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FULL FORCE

The new Gurkha continues to devour torturous trails, but this time with the newfound urbanity that allows it to cruise in the city as well

Story: **Sarmad Kadiri** Photography: **Apurva Ambep**



FIRST DRIVE • Force Gurkha

WITH THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE AND NEEDS, A HUGE number of mainstream buyers are even considering a 4x4 to be their primary vehicle. Not surprisingly, Force Motors are looking at cashing in on this opportunity with the friendlier new Gurkha. And for this the company is polishing the soft skills of the sales teams and will keep the community engaged through the owners' club and events. Although we've got our hands on the three-door version now, a more conventional five-door one is on the cards as well.

The boxy Mercedes-Benz G-wagen-inspired styling looks intimidating and looks funky in these bright new colours. I'm sure it'll be featured in a rap video soon. This is no longer a utilitarian off-roader but is quite stylish. Every single panel is brand-new, the corners are softer, the body lines are tighter, and the overall build is better. It's evident with the well-executed clamshell bonnet, old-school round LED headlamps with trendy jewel-like DRLs, and the new grille which now boasts of the Gurkha lettering in bold. I like the fact that the indicators are still positioned high, next to the bonnet, and the bumper has been given a modern treatment. And there's a proper bash-plate to take the beating.

The side profile spells hardcore off-roading. It retains the snorkel which promises an incredible 700 millimetres of water-wading capability, while the overhangs ensure best-in-class gradeability of 35 degrees. There's a generous spattering of plastic cladding around the wheel-arches and an integrated footboard. The biggest change is a large, single-panel rear glass which replaces the conventional windows. The challenge here is that the rear windows are now fixed and can't be opened. At the back, there's a new bumper, a tailgate-mounted spare tyre, and the tail-lamps are positioned higher for better visibility. Adding to the overall appeal, our test car came with accessories like a roof rack with a jerry can, a rear ladder, and, more importantly, all-terrain tyres.

Overall, the Gurkha is also larger than its predecessor and has far better structural rigidity thanks to its new ladder on frame chassis. Since the company wants to export the 4 x 4 model to an international model, it has ensured that it meets the necessary crash-test norms. During the presentation, Force Motors said that the structural rigidity has been achieved in collaboration with the IDIADA team, Spain. In fact, the new steering column is also >

The new Gurkha feels at home on unexplored land as the 4x4 paves the path to get you to the most surreal picnic spots





1: Interior quality has improved but the cabin can't match new-age cars

2: The modest touchscreen gets Android Auto and Apple CarPlay

3: The mechanically-locking diffs separates the men from the boys

4: You also get an after-market type tyre pressure monitoring system

FIRST DRIVE • Force Gurkha

collapsible to reduce occupant injury in case of a crash. To improve the ride, both on and off the road, the engineers have re-tuned the independent, double-wishbone front suspension and the rear multi-link set-up with Panhard rod and there's anti-roll bar at the front and the back. This has really improved the overall refinement and reduced the body movement to a great degree.

Using the stepping board and A-pillar-mounted grab-handle you swing into the tall SUV and are greeted by a modern cabin. The simple plastic parts can't match new-age cars, but the ergonomics and creature comfort are decades ahead of the older Gurkha. There are plenty of cubbyholes, including a slot to stow mobile phones. I like the rotary a-c vents and large and comfy seats. The door gets some nice fabric trim and a slim pocket to store maps and papers. The driving position is pretty decent, too, thanks to the tilt and telescopic adjustment for the steering wheel and you get an excellent front and side view. The view from the inside rear-view mirror is somewhat restricted due to the two high-set, front-facing Captain seats at the back. The basic driver console is easily legible and the air-con dials and controls are well within reach. Just that the front power window buttons are unconventionally positioned on the extreme left end of the centre console.

Adding a modern touch are things like speed-sensing door-locks, dual airbags, and an after-market type tyre pressure monitoring system. The modest Kenwood seven-inch touchscreen gets Android Auto and Apple CarPlay but the buttons are tiny and the UI isn't as slick. This large 4x4 also gets parking rear sensors but misses a rear camera. The front doors don't open in stages as they are held by faux leather straps from within. If you are a fan of all old-school things, then the Gurkha won't disappoint. This three-door version is a four-seater and passengers have to use the sideways opening tail-gate to access the front-facing rear seats. The rear Captain seats are well-padded and you can adjust the arm-rest and recline the seats for even more comfort. There's more than adequate head- and shoulder-room. The large Tata Sierra-type glasshouse gives the all-black cabin an airy feel, while

the additional 'Max' mode keeps you cool. Right at the back, there's a large 500-litre luggage area, though the loading dock is on the higher side.

