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Jeep Grand Cherokee



HILE THE OLD-STYLE CHEROKEE (Sport, Limited and Orvis) soldiers on, this all-new Grand Cherokee takes over from where the previous Grand left off. But gone are those aggressive, boxy lines in favour of a sleeker, smoother shape, with rounded off corners and sparkly headlamps. This underlines the fact that the new model is aimed at luxury car buyers who are likely to feel comfortably at home in the leather-trimmed, equipment-laden cabin that offers extra space in both the back seat and the boot.

There's a lot more to the newcomer than just a change of styling, however. Indeed, there are just 127 carry-over parts, the oil filter for the 4.0-litre being the biggest. There are the engines, for example (all of which come with automatic transmission only).

The best news is that there's now lots of gorgeous grunt from a new 4.7-litre V8. This not only has a throaty underbonnet roar when you open it up, the 122mph monster fairly romps up the road and clearly appears to live up to Chrysler Jeep's claim of 0-62mph in 8.3sec, spinning smoothly to 5000rpm in the process. It lopes along easily at the legal limit, too.

The "smaller" 4.0-litre's growl is more muted and initially it feels flat-footed. It pays not to pussyfoot, though. Press hard on the throttle to induce a downshift and it displays its more spirited side, with 0-62mph claimed in 10.9sec. This makes it similar in performance to the old, lighter model, thanks to a 13bhp increase in power.

Smooth-shifting, four-speed automatic transmission, with well-judged part-throttle downchanges, adds to this model's easy-going charm. However, it's the 4.7's new auto 'box that's particularly noteworthy. It's actually a five-speeder, but Chrysler Jeep refers to it as a multi-speed transmission because it has three normal ratios and two closely spaced second gears. Which of this pair is automatically selected is determined by whether rapid kickdown acceleration or smoothness of shift is the more appropriate.

All models are equipped with Quadra Trac II four-wheel drive with manual high and low ratio selection. Otherwise the system operates automatically and continuously apportions power between all four wheels depending on the grip available. It will even keep you moving if only one wheel has traction. The system proved remarkably effective on the particularly demanding off-road terrain we tackled; in fact, the Grand Cherokee seems virtually unstoppable under the toughest conditions. It really is a remarkably competent vehicle off-road. It's pretty impressive on the road, too, with a composed, car-like ride, well-controlled cornering roll and crisper handling, thanks partly to improved steering which is more positive and has a sharper turn-in than hitherto. The ABS-equipped brakes, with electronic brake distribution, are as reassuring as ever, with good pedal feel.

Climb aboard and you sit in firmer, more supportive seats and face an attractive, businesslike dash bristling with no-nonsense functionality; it's attractive and does the job well. There are cruise control buttons on the front of the steering wheel, audio control buttons on the back, with multi-purpose stalks within easy reach. All-round vision is generally excellent, although the auto-dimming mirror could be a little deeper.

None too convincing "wood" trim relieves the dark greyness of the interior and the list of equipment is mind-boggling – you name it, it's provided – including an industry first : infra-red climate control that senses the body temperature of the front occupants individually and, rather spookily, adjusts the heat settings automatically. You also get "his and her" key fobs with full memory settings for the ten-way powered front seats.

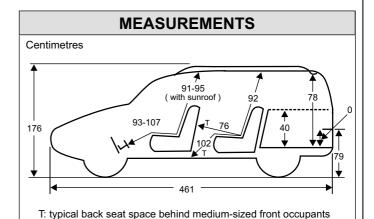
Our tape measure couldn't find quite as much extra space in the back as Chrysler Jeep claims, but there's 3cm additional kneeroom and legroom – both of which are pretty generous. However, you continue to sit rather low and "knees up", and you still can't slide your feet under the front seats. A third rear passenger has only a lap belt, no centre head restraint, and his or her feet have to straddle or rest on the wide central tunnel.

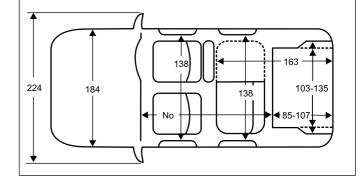
Luggage space is much improved now that the spare wheel has been moved from its upright position in the load area to under the floor. The snag is that it means a higher lift to get luggage on board. A lot more space is available by folding the 60/40 split back seats forward (with head restraints intact), but they don't have thiefproof catches. Conveniences such as protective carpeting, a load net, lashing eyes and a pull-out load cover are provided, and light objects can be loaded through the tailgate's opening window.

## VERDICT

The Grand Cherokee, already one of our favourites among the heavyweight 4x4s, has just got better. A whole lot better, in fact, thanks to the availability of that awesome (if gas-guzzling) V8 engine, the improved ride, handling and steering on the road, and the new Quadra Drive's formidable traction off it.

It's a pity that back seat passengers remain somewhat shortchanged, because otherwise the Grand Cherokee is a fine all-rounder that comes loaded with luxury- car equipment, an elegant interior, a three-year/60,000-mile warranty and remarkably (in the case of the 4.0 Limited) a price tag no higher than the version's it replaces.





FACTS AND FIGURES		
	4.0 Limited	4.7 V8 Limited
ENGINE		
Туре	six cylinders in line, 3956cc	V8, 4701cc
	OHV, 12 valves	SOHC, 16 valves
Power	188bhp at 5000rpm	217bhp at 4700rpm
Torque	218 lb ft at 3050rpm	288 lb ft at 3200rpm
TRANSMISSION	•	
Туре	five-speed automatic transmission with permanent Quadra Trac II four-wheel	
	drive with high and low ratio transfer 'box and (optio	nal) progressive, speed-sensing
	torque transfer differential in both fro	ont and rear axles
CHASSIS		
Suspension - front	coil-sprung live axle with Quadra-link leading arms and	
	track control arms; anti-ro	oll bar
- rear	coil-sprung live axle with lower trailing arms and	
	triangular upper arms; anti-	-roll bar
Steering	recirculating ball with hydraulic power assistance	
Wheels	16in alloy with 245/70R16H; full-size spare	
Brakes	ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with ABS	
	anti-lock control and electronic bra	ake distribution

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