

4WD BUYERS GUIDE

JEEP WRANGLER

SMALL WAGONS



The Wrangler was launched in Australia in 1996 in a basic package, but the range has since expanded to embrace 11 models, with a host of optional variants.

The Jeep Wrangler owes its origins to warfare, but today is bought almost entirely by non-military users. Military Jeeps took a different design path in the 1960s, beginning with the M151 that featured monocoque construction and all-independent suspension. Jeep has exhibited prototype independently-suspended, recreational Wranglers, but has not introduced production versions.

The Jeep brand, like Land Rover, has had several corporate owners since WW II and has followed a broadly similar path to that followed by Land Rover. Today's Wrangler is noticeably a development of the WW II Jeep quarter-tonner, while the Cherokee and Grand Cherokee models follow the SUV wagon path pioneered by the Jeep Wagoneer in 1963.

The traditional appearance of the Wrangler belies the fact that it incorporates modern technology: state of the art turbo-intercooled, electronically injected diesel; ABS brakes and electronic traction control; modern sound systems; and air conditioning.

The Jeep Wrangler Unlimited four-door is a more spacious version of the two-door, but its basic 'fun' purpose is unchanged. The Wrangler Unlimited has a light, half-tonne payload and is aimed principally at the urban dweller, who wants daily transport that can be transformed into a weekend and holiday 'escape' machine.



The Wrangler continues to be offered with the Euro V compliant 2.8-litre CRD turbo-diesel. A Stop/Start function is standard with the CRD manual.

The 2012 Jeep Wrangler range includes short-wheelbase Wrangler Sport and Rubicon variants, as well as the long-wheelbase Wrangler Unlimited which is also available in Sport and Rubicon form.

The 2012 Wrangler adopts the Pentastar **3.6-litre V6 that has been available in the Jeep Grand Cherokee**, with maximum power of 209kW – up 63kW over the previous engine – and 347Nm of peak torque – up from 315Nm.

The Pentastar V6 Wrangler comes with a manual six-speed or five-speed automatic transmission with adaptive electronic control and Electronic Range Select (ERS) driver-interactive manual control. Jeep claims the six-speed manual's combined fuel figure is 11.2L/100km and the automatic's is 11.3L/100km. CO₂ emissions are 259 g/km and 263 g/km respectively.

The short front leading arms of all beam-axle Jeeps means the vehicles suffer from unwanted steering inputs of axle-bump reactions more than designs that have long leading arms, such as those fitted to Patrols and Defenders. Jeep rear trailing arms are also short, so lumpy roads cause front and rear axles to 'steer' somewhat, creating a slightly wavering course. Handling was very good on road, with all three capable of cornering speeds in excess of most people's requirements. Electronic stability control compensated for the Wrangler's part-time 4WD system that provided only rear wheel drive on high-friction surfaces.

The 2011 Wrangler had better ergonomics than its predecessors, apart from one crucial problem: the discrepancy in height between the accelerator and brake pedals and the lack of space for a clutch foot rest – all worse in RHD than LHD models. Reaction time between loud pedal and brake was badly affected by this layout that has persisted in Wranglers for many years. Why?

Pedal positioning causes vertically-disadvantaged people a further problem, because in order for them to depress the accelerator they have to have the seat forward to the point where their knees hit the dashboard. My better half is 1.57m tall and cannot drive a Wrangler in comfort.

The Jeep's interior space is compromised by a traditional long-bonnet design, with extended front bumper apron. These design cues take up more than a third of its overall length, detracting from cargo space. Fortunately, in the Unlimited, rear seat room isn't compromised.





The Jeep's updated VM diesel was frugal, averaging 9.5L/100km in on and off road driving and hovering around 9L/100km on freeways. Towing didn't knock it around much, either, with a 13L/100km average, pulling a 1500kg trailer.

Off-road vocations for the Wrangler are most likely to be weekend frolicking, relatively close to home.

The Wrangler isn't really designed for long treks in remote areas, for carrying much freight or for towing caravans or large camper trailers. As such, it's well specified and has enough off-road ability to satisfy the vast bulk of buyers.