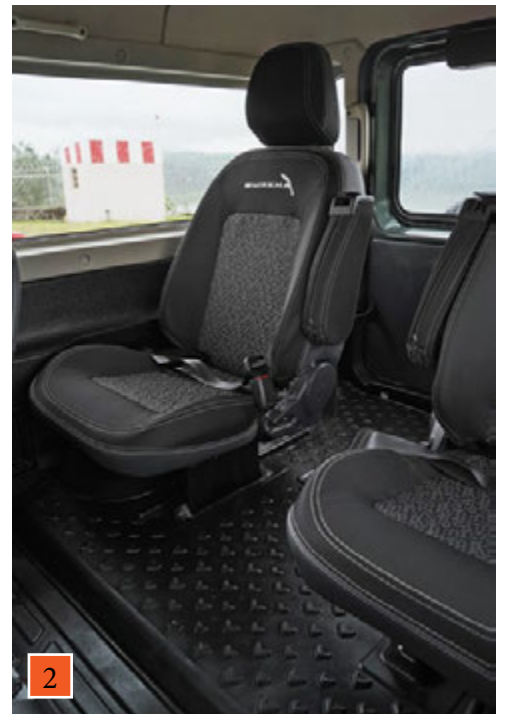
Compared to the doors, the bonnet is much heavier and well-insulated and manages to keep the diesel clatter under control. The Mercedes-Benz-sourced 2.6-litre engine has been powering the Gurkha for years but it's much more refined than before and BS6-compliant. The old horse retains the laidback character, though it makes slightly more power and torque — 91 hp and 250 Nm. There's ample low-end grunt as the turbo spools up right from 1,300 rpm and there's steady thrust before it maxes out close to 3,200 rpm. It feels the best when the engine is kept boiling around 2,500 rpm. Thankfully, most of the torque is also available in the lower revs, which comes in handy while crawling without throttle input. This also means you don't have to work the slightly notchy gearbox as much. Thankfully, the clutch is lighter than before, though it still has a long travel. Power delivery is relaxed and the Gurkha can cruise effortlessly at 80 km/h in fifth gear; however, it's never in a hurry to go fast.

The steering has plenty of play, so it's not really meant for darting through fast bends. Instead, this tall 4x4 has been tuned to manoeuvre easily through ruts, rocks, and puddles, though twirling it does require some effort. What also helps here is a tight 5.65-metre turning radius, which makes three-point turns quite effortless. What it can do tremendously well is take on bad roads, gradients, and broken paths. This

Force Gurkha 2.6 CRDI

Price: Rs 13.59 lakh (ex-showroom)
Engine: 2,596 cc, in-line four, turbo-diesel
Max Power: 91 hp at 3,200 rpm
Max Torque: 250 Nm at 1,400-2,400 rpm
Transmission: Five-speed, manual, all-wheel drive
Suspension: Independent double wishbone front, multi-link with Panhard rod rear
Weight: NA





- 1: The tight turning radius aids maneuverability
- 2: Access to the comfy rear Captain seats are via the tail-gate
- 3: Nice use of fabric and there's a slim pocket too
- 4: Top-class 500-litre boot space is a 'big' advantage
- 5: The 2.6-litre is more refined and is BS6-compliant without the need of AdBlue



well-damped suspension is further complemented by the all-terrain tyres, helping the Gurkha bulldoze through the trickiest of road surfaces. Engage the 4WD gear lever into Four-High mode and the Gurkha marches ahead conquering bumps and trenches on broken roads without flinching. Its good ground clearance and approach and departure angles make it practically invincible.

For a more serious affair, all we had to do was maintain the momentum and slot the lever in four-low and the Gurkha did the rest. It crawled up seemingly impossible slushy paths of a steep hill (while it was still raining) without any throttle input. And when you bite off more than you can chew, just engage the mechanically locking differentials and it rescues you from the sticky situation. This in-house developed transfer case has been put to the extreme test during Rain Forest Challenge events.

The Gurkha doesn't need to establish its off-roading abilities. But with the newfound appeal and sophistication, the 2021 model feels like a completely different animal. It's not for the faint-hearted but now has the potential of being an everyday car for our growing breed of adventure seekers. For many like me, the trendy new colours and the G-wagen-ish swag will be enough to seal the deal. 