



Off-roading may be thought of as a weekend-fun activity, but the Rain Forest Challenge India takes things to a different level.

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To the uninitiated, off-roading may seem a crazy, illogical and a dangerous way to spend your day – often traversing a handful of kilometres per day on average as you negotiate a combination of slippery surfaces, rocks and waterbodies. For off-road enthusiasts though, the party's just getting started. It was a niche hobby about a decade back, with a few pockets of enthusiasts across the country, but then off-roading caught on rapidly to become the weekend activity of choice for many a motorhead. Unlike motorsport or even casual track days, off-roading is much more accessible, given the rich landscapes our country has to offer. One only has to drive an hour or two out of any major city to find a suitable off-roading spot – and there's no need to commission Hermann Tilke because nature builds your track.

Although off-road competitions are not a new phenomenon in India, they've been limited to specific regions. The likes of the Chennai-based Palur Challenge have been held for a decade garnering substantial participation. However, interest surged with the dandy off-road competitions – the Rain Forest Challenge – making it to India three years ago.

RFC Malaysia, which is the mother event of the series, has been held every year since 1997 – and



The RFC Gurkha is well suited to variable terrain.

is considered the world's toughest off-roading event. India became one of the last countries in the Asia Pacific to have its own chapter as Colgar Motorsport took on the massive responsibility of bringing it to our shores in 2014.

Typically, the week-long event consists of four legs: the Prologue, Predator, Terminator and the Twilight, with each upping the stakes in terms of complexity. The Prologue leg had 12 special stages, to ease the participants into the event before the Predator and Terminator stages pushed the competitors to their extremes. Some struggled and turned turtle while others preserved through to



Many obstacles require you to have strong nerves!

the finish. Restraint and patience is a prerequisite for off-roading and has to be balanced with aggression. Too much caution means you may end up being the last to finish a stage, while too much aggression can see you packing up early due to DNF. Overall though, the RFC is more of a marathon rather than a sprint. The crew and the vehicle needs to last an entire week, and while you can't win it on day one, you can certainly lose it.

The last leg of the event, the Twilight stage, is a particularly brutal one with participants being allowed 10 hours to finish an 8km stretch with thick foliage – among other things – giving them

## IN CONVERSATION

### ANANT GURAV

Dy General Manager (R&D), Force Motors



**What are the mechanical differences between the factory Gurkha and the RFC Gurkha in terms of engine, suspension, drivetrain and ancillaries?**

In terms of the technical specifications, the stock OE Gurkha has a BS-III engine, while the RFC Gurkha has a B-W engine. The RFC Gurkha has a high-power Mercedes 2.2 BS-V with 220Nm of torque and 141 Shp. The stock Gurkha has a torsion-beam independent suspension, while the RFC Gurkha has a solid axle with coilover suspension. Also, the stock car has a mechanical diff lock, but here we have an electronic unit from Eaton with RCV shafts. Finally, the rear suspension is a coil spring in the RFC Gurkha, while the stock car has a traditional leaf spring.

**What about the gearbox and the gear ratios, plus the 4WD system?**

The gearbox on the RFC car is a G32, which is licensed from Mercedes-Benz, while on the OE car we have the G18 gearbox. As the engine on the RFC Gurkha has more power, the ratios are mapped accordingly. The engines as such are not modified, it's the same that we use in the Force One and the Traveller range, which are also BS-IV engines. In terms of the 4WD, there's no difference because the transfer case is the same. Similarly, the ECU is also completely stock.

**How is the RFC Gurkha equipped in terms of competition-specific equipment, such as winches and so on?**

We use the Comeq winch brand, which is high-speed, very strong and favourable for the competition. We have been using the hydraulic steering from Balwan tractors – which is new in terms of off-roading, and now we see many others implementing the same system.



Gurmeet Kirpal fought hard to win by just 11 points.



Competitors literally couldn't put a wheel wrong.

## 2016 FORCE MOTORS RAIN FOREST CHALLENGE INDIA

| Pos. | Competitors                            | Vehicle | Total Points |
|------|--|---------|--------------|
| 1    | Gurmeet Viral / Kirpal Singh Tung      | Gypsy   | 2177         |
| 2    | Mervyn Lim/Hamizan Bin Abdul Hamid     | Gurkha  | 2166         |
| 3    | Tan Eng Aoi / Tan Choo Hong            | Gurkha  | 2111         |
| 4    | Kabir Waralch / Gagan Sachdeva         | Gurkha  | 1938         |
| 5    | Cedrick Jordan DaSilva / Floyd Preston | Gypsy   | 1938         |



a glimpse of what the mother event in Malaysia is all about. The Twilight stage wasn't timed and whoever completed it within the stipulated time was awarded full points, but completing it was crucial, as only then you could finish the two final special stages which marked the culmination of the event. Only 13 out of 30 crews were able to conquer Twilight.

At the end of it, a bit of history was created as well, as Gurmeet Viral and co-driver Kirpal Singh Tung emerged victorious – becoming the first-ever Indian team to win the event. The Gerrati off-roaders team from Chandigarh was driving a Maruti Gypsy, and they were closely followed by two factory-prepped Force Gurkhas – driven by Mervyn Lim and defending champion Tan Eng Joo.

In terms of category, Gurmeet and Kirpal took top honours in the Up to 1,610cc category, while Malaysian Mervyn Lim (Hamizan Bin Abdul Hamid) emerged on top in the Up to 2,610cc Diesel category.

Northern India Offroad Club's Bijender Singh (Gajender Singh) was the top finisher in the Up to 2,610cc Petrol category while Hyderabad's Chaitanya Challa (Shabarish Jagarapu) took the prize in the Above 2,610cc Petrol/Diesel class. **■**