

# A SHOCKER & A SURPRISE!

The 3rd edition of the RainForest Challenge has proven itself to be one of the toughest motorsport events - if not the toughest in the country

By Adil Jal Darukhanawala

The third Indian edition of the super tough RainForest Challenge ran out in Goa late last month and lived up to its billing as probably the toughest of the extreme motor sport events in the country. Running to a proven format in the hilly regions of Goa with the rain gods lending credence to the title, this year's event was tougher, badder and truly in sync with the ethos that has made this event such a big draw.

So it was all the more surprising and even very welcome that an Indian crew kept their noses clean and by sheer dint of consistency managed to get the better of the Malaysians who had dominated the first two editions! Gurmeet Singh Viridi and Kirpal Singh Tung of Gerrari Offroaders of Chandigarh just managed to pip Merwyn Lim and Hamizan Bin Abdul Hamid of Malaysia to the top spot by a measly 11 points - the closest finish in the fledgling history of this event! This was the first time that Gurmeet had ever climbed the podium at the RFC but when he did climb to surely rocketed to the top by dint of really good work behind the wheel and a calm demeanour where he looked at the larger picture and not at the smaller battles and this proved crucial in the final reckoning.

Of the 26 special stages in the event, Gurmeet won just two of these but he was always there or thereabouts taking points while the all dominating Force Gurkhas again showed their muscle and staying power to clean up no less than 15 stages! The battle was tough and the Force Gurkhas were on the rampage from the word go with new signing Kabir Waraich and Gagan Sachdeva having a slow start on the opening day which probably caused them not just a podium place but also a shot at the top step! This year, the courses were way too tight but the way the two Malaysian pairings of Merwyn Lim and Hamizan Bin Abdul Hamid in car no. 102 and the winner of the previous two RFC India events - Tan Eng Joo and Tan

Choon Hong in car no. 101 had displayed their craft to one and all, the battle was fierce between these two.

It was probably here that in the ehat of the battle, Merwyn threw away points in stage 18 when well on his way and that DNF was to ultimately cost him the title he so dearly wanted. For the last two years he had played second fiddle to his countryman Tan and while he did get the better of Tan this year sadly he wasn't able to achieve this with an overall victory! The uncle and nephew pairing of the Tans were the most prolific of the teams on display winning six stages but they took many penalties enroute to trying for speed. Merwyn had five stage wins for the record but it was a most impressive debut for Kabir Waraich and Gagan Sachdeva who put the vagaries of their opening day behind them and stormed to four stage wins and fourth overall.

The big overall prize might have eluded a Force Gurkha driver this year but for the first time the Force Gurkha team bagged the overall Team Award and also took the top three placings in their class. There were great performances up and down the field. This time the stages were truly horrendous and in some cases penalized the longer wider cars, the skill levels of the Indian drivers as well as their vehicle preparation are now top notch and can more than hold their own against their compatriots overseas where RFC events are held. Goa's Cedric Johnson DaSilva with Floyd Preston were there or thereabouts in contention for a podium with two stage wins but ended up joint fourth with Kabir Waraich.

Siddharth Santosh with Yanrenthung Jamio impressed everyone with three stage wins but needed more consistency to challenge for the podium spots. Maybe they could be a force to reckon with next year. Four other crews did well to eke out a single stage victory apiece and the first of these was the ever-smiling Hyderabad duo of Abhinav Reddy Nukala and Laxmikant Reddy Thota, which won stage 5. The supremely infectious Bijender and Gajender Singh duo bagged stage 7 in their car



- 1 Kabir Waraich is mastering the tricky art of using a deft throttle pedal, operating the electric winch and steering the huge monster to make a 90-degree left turn on a near vertical rock face almost 8-9 feet in height!
- 2 Merwyn Lim storming his way thru one of the many streams in his Force Gurkha to second overall - his third straight finish in as many events!
- 3 Smooth and serene goes the Gypsy of Gurmeet Viridi and Kirpal Singh Tung to snatch a very well compiled victory by a whisker on the final two stages
- 4 Now this is what we mean by scrabbling for grip, equilibrium and direction in events of this kind. Virtuoso artists Dr Chaitanya Challa and Shabarish Jagarapu's huge 3100cc engine Gypsy demonstrates the struggle!
- 5 The winning crews (from left) second placed Hamizan Bin Abdul Hamid and Merwyn Lim, overall winners Gurmeet Viridi and Kirpal Singh Tung and third placed Tan Eng Joo and Tan Choon Hong.

buretted Gypsy powered by a 2400cc engine while former motorcycle rally ace turned off-roader Jagat Nanjappa with Chethan Chengappa won stage 19. The pairing of Dr Karthik Sharma and Rajiv Yadav took top honours on stage 4.

Events of this kind rely on mechanical ingenuity, good sound engineering, thought, proper preparation, strong mental outlook and an ability to take decisions on the fly. We saw all that and more in very good sustained measure and one can't wait for the

fourth edition of the RainForest Challenge that has been slated for July 22-28 2017. So time to get that old Jeep or Gypsy up and tuning or go get the deal on the RFC Gurkhas that the firm wants to build and supply to off-roading enthusiasts.

## UPPING THE GAME!

In the last few years we have seen two distinctly different motoring events go a long way to making many Indians up their game in the areas of classic and vintage car preparation, restoration and preservation with the bi-annual Cartier Travel with Style Concours d'Elegance events and Indian extreme off-roading with the RainForest Challenge.

Sure we had classic car events aplenty but when you learn from the best in the business, the movement offers a fillip to hone skills, learn the nuances of the game, invest in research rather than hearsay especially in the critical aspect concerning the provenance of a car, take the decision whether to restore or preserve, how much tech to bring to the restoration job without in any way overdoing things have been big learning from the five editions of the Cartier Concours held so far. India has not just great cars but also great enthusiasts who revel in them and I think this process is irreversible.

The same holds true for off-roading with the RainForest Challenge. There used to be off-road events and rallies since long and Mahindra & Mahindra had pioneered the welcome move to tailor events for their customers so that they could get to experience their vehicles safely and surely in an enjoyable and safe environment via their Great Escapes and other events. It was however the RFC that brought in the extreme off-roading dimension that India lacked and also kudos to Force Motors for showing the way forward with machine build and getting experts from overseas for our boys to learn and assimilate and up their prowess mightily.

Surely no one can begrudge the standings of these events in the esteem of those who follow these two disciplines of motoring endeavor and excellence. May they continue to inspire.