

Road test: Jeep Wrangler

by Tim Saunders



The Jeep is an iconic vehicle, with a long association with the US military, following its introduction in 1945.

The rugged Wrangler is its capable and luxurious offering, large enough for the whole family to travel wherever in comfort.

Externally it is striking with its prominent

grille, a smattering of chrome and the no mess design that has gained it a loyal following since its launch in 1986. Big chunky tyres surround 18-inch polished aluminium wheels with their black centre. Unlike most other vehicles on the road the door hinges sit on the outside of the bodywork and are themselves a design feature. I also like the metal aerial for the radio beside the front windscreen. You don't see many of those anymore. Yes, it is a design classic.

It comes loaded with mod cons; press the keyfob to unlock the central locking and you are met with a hardwearing black interior complete with black leather seats. Far more luxurious in fact than I imagined. Although it is possible to step into the cabin without treading on the running board, it is easier if you do.

Sitting in the driver's seat my left foot is uncomfortable due to a lack of space to the left of the footwell. Apart from that the seat is comfortable and the ride height is noticeably high. Often these days a dashboard is quite deep but in the Wrangler it isn't, reminding me of the original Land Rover. Nothing wrong with that.

My first drive is devoted to surprising my three little rambunctious children by picking them up from school. An automatic, it's simple enough to drive and surprisingly responsive if the accelerator is pressed down. It is a large vehicle which means that I can't park in the usual spot I would in my tiny Ford Fiesta. But I find a space and as I lock it the lights stay on for a little while, which is a little unnerving. But they do turn off eventually. When we return it reminds me of the radio controlled Jeep that Father Christmas kindly gave me as a boy. That too had working headlights; from that point on I have always had a soft spot for Jeep.

The children love it in the back and Henry draws my attention to the inside of the roof, which certainly does look different to a standard vehicle. This is because the roll bar cage is visible rather than incorporated into the design and hidden.

Never before have I driven a vehicle that has commanded so much attention from passers-by and motorists alike. As it sits on the driveway in front of the dining room from where my wife is often working these days, she counts at least a dozen people throughout the day stopping to admire the Jeep. Some from close up and others from over the road.

It is large and its height dwarfs most other road users unless they're in a truck or similar. If thrown into a corner on a wet day those front wheels despite the huge tyres, perhaps unsurprisingly don't feel quite as safe as you might wish.



But it's a joy to drive. A massive 4x4 that will propel from 0 to 60mph in just over seven seconds. Boy racers think they can out do it at the lights and are left stunned. It's comfy, different to the competition, and a delight.

'Are you picking me up in the Jeep, daddy?' questions Henry (4) as I drop him off at school. He loves the vehicle and the sound of the name. Of course, I do. Any excuse to drive this vehicle. The sizeable tow bar at the rear means that I daren't parallel park for fear of damaging the front bumper on the car behind. However, an opportunity on a main road does present itself – where there is no car behind – and it is easy enough to manoeuvre. The reversing camera is a great benefit.

One morning it is extremely cold and no sooner has the engine started the windscreen quickly clears, which in itself is impressive. The driver's seat heats up and so does the steering wheel. What luxury.

We find that if anything – even a coat – is placed on the middle rear seat a warning light on the dashboard flashes and there's a loud beeping noise. That's annoying but the children find a way round this by pulling the seat down and strapping their bags down, which satisfies the sensors.

This vehicle cries out to be driven off road and we find an open field near Alresford where we can put the Jeep through its paces. It's a matter of putting the automatic gearbox into neutral and then selecting the 4-wheel drive control on the stick next to the gearbox. It needs a firm push into position and then you're ready to go and we all love bumping along through the undergrowth. It becomes clear how much of a difference 4-wheel drive makes when I return it back to 2 wheels and we're still partially in the field; there's quite a bit of wheel spinning.

Driving through Alresford a man steps out of his Porsche and gawks at the Jeep as if he's never seen anything so cool. He could have bought two of these.

On another occasion as we make our way down a tight country lane we meet a VW Caravelle followed by a large Volvo XC90. Both these vehicles cannot reverse round the bend so I must reverse up the hill. The problem is that we have already travelled a mile down this very narrow road. In the rear view mirror I spy a verge so reverse onto it but it's higher up than anticipated and we find ourselves perched at an awkward angle. I daren't push it back any further in case we topple. Not only does this entertain the children, there's enough room for the vehicles to pass for which they're grateful. Wiping the sweat from my brow we move off, ready for the next challenge.

At a standstill for whatever reason it's got a really reliable engine start/stop function, too.

Overall, the Jeep Wrangler has quickly become a very much loved member of the family and we're all sad to see it go.

Watch the videos at www.testdrives.biz

FACTS AT A GLANCE
Jeep Wrangler Unlimited
Overland 2.0 GME 272bhp
OTR incl. options and accessories: £50,325
Fuel: Petrol
0 to 60mph: 7.4secs
Top speed: 110mph
Power: 272bhp
Economy: 24.8mpg
Emissions: 260g/km

