



Jeep Grand Cherokee



WHILE 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.

