



Testing the Grenadier

Off-road 4X4 test

Last September, CPM previewed the Ineos Grenadier and discovered the story behind it. But does it live up to all the hype? We get behind the wheel to put it through its paces and find out how it handles on and off-road.

By Mike Watkins

Nestled in a small yard at the picturesque Glanusk Estate near Crickhowell in Powys, several Ineos Grenadiers line up, waiting to be put through their paces. The dark skies are delivering rain and more rain, just what's needed to test an off-roader — some proper mud.

Opening the solid feeling door of a pale blue Fieldmaster — specced with two-tone leather seats and safari roof lights — it makes a reassuring well-made clunk as it closes. It all feels familiar, no fancy electronics to adjust the seat — just lean down, pull the bar up and slide the seat back or forth, just like my own old

Series 2 Land Rover Discovery. The whole premise behind the Grenadier has been to do away with the electronics that operate every aspect of modern 4x4s and, instead, go back to robust engineering that's fixable and won't leave you stranded and with a very high repair bill if the electronics go wrong. I like that about it.

Good visibility

Checking the mirrors — nice big square things — I can see the sides of the car all the way to the back. The visibility is really good, and its lack of rear overhang means there would be no excuse for accidentally reversing into something back home in the yard. The professional driver sitting beside me, Cameron, asks if I need to adjust the passenger side mirror and begins to lower his window — even the mirrors are adjusted manually, which might not have been that handy if he wasn't sitting in the passenger seat. You can't see much using the rearview mirror because of the way the rear door is split, but it's not a problem as the side mirrors and big windows more than compensate.

Heading out of the estate, first impressions are positive. The Grenadier's boxy shape means you can see the tops of the front corners, so you know where the

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wheels and body are — useful in a farming environment. It's smooth and very easy to control the throttle and power delivery. So far, it's feeling very civilised.

Gently dialling in the power, the eight-gear auto box is smoothly going up the gears and Cameron says: “It's a good straight down here, you can test the acceleration if you want?” If you want? No second invitation required, a healthy push on the throttle and the three-litre, straight six BMW engine changes from a gentle purr to a deep throated growl. The power kicks in and I'm taken a little by surprise, big lumps of 4x4 are supposed to accumulate speed gradually but the Grenadier properly shifts.

The petrol engine is capable of 0-60mph ▶

Off-road 4X4 test



Amongst the helicopter-type switch gear, the old-school handbrake and gearstick for the two-speed transfer box, the slick BMW-styled gear lever looks somewhat out of place.



The Grenadier's robust five-link front and rear suspension is tuned to deliver great levels of axle articulation and wheel travel. Its Eibach progressive rate coil springs offer flex, with 9° of front-axle articulation and 12° at the rear – enabling more than 585mm of travel to maintain grip and make light work of driving over extreme uneven ground.

► in 8.6 seconds, with the diesel only marginally slower off the mark. Both engines are tuned so that the power and torque are at the lower revs necessary for towing and off-road, hence the surprising pick up.

The Grenadier is making me feel quite at home on the road given it was built as a no-compromise off-roader. However, one of the things I was intrigued to test for myself was the steering. It's been reviewed by others as being too slow, vague, and with a turning circle that's too large. That wasn't my experience when making an easy three-point turn in a field gateway and I don't need the reversing camera to know how far I am from the gate.

A mini-roundabout gives me the opportunity to test the steering lock, a quick lap on full lock and I'm not really sure what all the fuss is about. Yes, you have to straighten up by turning the wheel yourself, but I didn't find it a problem. In fact I didn't really notice, but it was a characteristic that was raising some discussion among the motoring journalists after the drive. One of them mentioned that he found the steering a bit indifferent; he felt that he didn't get much feedback on a straight road and had to keep making micro-adjustments. He also didn't like the way the steering wheel didn't self-centre after a tight turn and the fact you have to manually straighten it up. It's probably a criticism that will keep on being levelled at the Grenadier but if you've driven a lorry or a tractor then it's not something that will bother you.

Ball bearing system

As you'd expect with the Grenadier, there's a reason behind the feel of the steering. It uses a recirculating ball bearing system which is very clever and very strong. Importantly, when off-road and thumping into a pothole or a rock, it stops the steering wheel ripping around and dislocating your thumbs.

My second drive of the day is a dark green Trialmaster, the more workmanlike Grenadier model kitted out for proper off-roading. It has cloth seats, front and rear differential locks and grippier BF Goodrich All-Terrain T/A KO2 tyres. Central diff lock is standard on all models.

