



The 2021 Force Gurkha retains the legendary go anywhere ability [Team evo India](#)

Car Reviews

2021 Force Gurkha First Drive Review, Inspired by the G-Wagen

The all-new Force Gurkha is here with an all-new body, chassis, interior and even a different engine but it retains the iconic styling and incredible go-anywhere capability. And it can now be used as a daily driver!



Sirish Chandran, Editor, evo India . [Twitter](#)

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Before the [Mahindra Thar](#) there was the [Force Gurkha](#). The [Force Gurkha](#) in fact traces its roots back to 1997 when it was first show in military fatigues and badged the [Trax Gurkha](#). The civilian version arrived a good eight years later in 2015. With uncompromising [off-road](#) ability the [Force Gurkha](#) became popular with armies in Africa, Angola in particular primarily uses [Gurkhas](#), while the Indian Army uses the [Gurkha](#) in its extreme [Light Strike Vehicle](#) avatar. The [Gurkha](#)-based LSV is shorn of doors, windows and a roof; is equipped with a rocket-launcher, machine guns and run-flat tyres; has a drop-down windscreen and has been configured to fit into military [transport](#) planes and parachuted into forward positions (and even behind enemy lines) for fast, precision strikes. And now there's a civilian version for you and me, retaining the incredible off-road ability, but with far more creature comforts to make it a civilised daily driver.

All-new Force Gurkha

The new Force Gurkha is top heavy

I'm serious. What you see here really is all-new. Just like 2019's all-new [G-Class](#) looked strikingly similar to the outgoing model, so too this new Force Gurkha looks like a spitting image of the old. And it is completely intentional, after all when you have such an iconic design why reinvent the wheel. When you see one on the road, be it the old or (soon) this new one, it'll turn heads like crazy. The colours too on this new Gurkha are inspired by the limited run [G 63 AMG Crazy Colour](#) edition, they even tried a bright green to go with this bright orange, but then settled on a more mellow darker shade. I think the styling is just fabulous. This is such an iconic shape and I'm so glad [Force Motors](#) didn't mess with it. What I'd do is swap out the grille for the one shown on the concept at the [Auto Expo](#) but I can also understand the rationale behind the big Gurkha lettering, to build the brand, so that eventually it can house multiple [variants](#) and derivatives. There's no variant badging on the version we are testing right now because it will be only launched in this one version – the add-ons being the snorkel, roof carrier, step ladder and windscreen guards, all of which will be put on at the dealer.



The 2021 Force Gurkha gets three colour options [Team evo India](#)

The 2021 Force Gurkha also owes its existence to the Trax [utility vehicle](#), derived from the new Trax that was shown at the 2020 Auto Expo. It's the reason why the interiors are what they are.

Interiors of the 2021 Force Gurkha

Old and new Gurkha side-by-side you will notice that all the panels are smoother, the panel gaps are tighter, and there's that massive window area which, Force Motors claims, is 44 per cent more than its rivals (the Mahindra Thar, obviously). The 3-door Force Gurkha sits on a 2400mm wheelbase and there is a four-door on its way which runs a longer 2825mm wheelbase. The chassis is all-new, a ladder

frame that has been designed to meet current crash test norms and verified by IDIADA in Spain and Ashimori of Japan.



The Gurkha is much taller than the [Mahindra Thar](#) and you immediately feel it when you step inside, the massive headroom making the cabin feel dramatically more spacious. What's changed is that Force Motors have made use of all the space to ramp up on creature comforts. The seats are new, wide and very comfortable and the same seats are used in the back as well making it a four seater. You get into those captain's seats in a very unorthodox fashion though, climbing in from the tail gate and sliding in via the gap between the two seats. It actually needs less gymnastics than flipping the front seats forward, and the width delivers enough space between the seats, but it will take some time getting your head round to this entry-exit procedure.

The captain's seats have their own armrests making it more comfortable and the window area is massive making for great visibility. This is a full hard top so you don't need any roll bars for crash safety that could intrude into the cabin space. The glass is glued in though, something that aids in the dramatically improved NVH, but also means passengers will have to rely on the air-con to keep cool (and there are no vents at the back). A bigger miss is there are only lap belts for the rear captain's seats, not proper 3-point belts.





