

Compromising with the weatherman, but not with the Trailhawk

Story and photos by Nick Calderone | Alpine sidebar by Rosalie Michaels

My girl Rosalie and I planned to camp with friends in the White Mountains of Arizona for a long Fourth of July weekend. Our wilderness site was about 250 miles away, and we needed to be self-contained. We had to pack in all our own water and food for four days, and carry out all the waste. We were excited to make the trip in a brand new 2014 Jeep® Cherokee Trailhawk, but I had one big concern ... space.

Normally when we head into the

woods for some nature time, we lift the gate of the family 4Runner and throw in all the necessities for comfortable camping. The Toyota swallows it all, plus my camera gear and in many cases a small aerial camera drone. There's never been a discussion about what to leave behind. So would the smaller Trailhawk cramp our camping style? It was an honest concern for us, especially since we've considered switching to a smaller SUV for some time.

I pushed the button on the fob, and

the Cherokee's power liftgate slowly revealed the space we'd have to work with (love that feature, by the way). Classified as a midsize SUV, the Cherokee is clearly smaller than we're used to. But once I folded the rear seats down, I began to realize the Cherokee is bigger than it looks.

I piled up our kit on the driveway, trying not to leave anything out. Rosalie and I enjoy the outdoors, but there's no reason to be miserable, right? So, first to get loaded were our two large reclin-

• The Jeep Cherokee Trailhawk gobbled up everything we threw at it. • Straightforward controls are ready to handle any roads or weather, or any audio or media whims. • Below, the southwest entrance to Big Lake.



ing lounge chairs, which seemed to eat up a ton of space. Next, I stacked a few bins, folding tables, camp stove, tent, air mattress, cooler, dry goods, clothes and finally a few pillows. It all fit! Our gear wasn't crammed in, and there was even a little extra space. I was relieved, but I also felt like I was forgetting something.

I quickly forgot about that feeling of forgetting something the moment we hit the road. Chrysler nailed it when it comes to the cabin of the Jeep. The

leather buckets are soft and comfortable, and the chrome-rimmed gauges bookend the center LCD display perfectly. The centerpiece of its interior is the 8.4-inch display of the optional Uconnect system. Big onscreen buttons intuitively guide you through everything, including Bluetooth, climate control, navigation and seven possible audio sources. Media inputs are easy to access with his-and-her USB ports, an SD card slot and an 1/8-inch jack port just below the center stack. We each

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SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE2.4L I-4 MultiAir
TRANSMISSION9-speed automatic
POWER/TORQUE184 hp / 171 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	4-wheel drive with standard Jeep Active Drive II Lock with low range and locking rear differential for best-in-class Trail Rated 4x4 capability • Fully disconnecting 4x2 mode with auto 4x4 engage • 4x4 Low • Selec-Speed Control combining hill descent and hill ascent • Rear axle lock • Crawl ratio 56:1
SEATING	.....FRONT/REAR: 2/3
FUEL ECONOMY	.....21/27/23 (city/hwy/comb)
SUSPENSION	...FRONT: McPherson strut, long travel coils, one-piece alum sub-frame, alum lower control arms, stabilizer bar. REAR: Four link rear w trailing arm, alum lateral links, isolated high-strength steel rear cradle, coils, stabilizer bar
BRAKES	.....13x1.1 vented w 2.3 single front, 10.95x0.47 w 1.5 single piston rear caliper
WHEELS	.....17x7.5 polished alum, paint pockets
TIRES	.....P245/65R17 OWL All-terrain
WHEELBASE	.....4X4 LOCK: 107.0 in
OVERALL LENGTH	.....182 in
OVERALL WIDTH	.....4X4 LOCK: 74.9 in
OVERALL HEIGHT	.....4X4 LOCK: 67.8 in
LOAD FLOOR HEIGHT	.....30.9 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....min 8.7 in, .....front axle 10.4 in, fuel tank 10.5 in
APPROACH ANGLE	.....4X4 LOCK: 29.9
BREAKOVER ANGLE	.....4X4 LOCK: 22.9
DEPARTURE ANGLE	.....4X4 LOCK: 32.2
CARGO VOLUME	.....SEATS UP: 24.6, SEATS DOWN: 58.9 cu ft
BASE PRICE	.....\$29,495
COMFORT / CONVENIENCE GROUP:	Backup camera, power liftgate, remote start, keyless entry/start, dual zone auto climate, 8-way driver and 4-way passenger power seats, alarm, tonneau cover .....1895
LEATHER INTERIOR GROUP:	includes heated front seats and steering wheel .....1295
BLACK HOOD DECAL	.....150
UCONNECT® 8.4/NAV:	Premium nav, HD radio, SiriusXM Travel Link & Traffic, one year Uconnect Access trial .....795
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....995
TOTAL	.....\$34,625

NICK CALDERONE is a host of the nationally syndicated news and entertainment show *RightThisMinute*. A lifelong car and motorcycle enthusiast, Nick says the coolest car he's ever owned was a 1986 Nissan 300ZX, and he currently rides a 1984 Honda Goldwing. Nick can be reached at [facebook.com/nscaldereone](https://www.facebook.com/nscaldereone) or on Twitter @nscaldereone.