Nothing too challenging to start as we set off out of the estate and into the forest. The gravelly track is fairly flat with a few potholes — not dissimilar to many farm drives in this part of the world. We're still in high box, however you start to get a feel of the steering, power delivery and throttle control.

Deeper into the forest, conditions become a little more exciting, so we drop into low box (it has a 2.5:1 ratio) and select the central diff lock. To do this means coming to a stop — you can select the central diff while moving but need to be in neutral to shift between low and high ratio. Like many features of the Grenadier, the process is manual. Lift the collar on the small gear stick and a good pull back and it locks into place. To lock the diff, it's the same process but push to the left. It feels solid and robust.

Off we go again, this is more like it, steeper, rougher, a bit muddier. The Grenadier is growing on me — you can place the wheels where you want, and

power delivery is very controllable. The suspension is making it quite uneventful, so I purposely drive over a decent-sized stone. The progressive springs soak it up, you hardly feel it.

I ask pro-driver Lisa when you would use the rear or front lockers, and she tells me only if it's so undulating that a wheel is likely to come off the ground. We're making easy progress when a message comes through on Lisa's two-way radio. I can just about make it out, 'stop at the bottom, we are about to come down Everest'. We duly stop and wait for the other car, which eventually comes into view to our left — at least, some of it does... The slope rises sharply to our left and I can just see the roof of the Grenadier and it's coming straight down at quite an angle. Interesting...

The other car passes, and off we go. As we turn the corner 'Everest' comes into view. It's a track in a gully going straight up the slope, it's steep, rocky, and gnarly — especially in the middle. The first section is no bother, but the middle section is steep, about 40 degrees, with a sump-busting rock right in the centre of the track and a big rut on the left. Maybe the Grenadier would clear it, I don't know, but I am not chancing it as I think of all the disclaimers I had to sign. There is a bit of rock sticking out of the left-hand bank, so I aim the nearside wheels at it. Over we go and clear the sump buster — too easy, the wheels never lose grip, the power is smooth and steady, and it's easy to place the left-hand front exactly where I want it in spite of the steep and slippery conditions. We get to the top, that should have been difficult, but it wasn't.

On a very muddy, but flat, grass track, I disengage the central diff to see how it copes. One tiny loss of traction which is impressive, it should have been slip-sliding away as after the rain the conditions are pretty greasy. Back to Everest and we prepare for the decent, central diff locked again and this time Lisa suggests we use

Off-road capabilities

Ineos Grenadier – Station wagon models

Ground clearance	264mm
Ramp breakover angle	28.2°
Departure angle	36.1°
Gradeability	45°
Wading depth	800mm
Front-axle articulation	9°
Rear-axle articulation	12°

the downhill assist button and I'm not arguing. The button controls the power and braking so you only have to steer, rolling down gently at 3mph.

Engine braking

Reaching the lower, less steep part of the hill, I want to test out descending using engine braking, and a quick push of a button to deactivate the electronic downhill assist and it's an old school descent in first gear. We roll gently down under engine braking, with good control.

Back at Glenusk house, the journalist who hadn't liked the steering on the road was waxing lyrical about it, he had seen the light. The Grenadier is built to be an extremely good off-roader not a road car, although it does a pretty reasonable job at that too.

Final thoughts — the Grenadier is a car that makes you smile, perhaps because you're not just a passenger while it makes all the decisions for you. That's why when the Grenadiers is inevitably compared to the luxury SUVs such as the Land Rover Defender and others in that class, in part because the Ineos journey began with the demise of the old Defender, it isn't really the right comparison.



Under conditions where one wheel is completely off the ground, engaging the front and/or rear lockers will get you out of trouble.

Jumping in and driving the Grenadier felt like pulling on an old pair of wellies, it was familiar and easy to get on with. It reminded me of the old Landies, and the early 1990s Landcruisers — utilitarian vehicles that are most at home in the testing conditions you find off-road. It's a modern-day improved version of those cars, using old technology that has been well engineered.

That really sums up the Grenadier — it's well-made, it's tough, and will reliably get you out of trouble, but is also comfortable and easy to drive. It's a vehicle I can imagine growing old with rather than trading in before it becomes too expensive to keep.

The brief for the Grenadier was to build an uncompromising, capable off-roader. I would say Ineos has nailed it. ■

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