Up front you immediately notice the [Trax](#) roots from which the Gurkha has been derived from. The dash, while all-new, is absolutely utilitarian with a big UV-like steering wheel staring you in the face. The analogue dials look old school. You get a 7-inch touchscreen complete with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto but it is an after-market Kenwood system. There's a tyre pressure readout on the top of the dash next to the A-pillar. And there are the two diff lock levers in addition to the 4-Low stick. That's what we've come to this spectacular location to experience.

Performance of the 2021 Force Gurkha



The 2021 Gurkha gets the OM 616-derived 2.6-litre diesel engine that produces 88.7bhp and 250Nm Team evo India

The engine is new, but new is a relative term here. This is new compared to the outgoing Gurkha which had the 2.2-litre OM 611 (Mercedes-Benz) engine that first debuted on the [Force One SUV](#). The new Gurkha reverts to the 2.6-litre OM616 engine which traces its lineage back to the eighties when it made headlines as the

first [Mercedes](#) engine for a [passenger vehicle](#) to be made under full technology transfer in [India](#)!

Truth of the matter is that the costs involved with [BS6](#) upgradation is massive, particularly so for a manufacturer of Force Motors' size and scale. And so they invested their money in upgrading just the OM 616 which is also used across their bread-and-butter [Traveller](#) vans (they are India's largest [van](#) manufacturer).

Now while the lineage might stretch back to the 80s constant upgrading means there is barely anything in common with its ancestor (it started off as an IDI, then DI, then common rail and now [BS6](#)). And, as I mentioned, NVH is not a concern at all. If anything the full metal body means the overall refinement at a 100kmph cruise is actually better than its immediate rival. As for a 120kmph cruise, well, that's the top speed. This is a large-hearted, old-school engine that has plenty of grunt but not much in the way of a top end. It runs out of breath at 3500rpm, the max power of 88.7bhp comes at 3200rpm and while you get peak torque of 250Nm at just 1400rpm it peaks at 2400rpm which means there is absolutely no point revving it much more than 3000rpm. What it does have is a good gear shift quality so you short shift up the 'box and then let it cruise in fifth. What it doesn't have is ESP, just ABS and twin front airbags. Also, no petrol engine and it isn't even on the horizon. What is on the horizon is an automatic gearbox though there's no timeline for it.

I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that the new Gurkha is down by 50bhp and 71Nm over the old one, and I'd be lying if I didn't say it does feel appreciably slower out on the [highway](#). 88.7bhp and a 2.2 tonne kerb weight has its limitations.

Ride quality of the 2021 Force Gurkha



To the end of the trail with the Force Gurkha Team evo India

[Drive](#) the new and old Force Gurkha back-to-back and that's when you really appreciate how much better the new Gurkha has become. The single piece firewall and one-piece door frames along with the double-skin body construction (regular fare on all modern [cars](#) but a huge jump over the old Gurkha where even the doors had three stamping) have made the cabin quieter and more refined. Force Motors have invested in their own NVH labs and anechoic chamber and it has paid dividends, with the Gurkha feeling like a modern but hardcore off-roader.

Then there's the ride quality, always a Gurkha strong suit (especially when compared to its leaf-sprung rivals), but has now gotten better. The frame is claimed to have best in class stiffness and torsional rigidity and it gets double wishbone front and multi-link rear suspension with coil springs all round.

The new Force Gurkha gets a 155mm front wheel travel

It takes the rough rather smoothly, going through ditches, ruts and humps with ease and especially with no nasty kick from the rear. Shod with 245/70 Apollo Apterra AT2 rubber on 16-inch rims there's plenty of off-road grip though that said a set of 18s would really will up the wheel arches and make it look proper gangsta. The wheel travel is 155mm at the front and 232mm at the rear.

On the highway, it goes very well over bad roads and you can jump small speed breakers. Over rough patches, it feels rather confident and stable and round corners it is not scary. There is a fair bit of body roll and it does feel top heavy but the anti-roll bars do their job and it doesn't feel scary. In any case, the motor doesn't let it get to scary speeds so things are all in check.

