension will always ride better – but they've managed to engineer it such that the trade-off is very little. I'd really have to drive the two back to back to tell the difference.

The Gurkha Xplorer had its faults and the drivetrain was a huge



Err, we're not quite sure the retro approach works on the inside

**“THE GURKHA IS BUILT TO TACKLE TRAILS, AND WILL CREATE THEM WHERE THEY DON'T EXIST”**

8/10

**FORCE GURKHA XTREME**

Engine: 2149cc, in-line 4-cyl, turbo diesel  
 Power: 138bhp at 3800rpm  
 Torque: 321Nm at 1600-2400rpm  
 Transmission: 5M, low-ratio transfer case  
 Turning radius: 5.65m  
 Price: ₹12.99 lakh (ex-showroom)

Pros: Off-road ability, desirability  
 Cons: Interiors, on road comfort  
 Bottomline: Will take you anywhere you want to go, but you're never going to be particularly comfortable



limiter on tarmac. The motor would run out of breath too quickly, and the Gurkha would struggle to accelerate beyond 90kph. I remember driving it along with the lighter, more powerful Thar last year and the Mahindra would comfortably sit at speeds 20kph more than what the Gurkha would. Getting to the trails was, well, cumbersome but not anymore. The additional grunt from the engine is immediately welcome, and the Gurkha can hit triple-digit speeds with ease. That said, the Gurkha (like any hardcore body-on-frame off-roader) on the road is like a clumsy walrus on land.

The Gurkha really comes into its own when you find mud, and pull the stubby lever on the floor back in to 4-low. The walrus is now underwater and is transforms itself from clutz to paragon of grace. I could through all sorts of numbers at you – the 44- and 40-degree approach and departure angles, the 550mm wading depth, the 210mm ground clearance – but when you're out in the wild, these numbers are irrelevant. Your neighbour's Aadhaar card number would be of as much use to get you out of a sticky situation here. What you need are diff-lockers and 'nads – ideally, a pair of each. The Gurkha has got us covered with one on each axle. Lockers not man-parts, you perverts. Engaging them requires a strong yank of a lever on the floor – the one closer to the driver locks the rear, while the one near the passenger locks the front.

There are very few situations that can hold back a Gurkha with both diffs engaged. There's such a mountain of torque low down, that you don't need to do anything but steer past obstacles. The Gurkha also has an intelligent system, where it senses load on the engine and adjusts the fuel injector pump accordingly thus allowing it to crawl up and down the steepest inclines steadily, without any inputs. It's almost like cruise control for crawling speeds. Only rutted climbs need you to even go close to the throttle. Everything that makes it hairy on the road, now works together to lend the Gurkha a sense of grace off-road.

As a hardcore off-roader, there's very little to fault in the

Engaging the diffs is a proper workout



Gurkha. The new drivetrain significantly improves the way it drives on tarmac too. However, it still isn't perfect. The cabin has been given as much attention as Donald Trump gives gun laws in the US. When you're in the driver's seat, it still feels crude and truck-like. Yes, this isn't the sort of SUV that you look to for luxury, but the cabin design sorely needs an update to look more contemporary – the retro design might work on the outside, it really doesn't on the inside.

The Gurkha Xtreme doesn't come cheap. At ₹12.99 lakh, it is a good ₹1.5 lakh more than the Gurkha Xplorer and ₹2.5 lakh dearer than the Thar. But for that sort of money, it is supremely capable and will tug at the heartstrings of an enthusiastic off-roader. It channels the ethos of the original G-Wagen of being a robust, utilitarian vehicle that can take you nearly anywhere. With the army ordering a fleet of Gurkhas as Light Strike Vehicles, it even gets army cred now! **17**