

# Off The Beaten Road

Offroading is the new adventure sport that is making inroads into the lives of high-networth individuals in India. *Indulge* spoke with Neeloy Sarkar, co-founder of Terrain Tigers, a Gurgaon-based group of auto enthusiasts whose sole mission is to tame tough terrains, about the basics of offroading. Edited excerpts:

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**What is offroading?**  
Offroading is a term for driving a specialized 4x4 vehicle on unpaved roads such as sand, gravel, riverbeds, mud, snow, rocks and other tough terrains. For some people who live in remote regions or regions prone to snowfall, this is a way of life. But it has also become a lifestyle sport, a way to loosen up and have excursions at obscure destinations. And for some, it is an extreme sport.

**How popular is it in India? And elsewhere in the world?**  
Offroading as a sport is not very popular in India as yet, though it's

gaining momentum now. While rallying has gained popularity over the years (due to the multitude of events organized by auto manufacturing companies across the country), offroading is coming of age now. With more and more people opting for SUVs and 4x4 vehicles, this sport is definitely poised for growth in India.

It's fairly popular across the world though, and there are professional offroading championships held in countries such as Malaysia (the Rainforest Challenge) and Australia (the dune bashing event) every year. Just like any other kind of auto-racing.

**Why is offroading considered expensive?**  
Driving through tough terrains does take a toll on any vehicle. Needless



Regular offroaders modify their vehicles heavily. Some of the common modifications include lift kits and raised suspensions to give more clearance, special mud terrain tyres for better grip, strengthening of differential tubes to take on hard bumps, and engine modifications such as oversized pistons, headers and free flow exhausts to get more power.

And once you've invested so much in the mechanical accoutrements you want your vehicle to look spectacular. So most people invest a fair bit in cosmetic upgrades.

Finally there is safety. Roll bars, reinforced door panels, rally seats with multi-sided seat belts are among the many things that offroad vehicles are equipped with, to make them "offroad-ready".

All these modifications can cost, for each vehicle, anywhere from ₹30,000, if you just get a set of good tyres, to ₹5 lakh if you go for a radical overhaul.

Regular maintenance is crucial. Even if you're offroading just a couple of times a month. Maintenance can vary from an average of ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 per month.

to say, for some levels of extreme offroading, you push your vehicle to limits that are unimaginable in normal city driving. Some of the regular wear and tear includes clutch burn, damaged differentials, leaks from CV joints and engine overheating.





#### What is Terrain Tigers? What do you guys do?

Terrain Tigers is a group of off-roading enthusiasts based out of Gurgaon.

It has been an interesting journey for Terrain Tigers so far. I had been offroading with some friends for the past few years. We used to meet up frequently on weekends and go hunting for new trails. There are several villages around the hinterlands of Gurgaon, which are a mix of jungles, water bodies, ravines and sand pits. What started as an exploration on four wheels, soon became our playground, as more and more jeepers started joining us in conquering these tough terrains.

In a span of a year, we had close to 20 jeepers who were ready to do this sport weekend after weekend.

In August this year, a couple of regulars and myself decided to give the group some shape and organization. And we christened ourselves the Terrain Tigers.

Today, we have close to 600 members who join us off and on, on our weekend outings. Many of them are enthusiasts who want to know more about the technicalities of the sport, many are regular offroaders, many join us for the thrill of it and some are extreme off-roaders. We also have lot of SUV owners who come with us initially to check the sport out. Some find it so thrilling that they buy their own 4x4 vehicles. Which is exactly our idea.

#### What kind of person is the average Terrain Tiger?

Our target audience is anyone who is an auto enthusiast and has an appetite for adventure and motorsports. Today, we have a good mix of entrepreneurs and corporate heads who join us in our activities. Most of them are between 25 and 45 years of age.

Since this sport demands high maintenance of vehicles, we

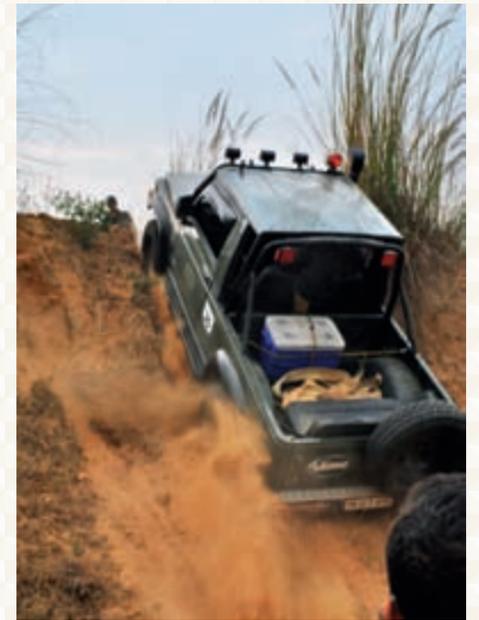
definitely encourage people to give it a thought before they take this sport up. However, we have a lot of people who have basic SUVs, and they are getting inducted into the sport. It's not that this sport is only for the wealthy, this is for those who are "young at heart and daring in the head" with some spare money in their pockets!

#### What are the safety measures that you take during your trips?

This is a common interest group that we have formed and hence we do not implement any rules. However, we do have our safety guidelines in place, which we request all members to follow. We always carry tow ropes, shackles, spare tyres, etc., to ensure that we are able to rescue vehicles that get stuck and we never leave anybody behind.

Everyone diligently moves in a convoy and the Marshalls ensure that no one is left behind. It's a sport where camaraderie is very important. We also suggest that vehicles are equipped with roll cages, seat belts and our members wear protective gear.

Drunken driving is out of the question. ■



## OFFROADING: THE BARE ESSENTIALS

#### Tips for the first timers

- Offroading is not a lone sport. It is best to have around three-five vehicles in the group, so one can get help if he is stuck in unfamiliar terrains.
- Since offroading is mostly done in the wilderness, it is important to drive very slowly through stretches that have villages, cattle, livestock, etc.
- Offroading skills come with time and experience. One should never attempt doing an obstacle if he is not 100% convinced he can do it.
- Since offroading is primarily a day sport, it is advisable to carry a few litres of water and keep yourself hydrated. It helps you to stay alert. Also carry face masks or a scarf to cover your nose and mouth in dusty terrains. When doing jungle trails, it is good to wear full sleeved shirts/T-shirts to protect yourself from scratches, cuts and bruises.
- Always ensure you carry tow ropes along with shackles or hooks, a spare tyre, coolant/radiator water, some spare fuse and a tool box. A first aid box is also handy.

#### How to get in touch

Terrain Tigers have a dedicated Facebook page (the only real way to contact them for now), where one can sign up for membership. A dedicated website is due to be launched in January.

#### Offroading events

There are some countries where offroading is an organized sport such as Malaysia (the Rainforest Challenge) and Australia (the dune bashing event), while some other countries promote cross country offroading events such as the Dakar Rally, Baja 500 & 1000, Spanish Baja and the Russian Baja Northern Forest.

#### Some of the best offroading cars

One thing that is essential in a car to be an offroader is the 4x4 technology. The Polaris all-terrain vehicles, the Maruti Suzuki Gypsy, the Toyota Fortuner, the Mahindra Thar and the Mitsubishi Pajero are some of the best examples.

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