

# 2017 Force Gurkha Xplorer and Xpedition Review: First Drive

By Ravi Ved | on July 13, 2017



**The 2017 Force Gurkha might look identical to its predecessor, but underneath, it is, in fact, a new-generation model.**

I have always had a soft corner for the Force Gurkha for two primary reasons. Its boxy design is exactly how I imagined SUVs as a kid in my drawing books. And secondly and more importantly, its malleability is praiseworthy. Just look at some of the Force Gurkhas modified for the Rainforest Challenge and you will know what I am talking about. But aside from these aspects, the Gurkha had more than a few sneers. Now, the company has brought a new-generation model and it promises to be significantly improved. We took it for a spin from Pune to Kamshet and off the tarmac into the fields to find out if it has truly improved.



First things first, the 2017 Force Gurkha retains the boxy design cues of its predecessor. That being said, they have made a few tweaks in the overall design and it sure does make the brawny SUV more likeable. The bold three-slat grille gives way to a single-slat one that flaunts the Force Motors emblem in the centre. The front and rear bumpers are now sleeker and are draped in matte black paint, just like the squared wheel arches. The circular tail lamps have given way to horizontally stacked ones. The 2017 Gurkha also gets a new set of alloy wheels. Call it minimalistic, but I still like the way the Gurkha looks from the outside.



The same however cannot be said about the interior. The 2017 iteration continues to borrow the dashboard from the previous generation model – this means that the fit and finish is still poor and the plastic quality is below average too. Moreover, considering that Force Motors says that the Gurkha (in the Xplorer variant) is targeted towards off-road enthusiasts, the sheer absence of creature comforts does not go unnoticed. The only features that the Gurkha gets is an air conditioner and a 12v charging socket. That aside, it doesn't get an integrated music system, power windows, central locking, electric ORVMs, tilt adjustable steering wheel or even height adjustable driver seat.



Yes, these changes to the exterior and interior are minor, especially considering that it is a new-generation model. But underneath the body is where the real work has been done. The Gurkha is now based on a C-in-C chassis as opposed to the tubular frame. While the front wheels are mounted on an independent suspension, at the back, it comes with coil springs instead of leaf springs. All these changes have resulted in an extremely plush ride quality. On our drive to Kamshet, we encountered some pretty bad roads and the new Gurkha tackled them all without tossing us around in the cabin. While the softer setup works well on bad roads, out on the highway it feels bouncy while riding over uneven joints.

Despite its size, the new Gurkha is a lot easier to turn than its predecessor and the credit for that must be given to the new rack and pinion steering. The effort could have reduced considerably had the steering been a little more tilted towards the driver.



Getting to the meat of the matter, the 2017 Gurkha continues to be plonked with the same 2.6-litre diesel motor from the predecessor. Force Motors has however tuned it to comply with the BS IV norms. If you have driven the old Gurkha, the first thing you will notice when you crank the engine of this new model is the significant improvement in refinement and NVH levels. There is a linear hum from the engine even when you are cruising at speeds of over 70km/h but it isn't an annoying sound. Of course, considering the bulk of the car, the 85bhp motor does feel lethargic and it struggles to gain speed, but at least the 230Nm of torque ensures that overtaking is easy. The new Gurkha also gets a new 5-speed transmission but thankfully the throws are a lot shorter now. While it sure is notably smoother than the one on the previous-gen model, you can still feel it is a bit too rubbery – an irritant while driving in traffic. That challenge, however, is willingly accepted by the availability of torque as low as 1,400rpm. While in moving traffic, you can simply slot it in third and let the torque do the rest of the job for you.



The new Gurkha is being made available with two options – Xplorer (4×4) and the Xpedition (rear-wheel drive). At 4.3 metres, the Xpedition is the longer of the two and comes with 6 + D or 8 + D options. Force Motors has been able to manage this configuration thanks to the long 2,750mm wheelbase. The Xplorer, on the other hand, has a shorter 2,400mm wheelbase due to which it accommodates a maximum of eight persons. Weirdly, the 4×4 despite having the additional lever comes with a few cubbyholes and bottle holders in the centre, something that the RWD misses out on.



While we had a lot of fun sliding the rear-wheel drive Xpedition around on grassy surfaces, it will probably be used as a commuter in small towns. But if you are an off-road enthusiast, the Xplorer is the one you should be looking at. Not only do you have 4H and 4L to your rescue while driving off the road, the Gurkha Xplorer also comes with front and rear diff locks. Mucky surfaces, river crossings or rocky hills, the Xplorer manages to make its way through anything. Sadly, we couldn't test the Gurkha Xplorer's off-road ability to the limit due to the road-focused tyres, but Force Motors offers Maxxis Bighorn off-road tyres as optional fitment if you wish to do that. Brakes could have been sharper as the bite only comes after you've dug your foot a bit deep and it can get a bit scary in emergency situations.

Force Motors has smartly packaged the Gurkha in two variants for different target audiences. The Xpedition is for the tier 2 towns and rural markets while the Xplorer is for the off-road enthusiasts, and in both the trim options the Gurkha performs well for the most part. While it is clear that Force Motors has worked hard to improve mechanicals of the Gurkha, the absence of creature comforts and the sub-par interior quality stick out like a sore thumb. But if you are the kind that likes to customise your own SUV, the Force Gurkha is just the thing for you. But before the Gurkha makes its way into an enthusiast's garage, it has the Mahindra Thar in its crosshairs and to beat that is going to be quite a challenge.