

# 4WD BUYERS GUIDE

## JEEP COMMANDER

### LARGE WAGONS

**Jeep's Commander was the brand's first venture into the three-row-seating wagon market, sharing its powertrain, suspension and running gear with the Grand Cherokee, but with much softer damping. It's no longer in production.**

The wheelbase is identical to the Grand Cherokee's and space for the third-row seating comes with a mere 37mm extension in rear body length – that, and a total absence of any cargo space when the Commander is set up as a seven-seater.

If the Commander's designers had taken 300mm out of the unprecedented depth of the dashboard there would be additional interior space.

The Commander power-trains are straight out of the Grand Cherokee book: Jeep 4.7-litre and 5.7-litre petrol V8s, and the Mercedes-Benz three-litre, aluminium V6, common-rail turbo-intercooled diesel. The V8s drive through a Chrysler 5-45RFE five-speed auto box and the diesel is hooked up to a 'Benz W5A580 five-speed.

Two 4x4 systems are available: Jeep's QuadraTrac II and QuadraDrive II. QuadraTrac provides automatic torque transfer to the axle with the most traction and QuadraDrive adds across-axle, electronically-controlled, limited slip differentials.

QuadraTrac II is the standard transfer system behind the 4.7-litre V8, but the diesel engine and all Limited versions score QuadraDrive II.

The Commander comes with high levels of stock equipment in standard and Limited versions. The active safety list is impressive: electronic stability program; electronic roll mitigation (ERM); brake assist; ABS; all-speed traction control; a tyre pressure monitor and warning signal; and rain-sensitive wipers.

The interior fitout is also impressive: a three row heater-air conditioning system; power adjustable seats (eight-way driver, four-way passenger); power door locks and windows; powered, heated mirrors; an AM/FM/CD, six-speaker sound system; overhead console; an electronic vehicle information centre; a 40/20/40 split-folding rear seat with folding outboard head restraints; a Sentry Key® engine immobiliser and remote keyless entry; multi-stage driver and front passenger air bags; and front and rear full-length side-curtain air bags.



The Limited model picks up Jeep's seat and mirror memory system; a leather-wrapped steering wheel; leather interior trim; rain-sensing automatic wipers; a premium sound system; ParkSense front and rear park assist; heated driver and front passenger seats; a chrome-plated grille and bodyside mouldings; fake wood trim; infrared dual-zone climate control; and auto-dimming rear view and driver-side exterior mirrors.

## On and Off Road

Given that its suspension comes from the 2007 Grand Cherokee - the best-handling Jeep ever at that time - the Commander should have fine on-road manners and it does: on smooth surfaces. But the Commander's suspension is found wanting once the box on wheels strays from boulevards. The shock absorbers should last the life of the vehicle, because they don't appear to do anything. There is no discernible bump control and the rebound damping is also largely ineffective. On rough surfaces the new big Jeep is a wayward beast. Fortunately, it's fitted with an excellent stability control system and that keeps it out of the shrubbery on corrugated, winding dirt roads. The ABS system is also very effective on loose surfaces.

While the driver is struggling to keep the Commander aligned with the road there are the additional distractions of drumming bodywork and excessive road feed-back through the steering. The plus sides of the Commander's on-road performance are the brilliant 'Benz V6 diesel and the five-speed auto, that combine to give class-leading diesel urge and smoothness. As our performance figures prove, it was able to show a clean pair of heels to the other vehicles on this test – on smooth, straight, high-grip surfaces.

This Jeep looks unbalanced for bush driving, with a nose-down attitude that doesn't match its high-set rear end. Ground clearance up-front is about what you get with a passenger car, while the rear is traditional Jeep. Compromising the front end even further is a vertical spoiler clipped to the under-bumper chin panel.

It looked like a snowplough and that's how it behaved, shovelling gravel and stones in front of it, while those that escaped the 'blade' clattered under the low-set wishbones and the steel bash-plate. Without that substantial bash-plate we'd probably have holed an oil reservoir.

The ground-scraping front end nobbled the Commander's considerable off-road potential, forcing the driver to avoid obstacles that nearly every 4WD on the market could pass over. It was a frustrating experience.

The Jeep was much more at home on soft sand, where the ground clearance and suspension compromises didn't matter. With its stability control switched off and that beautiful engine howling away it was in its element.

### Previous Models

None, thank heaven.

### Bush Modifications

Not really applicable, we feel



**"New HELLA LUMINATOR  
LED driving lights.  
Brilliant!"**

