Ineos Grenadier – First Impressions

Published: September 4, 2021

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/ineos-grenadier-first-impressions/



Kieron Fennelly gives his views on this classically-inspired tough-in-nature new four wheel drive machine…

It was Ferry Porsche who, sixty years ago, famously said "I couldn't find a sports car I liked so I decided to build my own." The man behind the Ineos Grenadier, Sir James Ratcliffe, evidently had a similar idea. But unlike Porsche who saw his mission as developing his father's consultancy business, industrialist Ratcliffe had already made his fortune in the chemical business so in a sense he had nothing to prove.

A man with a sense of adventure, Ratcliffe was far from alone in lamenting the demise of the Land Rover Defender in 2017: An oddity in modern car manufacture, the traditional Land Rover had become an increasingly marginal product in Jaguar Land Rover's range and it was clear that its successor would be the more fashionable kind of 4×4 whose off-road

excursions are largely confined to putting two wheels on the pavement. Hardly the kind of Land Rover that adventurer Ratcliffe and his like-minded friends would want to drive across deserts or mountain ranges. Hence the birth of the Grenadier, named, it is said after the pub where Ratcliffe and his fellow directors sketched out the original concept.

When you read that the designer engaged to style the Grenadier has a background in architecture and yacht design rather than automotive, the auguries suggest another rich man's fantasy creation. The reality is however, is very different for as the Grenadier drives into view, its inspiration, the Land Rover Defender is very evident – the same, boxy shape and proportions, the slatted radiator and from a distance you could mistake it for a Land Rover. The Grenadier is slightly wider and higher, but shares the same foursquare stance of the Defender. This is the point: Ineos has set to build a traditional successor to the Defender and the fundamental object has been to take the Land Rover in all its rugged practicality and improve it for all those extreme conditions that made it the only vehicle for explorers, rescue missions and of course the military.

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The Grenadier does not go the route of new technology: its engineering is conventional, even old school – a ladder chassis carrying a body of aluminium, steel and composites and supported by solid axles. The rollcall of big names is reassuring: BMW supplies the 3 litre six-cylinder engines, either a petrol or a diesel, ZF the eight-speed transmission, Eibach the springs and tractor axle specialist Carraro the beam axles. All proven componentry, Ineos points out, and all operating in hundreds of thousands of vehicles. Ineos works in partnership with Magna, the Austrian components manufacturer which builds, amongst others, the Mercedes G Wagon and the Jaguar EV, the I Pace.

Inside the Grenadier the emphasis again is on robustness and practicality. Climbing into the cabin is assisted by substantial grab handles on the A pillars, placed exactly where you instinctively look for them, but intelligently angled so that they do not interfere with driver's vision. Surfaces are well finished with good quality if hard wearing materials. The seats

from Recaro are thoughtfully shaped and all upholstery is wipe-down or wash-down, the rubber floor mats, designed to be hosed, have drain holes beneath them, but the Grenadier's interior still feels more like a Range Rover's than a utility vehicle.

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The driver sits in front of an attractive leather-clad wheel, agreeable to hold and surrounded by analogue controls. Ineos says that a touch screen will be limited to non-essentials – 'infotainment.' All the controls that matter have knobs or switches because with gloved or dirty hands these are the only practical solution. A panel on the ceiling has further controls like a plane cockpit or a military vehicle and it is no coincidence that several of the development drivers come from an army or emergency services background. Indeed, development of the Grenadier has involved 4×4 users such as the Halo Trust which is de-mining in Angola. Many sites there have no road connection and Ineos engineers have been to see how the trust maintains and modifies its ageing fleet of Defenders to cope in these conditions – which are also providing useful development feedback on the Ineos test vehicles which Halo is using.

An all-too-brief off-road excursion suggested that even though these are pre-production development 'mules,' the Grenadier is a remarkably cohesive package. Long-travel springs absorb bumps, cushioning the cabin against shocks and the diesel engine is refined and muted. The gearbox changes ratio imperceptibly and ride quality is quiet and almost serene. This was a major design objective which appears to have been largely achieved. Both petrol and diesel engines provide massive torque and only in extremis is the low range likely to be needed. The ZF is programmed with hill descent control, reassuring for less experienced drivers.


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Ineos is running customer ‘clinics’ in several European markets where the Grenadier is likely to sell significantly and feedback from would-be owners, among them Defender users, has assisted the development process. In fact, the whole process of “development in plain sight” as Ineos puts it, is in contrast to an industry which normally goes to considerable lengths to hide it. Grenadier’s makers feel that as they are entirely new to automotive and that they are launching a product which has no direct competitor, they have everything to again from this open approach.

Series production is planned for Q3 2022. Early test Grenadiers were built at Magna – the hence the ‘G’ (Graz) registration plates in some of the pictures. Ineos has acquired the former Smart plant from Daimler Benz at Ambach on the Franco-German border, a fortunate purchase as Ineos was also able to take on an experienced workforce which

otherwise would have been dispersed. The plant has a potential capacity of 30,000 units per year.

The Grenadier will be available in a commercial specification – a two-door with effectively a van body, or as a five door, fully upholstered SUV. Pricing will range from about £45,000 for the two-door to about £60,000 for the 'car' version. Ineos seeks to keep things simple – one petrol or diesel engine and one ZF transmission. The company foresees a larger market for the diesel in Europe, but petrol for the Middle East and North America where US homologation rules make it difficult to import the diesel. Later a long wheel base version will see the introduction of a double-cab truck and a seven-seat station wagon.

Several specialist companies are already rebuilding or making 'continuation' Defenders (at a price) but the Grenadier has rather greater ambitions than a British enthusiast market. Ferry Porsche succeeded because he had a good idea backed by solid engineering and for forty years, he only ever used his own money. Sir James Ratcliffe would seem to have all the right ingredients including 18,000 registered potential buyers.