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THE MUD-TERRAIN **CHALLENGE**

BF Goodrich MT KM2 v General Grabber MT X³. Team LRO puts two MT giants head-to-head in some of the UK's most tenacious mud



While we usually recommend using all-terrain tyres as a good all-rounder for most conditions, there are some occasions when only an aggressive mud-terrain tyre will do the business. If you regularly drive through deep mud or in rough and unpredictable places, mud tyres can make the difference between getting through or not.

MT tyres offer more chunky and wider-spaced tread blocks for extra grip, and generally have tougher carcasses to cope with the conditions. But which is the best?

Here we've taken two of the most popular mud-terrain tyres – BF Goodrich MT KM2 and General Grabber MT X³ – putting them head-to-head over two long days in the demanding mud holes and big, slippery hills at Snugg's Pit, which lies between Sudbury, Suffolk and Belchamp Otten in Essex. The only aspect of off-road performance we couldn't do at this popular club trials and challenge events venue was rock crawling – but there aren't many rock crawls in the UK.

Doing an objective back-to-back tyre test is difficult because conditions change every time you drive through a section – and, obviously, the terrain can dry out during the

course of the test. So, while we can't claim this is a perfectly scientific comparison, we've done our utmost to ensure we've arrived at what we believe is a fair and accurate conclusion.

We've used the LRO project Discovery 2 Td5, with ABS/TC switched off, as our test vehicle, swapping the sets of 245/75 R16 tyres over regularly and repeating the challenges numerous times to ensure we get a definitive result. We've also drawn on the LRO team's experience and observations. For each test we've awarded the tyres marks out of 10, based on overall performance. Here's how they shaped up. **22**

TEST 1

Braking on wet roads

● A straightforward test in consistently wet conditions, due to rain throughout. Driver Martin Domoney holds the Disco 2 at a steady 30mph approaching the marker (which on this occasion is Mark the Marker). He jams on the brake pedal for an emergency stop and we measure the stopping distance. The test is repeated half a dozen times with both makes of tyre and the result is conclusive: both stop in impressively short distances, but it's a win for the Grabber, which consistently stops almost a metre shorter than the BFG. We attribute this to its tread design, especially the use of sipes – thin grooves across the tread blocks.

● **BFG 7** ● **Grabber 8**



Tyre smoke despite wet road shows braking capability of mud-terrains



We repeated the braking tests six times with each to achieve a result



TEST 2

Road noise

● Long gone are the days when the howl of a mud tyre on the road would drown out the engine note, but quiet running is important when choosing a tyre. Our test is in two parts: using a decibel meter to measure drive-by noise at 30mph, and then a subjective judgement by Martin and me after testing both sets over a variety of tarmac types and speeds.

Both tyres prove remarkably quiet at 30mph. And both consistently record the same 77dB, much of which could be engine noise. The difference comes when out on the road, when both Martin and I rate the Grabber as being quieter on a wider variety of tarmac surfaces, and when cruising at 70mph on motorways. The Grabber usually only hums on concrete roads or high-grip surfaces.

● **BFG 7** ● **Grabber 9**

'We used the LRO Disco 2 as the test vehicle, swapping the tyres regularly and repeating the challenges'



TEST 3

Climbing out of muddy ruts

● A simple test of the sidewall pattern's ability to bite into the slippery ruts. Martin turns the steering on to left lock from a standing start and we measure the distance it takes for the tyre to provide sufficient grip to clamber out of the side.

It's interesting to watch the tread blocks digging into the side of the ruts and the tread squeezing out mud slugs. This, again, is a win for the General, which consistently clambers out earlier.

● BFG 7 ● Grabber 9



Deceptively slimy rut provided a tough test



TEST 4

Rutted mudhole

● The ruts in this claggy mudhole are so deep that the tyres have the extra challenge of hauling the Disco through with the underbody dragging on the ground. They have to grip without being able to bite very far into the surface.

Both sets of tyres prove their prowess when the section is driven at speed and manage the tricky exit, albeit spinning and scrabbling for grip. But both somewhat inevitably fail when driven slowly and the drag becomes too much for them.

● BFG 7 ● Grabber 7



The ability to get out of ruts is important with a mud-terrain tyre

TEST 5

Cambered corner climb

● This looks fairly innocuous, but the surface is slimy, wet clay that offers minimal grip. Both sets of tyres do an amazing job on our initial low-speed runs, managing to maintain traction on the slick surface. Standing at the side, Neil, Mark and I can see the action of both sets of tread blocks biting into the mud. They perform even better at speed, when the tyres self-clean. We couldn't even get them to fail on a stop and restart. ● BFG 9 ● Grabber 9



TEST 6

Snotty mud climb

The test is to see how far Martin can drive the Disco up two tracks etched into the hillside from a standing start. It's steep, slimy clay. Even Neil couldn't crest this short but definitely not sweet hill with the difflocker-equipped LRO 90 during a recce run (admittedly on more worn tyres), so it's a tough test, especially with no traction control.

Time after time the Disco initially finds grip, but then spins to a halt at the steeper part of the climb. And it consistently stops at the same point with both sets of tyres, to the extent that we're unable to separate them. Honours even on this one.