The Jeep Wrangler continues to exhibit traditional 4WD characteristics that have undoubted market appeal and the Unlimited four-door model has managed to retain that DNA, while making more room for passengers and some freight.

However, the RHD conversion work hasn't been well done since 1996, leaving Anglophiles at an ongoing disadvantage.

Wrangler Rubicon

The Rubicon Model was launched in late 2002 at the Paris Motor Show, but wasn't released in Australia until five years later. It was named after one of the USA's most famous and toughest off-road trails. The Wrangler Rubicon was engineered to take on the most demanding trails, including those previously reserved for highly modified vehicles.

In response to the demands of hard-core off-road enthusiasts, the Jeep Wrangler Rubicon model featured Dana 44 axles with Tru-Lok locking front and rear differentials, and a 4:1 low-range transfer case. When unlocked, the rear axle's torque-sensing, limited-slip action provided better traction and handling on-road.

We drove one of the release models on the actual Rubicon Trail and came away highly impressed with the capabilities of this purpose-built vehicle.

Unfortunately, it has been available only with petrol power, severely limiting its appeal to Australian enthusiasts.

The 2012 Rubicon model gets upgrades that include a body-coloured three-piece hardtop, body-coloured fender flares, leather-trimmed seats, heated front seats with height adjustment and map pockets behind the front seat backrests. Sadly, there's still no diesel Rubicon model.



Previous Models

The Jeep Wrangler was launched in Australia in October 1996, in three trim levels. All Wranglers could be converted into hard or soft-top and all featured coil-spring suspension, a modernised interior and twin airbags.

The Wrangler was powered by the same proved four-litre six-cylinder petrol engine that propelled other Jeep models and had part-time-4WD, with low-range 2.72:1 gearing and an optional Trac-Loc locking rear differential. The engine put out 130kW and 290Nm of torque.

In 2003 a new 42RLE four-speed automatic transmission made its debut in the Wrangler. An all-new interior incorporated front seats with an additional 20mm of rearward travel and easier access to the rear. The top-shelf 2003 model also had an electro-chromatic rear view mirror, map lights, temperature and compass display.



Safety features standard on all 2003 Jeep Wranglers included SRS airbags, a driver's side constant-force seat belt retractor and height-adjustable lap/sash belts.

The 2005 Jeep Wrangler featured a six-speed manual transmission, with a lower-speed first gear for brisker acceleration and a taller top gear for quieter and more economical cruising at speed. The four-speed auto option carried over. There was also a limited edition Renegade model, with cruise control, dual top roof, auto-dimming rear view mirror with map lights, overhead compass and temperature gauge, leather wrapped steering wheel and side steps.



Pricing was: Wrangler Sport six-speed manual \$29,990; four-speed auto \$31,990; and Renegade six-speed manual \$31,990.

Jeep launched four new Wrangler models in 2007, bringing the total to seven. The all-new Jeep Wrangler and Jeep Wrangler Unlimited arrived in March. The Wrangler Unlimited featured a four-door, open-air design that offered space for five adult passengers and the most cargo space ever offered in a Wrangler.



Jeep Wrangler Unlimited had a 2947mm wheelbase, achieved by adding 523mm to the standard all-new Wrangler's 2424mm wheelbase.

There was also a 2.8-litre common-rail turbo diesel option, in addition to a 3.8-litre V6 petrol engine. Offered in three models – Sport, Renegade and Rubicon – the 2007 Jeep Wrangler and Wrangler Unlimited were available with different top, door and windshield combinations in a choice of nine exterior colours and on 16- or 17-inch wheels.

Standard equipment on the Sport included Electronic Stability Program (ESP), Electronic Roll Mitigation (ERM), four-wheel-disc brakes with Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), four-wheel brake traction control (4BTC), Sentry Key Theft Deterrent System, driver and front passenger multi-stage front airbags, cruise control, fog lamps, power locks with keyless entry, power front windows, soft top, 16-inch wheels, skid plates for transfer case and fuel tank, easy access tip-and-slide seats, driver-seat height adjuster, rear folding seat, air conditioning, mini floor console, locking glove box, compass and temperature gauge, 12-volt auxiliary power outlet, tilt steering wheel and AM/FM CD radio with MP3/Auxiliary input and six speakers.

