

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

What these guys did with their 4WD vehicles will shock you...

By ASHOK GEORGE Photographs ASHOK GEORGE

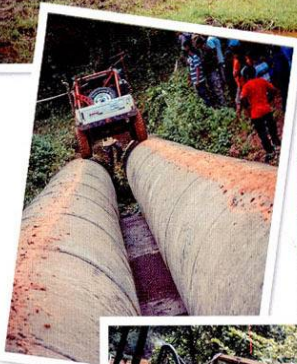
There is no way in hell you can climb this.' The special stage I was looking at started with a reasonable climb, then a right-hander, then a left-hander onto an impossibly steep incline which can only be done by winching the car. Problem was, right at the crest of the climb, there was a left that brought you to a section of boulders. The only way around this was to use a snatch-block at the crest of the incline while the winch cable was tied around a tree near the boulder section. If I were in the driver's seat, courage would have been long gone by now.

First, let me tell you a bit about

the Rain Forest Challenge, then we can get to the juicy bits. The Rainforest Challenge is one of the most difficult off-road events in the world. Impossible inclines need to be climbed, raging rivers need to be crossed and, in some cases, you might even have to figure a way to get past a fallen tree or a six-foot deep ditch. This year, India was added to the list of seven countries where the challenges take place. And what better place to have it in than Goa — in the middle of the monsoon!

Participants showed up in all kinds of machines. There were Mahindra Thars, MM540s, Willys, Gypsies, Gurkhas, and even a rad looking FC. Over the next few





days, man and machine were put to the most gruelling test that the organisers could come up with.

Day 1 and 2 had the Prologue stages. The 12 stages were designed to get the participants familiar with the kind of obstacles they would face during the rest of the days. That means it was one of the easier stages in the entire event. Day 3

was when the real action started. Stages 13 to 18 were the Predator special stages, and the participants got their first taste of being in the wilderness. Driving through water, getting stuck in waist deep slush and a sprint stage that looked deceptively easy but was difficult enough for even JCBs to get stuck, was the order of the day.

After the Predator stages, the competitors headed to the even more challenging Terminator stages. The Terminator stages had some ridiculous gradients, and all the stages, bar two, needed the competitors to use their winches to get through them.

But that was nothing, because the next day was the Twilight Zone. This was to be the most difficult part of the entire event. Competitors would enter the Twilight Zone in teams of three, and the only objective was to come out to the other side.

No marked trails; no marshalls to ask for advice; no recovery vehicles standing at the ready. Just the wild and the machines. In fact, the stage was so difficult that none of them were ready to attempt it. Maybe they were tired from having taken part in such a trying event for the first time. Maybe.

Whatever be the case, the Rainforest Challenge is here to stay. Cougar Motorsport promises that next year's challenge will be even better. We can't wait for it. Even if we have to brave rain, mosquitoes and muck, it's an event that we wouldn't want to miss. **M**



OVERALL RESULTS

POS	NAME	CAR
1	Tang Eng Joo/ Tan Choon Hong	Force Gurkha
2	Mervyn Lim/ Hamizan Bin Abdul Hamid	Force Gurkha
3	Kabir Waraich/ Gagan Sachdeva	Maruti Suzuki Gypsy