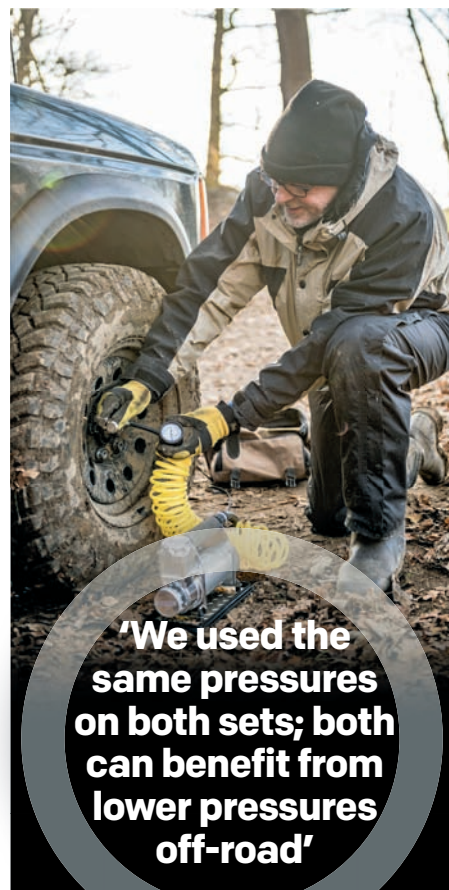
● **BFG 6** ● **Grabber 6**



The team analyse and talk about mud. They so need to get out more



Climb doesn't look steep, but proved a stopper for both sets of tyres



'We used the same pressures on both sets; both can benefit from lower pressures off-road'



TEST 7

Slippery hill climb

● A steep, deceptively slippery and very steep hill that snakes up from the bottom of the pit – with the added sting of a slippery tree root to kick the offside wheels off-line. It's also made worse by a rutted approach that prevents Martin achieving any momentum at the bottom.

This is another one where we can't separate them. Both failed on their initial runs, but then clambered out consistently on all attempts after that.

● **BFG 8** ● **Grabber 8**



TEST 8

Slippery hill descent

● Obviously, the Disco will come down one way or another, but what we're looking for here is controllability when braking on the slippery surface. Again, there's the added complication of the exposed tree roots.

And it's another tie. Both tyres sledge a little over the steepest part but quickly find grip, allowing Martin to exit in a sweet, controlled manner.

● **BFG 8** ● **Grabber 8**

TEST 9

Sandy hill

● Although Snugg's Pit is famous for its tenacious mud, it was originally a sand pit – dug out by Italian prisoners during WW2. Our test hill is steep, sandy and eroded by countless spinning wheels. To master it, a tyre needs to deliver consistent traction and clear its tread quickly.

On the first run with the BFGs, test driver Martin almost crests the climb, and clammers out with ease on the next attempt – which he repeats several times.

The Grabbers also fail the first attempt with them, and while they do consistently get the Discovery 2 out the top, Martin has

to work a lot harder in order to achieve it – and he also has several fails. It's a win for the BFG, which we attribute to its more open tread pattern coping better with the loose surface.

● **BFG 8** ● **Grabber 6**



Sandy hill climb proved a tough test, with a tricky dropaway at the exit

The mud run

● Snugg's Pit has a section of bottomless mud in a gully – which would have been fun as a mud run, but we suspect that we would have wasted a lot of valuable time winching out the non-TC D2 whatever tyres

we fitted to it. So instead we chose an area of gloopy mud that has a base down there somewhere. If the tyres are good enough, they'll get through the surface and find grip. For the test Martin evaluates grip when driving straight, and also tests for lateral grip and directional control.

Both score well in terms of traction, but the Grabbers repeatedly prove capable of making a tighter arc than the BFGs, courtesy of its sidewall design. The BFGs do find grip and get through, but consistently run wider lines than the Grabbers.

● **BFG 7** ● **Grabber 9**

TEST 10



Slimy mud run allowed us to test for grip when straight and turning



LRO's verdict

Totals ● BFG 74 ● Grabber 79

● As you can see from the above points totals, it was a tight contest. Both brands are immensely capable at driving through muddy terrain. The BF Goodrich MT KM2 is a proven tyre that's tough and capable when the going gets muddy – and sandy. It beat the Grabber on the loose-surface hillclimb and matched it on a number of other tests, but it is now a 10-year-old design (the replacement KM3 is due this year). The newer General Grabber MT X³ takes the overall honours through its sidewall grip for climbing out of ruts, and gripping and turning in gloopy mud. It's also quieter at speed and delivers better braking on wet roads.



How they compare

● **OPEN TREAD**
Good traction in mud, sand, gravel – wider apart than the Grabber.

● **TREAD PATTERN DESIGN**
Inspired by BFG's renowned Krawler rock-climbing tyre.

BF GOODRICH MUD TERRAIN T/A KM2
£169.68

GENERAL GRABBER MUD TERRAIN X³
£139.14

● **MULTI-ANGLE TREAD EDGES**
Deliver traction in various directions.

● **QUIET ON TARMAC**
Individual tread block pitch length designed to reduce road noise.

● **OPEN TREAD**
Good traction in mud, sand, gravel. Evacuation channels for quick self-cleaning.

● **THREE-PLY CONSTRUCTION**
For durability. Compound designed to provide resistance to cuts and chips.

● **FULL-DEPTH SIPES**
Tread block grooves for good wet and snow performance through tyre's life.

● **STONE BUMPERS**
Push out stones caught between tread blocks.

● **SIDEWALL DESIGN**
Aggressive sidewall lugs for grip/protection.

● **SIDEWALL COMPOUND**
Designed to provide resistance to cuts and chips.

● **STONE BUMPERS**
Push out stones caught between tread blocks.

● **THREE-PLY CONSTRUCTION**
For durability.