Options were four-speed automatic transmission, half doors and front-seat-mounted side air bags. In addition to standard features on the Sport, Renegade included a dual top with soft-top and three-piece modular hard top, deep tint glass, six-disc CD/DVD player, premium speakers with subwoofer and tubular side steps.

In addition to standard features on the Jeep Wrangler Sport the Rubicon model included electric-disconnecting front sway bar, 4:1 part-time transfer case, heavy-duty front and rear axles, locking front and rear differentials, 4.10 axle ratio, rock rails, 17-inch machined, cast-aluminium wheels with 225/75 Goodyear All Terrain tyres, tough seat fabric and premium speakers and subwoofer.

Pricing ranged from Jeep Wrangler Sport 3.8L V6 Petrol six-speed manual at \$30,990 (RRP) up to Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Rubicon 3.8L V6 Petrol 4-spd automatic - \$45,990 (RRP)



For 2010 the Wrangler range picked up a standard tyre pressure warning system and 17-inch wheels. The 2.8L CRD with automatic transmission went up to 460Nm of torque, while the 2.8L CRD with manual transmission remained unchanged at 410Nm. A 3.73:1 axle ratio replaced 4.10:1 on Sport models equipped with automatic transmission. Unlimited models scored an 85-litre fuel tank and a Dual Top became standard on Rubicon and Rubicon Unlimited.

A \$1500 Off-road Group was available as an option on both petrol and diesel models and combined an electronically controlled rear axle differential lock, 3.73:1 axle ratio and electronic front sway-bar disconnection.

For 2011 the Wrangler lineup had improved sound insulation, a redesigned instrument panel, lockable centre console and heated, power mirrors. A leather-wrapped steering wheel mounted CD/DVD/MP3 audio and cruise control switches. A USB interface was included, along with Bluetooth audio.

Larger rear windows were incorporated into the 'Freedom Top', three-piece hardtop option.

The 3.8-litre V6 petrol engine continued, but our test vehicle was powered by an upgraded 2.8-litre CRD turbo-diesel, with 147kW at 3600rpm – up 17kW – and 460Nm of peak torque in the 1600-2600rpm band, when fitted with the Grand Cherokee's five-speed automatic transmission. (Manual six-speed diesels are limited to 410Nm in the 2200-2600rpm band.)

Claimed economy was 7.1L/100km when mated to the six-speed manual transmission. A Stop-Start function shut down the engine when the vehicle was in neutral with the clutch released, then restarted when the clutch was depressed.

Standard equipment included: multi-stage driver and front-passenger SRS air bags; ABS with off-road calibration; electronic stability control (ESC) with brake assist; traction control, electronic roll mitigation; brake locking differentials (BLD); 17-inch aluminium wheels; tyre pressure monitoring (TPM) warning lamp; manual headlamp levelling system; part-time four-wheel drive; mono-tube shock absorbers; and transfer case and fuel tank skid plates.

The Wrangler Unlimited RRP list started at \$36,000, but our diesel auto test vehicle with Renegade Pack (three-piece hardtop, soft top, tinted glass, side steps and six-speaker media centre with sub-woofer) had a RRP of \$45,500



Bush Modifications

Jeeps can be kitted with a host of Mopar and after-market equipment, but high lifts need to be avoided, or on-road stability will suffer.

Buyers looking for optimum bush-ability could look for a Rubicon model and put up with the petrol thirst.

An advertisement for HELLA LUMINATOR LED driving lights. On the left, a close-up of a round, silver LED light is shown. To its right, the text reads: "New HELLA LUMINATOR LED driving lights. Brilliant!". On the right side of the advertisement, there is a yellow rectangular box containing the HELLA logo, which consists of the word "HELLA" in a stylized font inside a blue oval.