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CARreport



Detroit-made Grand Cherokee has developed loyal following

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

Jeep has never been known for its comfort, ease of operation or power, but the flagship Grand Cherokee is. By now everybody knows it's more than just a big Cherokee, a sport-utility pioneer that poles next to its big brother but still has a loyal following.

The Detroit-made Grand Cherokee handles more like a top-of-the-line sports sedan than a truck, has a lot of creature comforts, a car-like interior, standard anti-lock brakes on every trim level (an ascending order, the SE, Laredo and Limited) and the side Jeep is not known for.

There are a lot of differences in this high-end Grand Cherokee compared to the base Cherokee. They include a 4.5-inch longer wheelbase, an 8-inch increase in overall length, 5 inches more in rear-seat hip room and 1.7 inches more in the front. Front shoulder room is 3 inches more, rear shoulder room is 2.3 inches bigger, cargo space has increased 7.4 cubic feet and the rear door is 4.2 inches wider. Whoa!

All of that adds up to a lot more comfort, a lot more hauling capacity and the ability to get in and out of the vehicle easily.



ROAD TEST
By
Anne
Fracassa

Several years ago, a test Cherokee was taken on a 250-mile trip with two passengers. Both companions complained (so I didn't invite them along this time). They didn't like the Cherokee's headroom, hip room or handling characteristics.

Other safety features of note on

the current edition of the Grand Cherokee include 4-wheel anti-lock brakes and a standard rear wiper-washer system.

One of the better features is the choice you get with 4-wheel-drive systems: Part-time 4WD, full-time 4WD and Quadra-Trac all-time 4WD.

Tested was the Quadra-Trac, which shifts quickly and effortlessly while in transit and automatically locks the center differential for you for maximum torque transfer. Cruising speed is easily attained, as watch that load foot. Mileage is an OK 16 mpg city, 21 highway.

The Grand Cherokee's 4.0-liter, multi-port fuel-injected 6-cylinder high-output engine delivers 190 horses and can easily pull you away from the pack at a light. An option: A 5.2-liter V-6.

The Grand Cherokee was introduced in January 1992 at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, when then-Detroit Mayor Coleman Young purposely crashed it into the front of Cobo Center, where the show was held.

Initially, the "old" Cherokee

style, which is what is sold in sport and Country editions, code named "ZL," got widened (3 inches) and stretched (4 inches) for a roomier, cleaner interior that sat atop a new suspension. The exterior received a large, creative redesign with rounded corners and smooth surfaces all over. Designers retained the "Jeep" feel that first made initial iterations a hit with the Cherokee debut in 1984.

There have been changes since the introduction. In 1993, the 6.2-liter V-8 engine was introduced as was a heavy-duty 4-speed automatic transmission with it. A 2-wheel-drive model was made available and a 5-speed manual transmission was added to the 4.0-liter engine.

In 1994, 4-wheel disc brakes were put on the Grand Cherokee Limited; doorbeams were added for side impact protection, a power sunroof was a late model addition and the base Grand Cherokee was renamed the SE.

For 1995, all Grand Cherokees added 4-wheel disc brakes. A flip-

up tailgate window is now optional, as are integrated child safety seats, some new colors were added as was the upscale Orvis edition to offset the Eddie Bauer's of Ford.

The four-wheel ABS system (standard) was another first in its class.

Other than that, one shouldn't much mess with success.

With a mission to mix the ability to go off-road and retain car-like handling (is there a truck today which seemingly doesn't have this set of goals as a mission?) Cherokee is still a versatile, all-purpose vehicle.

The interior is quiet, roomy, without ergonomically angle dash controls.

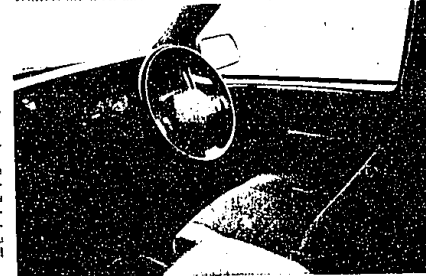
Though easy to utilize, those with long legs will find reaching the dash controls are a bit more of a reach

than first imagined or romanced. Entry into the rear seats is where the "stretched" body benefits tall passengers most, allowing them to enter without getting caught on the rear wheel wells.

(Something that's still a problem on regular Cherokees). However, if the driver has the seat back far, legroom is cramped.

A 60/40 split bench seat increases room for larger items. The spare tire is still a space hog in the cargo bay. The full-sized spare can also block vision out of the rear window. An outside spare tire carrier was due as an installed option. Viability is very good given the higher stance and numerous glass panels.

Gorry Miller of Avanti NewsFeatures East contributed to this report.



If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI 1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox... Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti News Features.

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