Ineos Advances Projekt Grenadier

Chemicals Manufacturer Teams up with MBtech to Build Defender-inspired Off-roader

One year ago, following the completion of a six month feasibility study, Ineos confirmed that it is to go ahead and build a brand new “uncompromising” 4×4 off-roader modelled on Land Rover’s classic Defender. Whilst the company claims to be one of the largest chemicals manufacturers in the world, it will be the first time that it produces a vehicle.

The project is the brainchild of Ineos founder and chairman, Jim Ratcliffe, who is also an extreme sports enthusiast and global adventurer. When Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) announced it was going to cease production of the Defender in 2016, Ratcliffe saw a gap in the market for an off-roader that stood for adventure and active driving but also had the capability to be a work and utility machine. And he decided that Ineos could fill the gap – thus Projekt Grenadier was born.

“I am a great admirer of the old Land Rover Defender and have enormous respect for its off-road capability,” said Ratcliffe, “and our new 4×4 has been inspired by it. But whilst our off-roader might share its spirit, our new car will be a major improvement on previous models.”

The project is to be run by Dirk Heilmann, formerly head of Engineering and Technology at Ineos. He is CEO of Ineos Automotive, the business born in 2016 to build the first-ever Ineos car.

The target market for the vehicle is global and includes agriculture and forestry workers, explorers and adventurers as well as traditional Defender fans that simply enjoy an authentic 4×4 driving experience.

The car has been dubbed 'Projekt Grenadier', which references the Grenadier pub in Knightsbridge that’s close to the Ineos office and where plans for this Defender-inspired model were first discussed, Ratcliffe said.

On Feb. 14, 2018, exactly one year after the project had been officially launched, Ineos announced it has brought German automotive engineering firm MBtech on board. MBtech, which is part-owned by Mercedes-Benz, will become Ineos
Automotive's engineering partner on Projekt Grenadier. MBtech was founded in 1995 as Mercedes-Benz Technologies and works with a range of auto giants outside of its parent firm, including Porsche and BMW.

Under the deal with Ineos, it will take the lead on overall vehicle development of the Grenadier, overseeing all components.

Heilmann said: “Today’s agreement represents a very exciting step for Projekt Grenadier. We have found a quality partner in MBtech who we believe have the competency, talent, and foresight to enable us to deliver a high-quality vehicle to the market. This deal will bring together German engineering and British entrepreneurship to create a truly formidable off roader.”

By the spring, over 200 engineers will be working on the project in Stuttgart in Germany. Ineos Automotive intends to reveal early sketches of the car later this year. It is aiming to finalize the car's specifications by mid-2018, with MBtech producing the first "mule vehicles" soon after, with proper prototypes following later this year. MBtech will be tasked with "working up" the exact specifications of the vehicle to ensure that it is a "truly rugged, reliable and uncompromising 4x4."

Ineos Automotive's plans for the Grenadier to go into proper production next year, with finished cars on the roads in 2020.

Henry Kohlstruck, managing director of MBtech, said: "The next six months are where the real work will begin as we take all the design variables into account."

Ineos is still mulling where to choose as the manufacturing site for the new 4×4, with the possible locations narrowed down. Ratcliffe has said ideally it would be made in the UK, but added it would want government support. (mr, rk)

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