

GAME, SET, CONQUER

THE NAME SAYS IT ALL. THE XTREME
IS HERE TO REDEFINE OFF-ROADING

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Speed is not the point. It's conquering terrain



This is what adds the magic to the concoction

This is a properly rugged off-roader that can withstand a tonne of abuse

For years on end, we've longed for a true salt-of-the-earth off-road SUV. We've made do with the Maruti Suzuki Gypsy, Isuzu V-Cross and Mahindra Thar, and everything was sort of peachy until now. It's no mystery that you'd have to spend a small fortune on all the little parts you'd need to make these cars properly off-road capable. But lurking quietly in the garages and search histories of well-informed off-road enthusiasts lie the Force Motors 4X4s. These aren't mass market cars, no. They're heavy-duty supremely capable off-roaders that make the compromise on comforts found in modern-day cars in the pursuit of true off-road nirvana. The predecessor to the Xtreme, the Xplorer, left a fair bit to be desired as an overall vehicle. So how did this shift to more off-road-capable components come about in the first place?

Well, we have two reasons to be grateful. Firstly, the fact that Force Mo-

tors has a highly successful track record and ridiculously competitive vehicles when it comes to the rather extreme RFC rally. And secondly, because the Indian Armed Forces needed a hardcore SUV like they normally do. So Force went back to the drawing board and unleashed a beast that even the army saw properly fit for duty. Thanks to these two endeavours, Force Motors now has the capability and experience to gift the world an even more off-road-capable machine. And that's exactly what they've done.

Using the Xplorer as a base, there have been a few crucial tweaks to the engine and suspension that make the off-road experience in the Xtreme a more pure one. Well, to be honest, calling them tweaks would be a gross understatement. Force literally went and threw in a new engine and got a completely new suspension setup for the front end. On the surface the changes are barely noticeable; there's

an increase in ground clearance and the stickers have gotten a little more conservative. Oh, and there's also a new foglight setup that's now integrated into the front bumper. Although the Xtreme looks like something only a battle tank could stop in its tracks, with all this new off-road machinery, it'd probably outrun that, too.

Firstly, let's address the big German elephant in the room. We already know the Gurkhas have a long-standing DNA platform that is deeply intertwined with the Mercedes-Benz G-Wagen of yesteryear. The older Gurkha variants were also running Merc-sourced 2.6-litre engines that made a paltry 84 bhp and 23.45 kgm. While these figure are acceptable for chugging along off-road, the on-road experience was, let's say, less than satisfying. What did Force do? Throw in the other Merc 2.2-litre engine the RFC Gurkhas are running that now churn out a very respectable 138 bhp and a whole 32.73 kgm. This OM



All EVs, do note the old-school range extender

611 engine has hauled the likes of the Mercedes-Benz W210 E-Class, the Force Traveller and the discontinued Force One SUV. Of course, it's substantially more refined now in the Xtreme. And let's just say, with a little bit of ECU remapping, it's capable of handling a lot more than just 138 bhp, but we'll just leave that to your discretion.

Another change to the Xtreme is the new gearbox it gets. This unit is the G32 gearbox that has grinded gears, better shift quality and it even has a single





Here's that extra ground clearance you wanted!



unit transfer case that reduces weight thanks to a few less moving parts. The differential locks for the front and rear axles is thankfully carried over from the older Gurkhas. For off-road, we know that's just a blessing for getting out of messy situations. Now, although we're aware that the Xtreme is derived from the army's Light Strike Vehicle, it's actually even more off-road friendly.

Independent front suspension is always the compromise that's been made to keep these SUVs more road-friendly. But the Xtreme gets a rigid live front axle that any off-roader will swear by. The beauty lies in how Force has set this up to still have fairly acceptable road manners. In fact, I'd go as far as saying it's even better behaved than the Gurkha Xplorer on-road. Clear evidence lies in the fact that the supremely capable Jeep Wrangler uses this very same setup. While this setup is slightly on the softer side and does induce some bounce and body roll, it's reasonably acceptable for an SUV of this size.

Force Motors have also upped the

spec on the front axle; this allows the Xtreme to be fitted with heavier mud tyres without any modifications. The live axles with individual coil springs on all four corners not only adds balance and traction in highly undulated terrain, it also aids in the ground clearance of the vehicle. But it doesn't end there. The Xtreme comes factory-fitted with a 3-inch body-lift kit already in place. Have a gander at the increased gap in the wheel arches and it'll be clear. Aside from the increase in ground clearance, the arches can now accommodate 35-inch tyres without any major body modifications. All you need to do is remove the plastic wheel arch cladding. Aside from the 210-mm ground clearance, the approach and departure angles have also improved to now accommodate 44 degrees at the front and 40 degrees at the rear, with a 30-degree ramp-over angle. Just for reference, the breakover angle for the Xplorer is just 24 degrees.

As we tackled the test course at the Force facility, the first thing that

was amply evident was the crawling ability of the Xtreme. Where the Xplorer would struggle on inclines and need a bit of gas, or where the revs would climb on steep descents, the Xtreme stays constant with its power delivery. It simply handles these obstacles effortlessly. And thanks to the factory fitted snorkel intake, it's capable of water wading upto 550 mm. Of course, if you aren't shy of getting your ankles a little wet, it'd also take on water about four feet deep. And like I mentioned earlier, the diff-locks for both ends are life savers if you're ever in one of those tight mucky situations where all wheels aren't grounded. They're fairly easy to engage, too. They sit on either side of the gear lever and are quite easily accessible. The lever to engage the 2WD (rear wheels), 4H and 4L sits aft of the gear lever and is also fairly straightforward to use. You just need to remember to disengage the diff-locks the moment you're out of the rough stuff or you could properly damage the axles.

Which brings us to the interiors of

the Xtreme. While we get that the main focus of this car is off-road, I honestly think a little more thought could have gone into its design. Sure, you could argue that rugged manly men don't need creature comforts and mollycoddling. And I'd agree with you about not needing power windows or a fancy little stereo system. But the archaic design of the dashboard will remind you of some budget creation that crawled out of the '70s. And that's disregarding the rather ineffective air-conditioner vents that seem like way too much of a compromise for a car that costs ₹ 12.99 lakhs (ex-showroom).

Would I say this is by far one of the most capable off-roaders to kick

up a dust storm in India? Yes. Would I say it's properly worth the money? Well, that comes down to how determined you are to really explore the unexplored. This is a properly rugged off-roader that can withstand a tonne of abuse and really get you further than anything we currently have available in India. It's about ₹ 3.6 lakhs more expensive than the Thar, but it comes factory-fitted with a lot of very useful components that the Thar misses out on. But that purely depends on whether you're really going to access the full potential of it. For the true adventurers out there, look no further. Here's something that will get you a lot closer to your RFC dream. //

AUTODATA

FORCE GURKHA XTREME

POWERTRAIN

Displacement: 2149cc, inline-four diesel

Max power: 138 bhp@3800 rpm

Max torque: 32.7 kgm@1600 rpm

Transmission: 5-speed manual

TYRES

F/R: 245/70 R16; 245/70 R16

DIMENSIONS

L/W/H (mm): 3992/1820/2075

Wheelbase: 2400 mm

Ground clearance: 210 mm

Kerb weight: 2510 kg

Fuel capacity: 63 litres

PRICE

₹ 12.99 LAKH (ex-showroom, Delhi)