The steering is hydraulic and that means you get plenty of feel but also some kick back over the ruts. Never mind. A light hand on the 'wheel, let it do its thing. The 'wheel is adjustable for reach as well as rake so you do get a good driving position. And then use the absolutely unbelievable visibility to position the Gurkha with millimetre-perfect accuracy to keep crawling.

Off-roading the 2021 Force Gurkha



Force Gurkha's 4x4 abilities are incredible | Team evo India

It's only when we see a path off the highway going up a hill that we engage 4x4, now operated rather easily with no need to wrestle the lever. Force Motors claim the ground gears and rubber dampers for the transfer case cable shift improves the NVH, and I can certainly verify that it improves ease of use. And in 4-Low, engine in its crawl mode, both feet off the pedals, the Gurkha just chugs up and down rocky slopes imperviously. This really is unstoppable. Gnarly. An absolute beast.

The 2021 Force Gurkha has a 232mm rear wheel travel

We then remember that the diff locks haven't been engaged and so we go looking for deep ruts to get the Gurkha stuck into and then engage the diff lock to pull it through. The diff locks for the front and rear axle are engaged separately so you only lock the axle that you need to., This ensures that even if only one wheel has traction you can get the Gurkha unstuck – thus making it the most capable off-roader in the country. That said, the Gurkha is and does feel top heavy, and I'll happily admit that I ran out of cojones and handed the Gurkha over to the Force Motors engineers to pull it out of a deep gash in the hill that we put it into trying to test out the diff-locks. The Gurkha is definitely more capable than I am!

On the road with the 2021 Force Gurkha



On road the new Force Gurkha is far more civilised Team evo India

Shots in the bag, night fall, and I insist on driving the new Gurkha the two and a half hours back to Force Motors' HQ in Pune. On the trails, the motor delivered plenty of torque, enough to ensure it never got stuck and was refined enough to boot. But out on the road what's this new engine like?

Verdict on the 2021 Force Gurkha

The 2021 Force Gurkha is capable of 37 degree approach, 33 degree departure and 25 degree ramp over angles

There are evident limitations on the 2021 Force Gurkha. The utilitarian dashboard for one. The old **diesel**. The lack of an **automatic**. And also the network which is van- and UV-focused. But Force Motors will employ tools to deal with the latter. Digital sales for one, maybe even taking a leaf out of Citroen's play book and doing everything from purchase to delivery online. There's now a dedicated team at Force Motors to look after Gurkha customers. Events are planned to build that eco system that is so important in this lifestyle space. Gurkhas will come to you to test and experience. There's a 3 year and 1,50,000km warranty for peace of mind, plus a pick-up and drop facility for servicing. Time, effort and resources are being deployed to make sure the Gurkha doesn't remain super-niche any longer.

The 2021

New and old Gurkha side by side reveals identical dimensions but much better build quality

The launch of the 2021 Force Gurkha is round the corner and we expect it to be priced in the same ball park as the Mahindra Thar, around Rs 14.5 lakh ex-showroom. There will only be one variant to start with and a **5-door** will follow early next year.





For hard core off-road fans the new Gurkha will mark the return of the OG. As for the rest of us, this new Force Gurkha is the most affordable gangsta vehicle. Iconic, unmissable and hugely desirable. Subtle touches like the LED lights to lift everything up. Tasteful accessories that, while adding to the practicality, make it look even more hardcore. The snorkel's intake near the driver's ear even delivering a cool intake snarl at low revs, whether you're tackling the accelerator in 4-Low or just idling at the traffic lights. And it's the latter where the big improvements lie. It is now civilised. It can be used as a daily driver, if you're not too hung up on an automatic. It has the creature comforts you cannot do without. It even has brilliant visibility to make city commutes a breeze. And nothing short of a G-Wagen will turn heads like this Gurkha, particularly in this shade of orange.

4x4

Mahindra

off-roader

thar

Mahindra Thar

Force

gurkha

first drive

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first drive review

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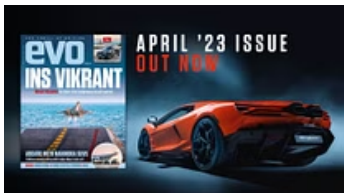
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