ROSALIE MICHAELS is an actor, model and corporate spokesperson. She has been in many films and commercials and is a national spokesperson for Hyundai. In addition, she owns With a Smile Productions, an event model management company responsible for the iconic "red dress block girls" you see at Barrett-Jackson.



Finding our campground on unmarked forest roads in the dead of night was not an ideal mission, but the Trailhawk's nav pinpointed it just fine, and it delivered exactly the getaway we had in mind.

had our iPhones plugged in, and Rosalie played DJ as she swapped between the music in our libraries.

Phoenix weather can be rather uncomfortable in July, and the digital readout of two-digit temperatures as we climbed out of the Valley would be a welcome sight. The temperature dropped with each click of the odometer. Our speed also dropped as we drove on, which wasn't so welcome. The mountain grades heading north on the Beeline Highway get quite steep and can tax a loaded SUV. Our Trailhawk was fitted with the base 2.4-liter 4-cylinder mated to a 9-speed automatic transmission. The Jeep kept pace with 70 mph traffic, but its 184 horses seemed to be running hard. I was left feeling curious how the extra power of the vehicle's optional 271-hp 3.2-liter V6 would perform.

Holiday traffic slowed our arrival into camp by a few hours, which meant we'd have to find our friends in the dark. The forest service roads were a wide but twisty track through a mix of dense trees and wide open meadows. I could tell we were driving through some beautiful country, just by what I could see from the headlights. This is deer and elk territory, and I spotted a few bounding off into the darkness. I stayed alert to avoid a spontaneous deer shaped hood ornament.

Normally, I'd be a little uneasy about navigating unfamiliar forest roads in the dark, looking for signs made of lipstick and paper plates. However, I was confident we'd find our group. The Trailhawk's navigation system allows for direct input of lat/long coordinates, which we got from our friends. I punched in the code, and we followed the electronic breadcrumbs straight to our group's location, even on unmarked wilderness roads. We made camp as quickly as possible through intermittent rain showers and crawled into our double-wide sleeping bag. I drifted off anxious to see the beauty of our surroundings in the warm morning sun.

The next morning, a steady patter against the taut tent walls woke us up.



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Departing Big Lake, we headed toward civilization: the small town of Alpine, Arizona. The route was Three Forks Road, about 18 miles of rugged washboard gravel almost all the way to US 180, the Coronado Trail.

The pine trees towering above waved gently against monochrome grey skies. July 4th looked to be unusually gloomy this year. Normally, the powerful high desert sun pushes through the clouds, but not on this day. Showers turned to steady and occasionally heavy rain. Thunder and lightning were the substitutes for fireworks, but we put on our rain gear and went for a drive, anyway.

Big Lake was a few short miles down the road, and Rosalie and I were hoping to get some cool cloudy sky pictures. Sadly, just as we pulled into the park to get our first look at the lake, the skies opened up. We sat perched on a vista for a while, fighting back our rainy day disappointment, but the rain outlasted our patience. The water reflected the color of the gloomy skies and resembled a big bowl of molten silver. My cameras aren't waterproof, so we made for camp. Despite the rain, it turned out to be a great day with my girl. Rosalie and I hunkered down in our tent and spent the afternoon peering through screen windows, chatting and watching the puddles ebb and flow.

The weather may have dampened our Friday fun, but the rain made for excellent conditions to play with the Trailhawk. Saturday brought some sun and drier skies, so we set off into the woods to take vehicle pictures and tackle some off-road exploring.

The look of the Cherokee lineup is a bit of a departure from the classic boxy Jeep exterior. Its rounded front clip seems to have evoked the most critiques. One of my friends described the new Cherokee as the ugliest car since the Pontiac Aztec. I disagree ... mostly. Rosalie, a model and pageant girl, proclaimed this about the Trailhawk: "It's got a big nose, and if it were a girl in a beauty pageant, they'd tell her to go get some rhinoplasty." Ouch.

The Cherokee isn't likely to win any beauty awards soon, but I honestly like the looks of the Trailhawk. But just the Trailhawk. The manlier, trail-rated version of the Cherokee won the genetic lottery when compared to its siblings, the Sport and the Limited. It's taller and carries a tighter, lifted chin and perkier rear end on top of more muscular wheels and tires—all attributes that play into its off-road

abilities, but also improve the Cherokee's overall appearance. I like the Trailhawk's rugged stance and I applaud the Chrysler design team for taking a risk.

Look beyond the divisive exterior and get to know the Trailhawk's guts, and you begin to see the real beauty. It's what's on the inside, anyway, right? There are five selectable driving modes designed to handle varying degrees of road quality and conditions. Plus, a low-range 4WD mode, differential lock and downhill assist—plenty of tools that should keep the weekend soft-roader from getting stuck. We had no trouble poking around on muddy, rutted spur roads as we made our way back to Big Lake.

We explored the perimeter roads of the lake, and this time the water sparkled and teemed with anglers. We parked the Trailhawk near one of the boat launches and just kicked back. Rosalie was relaxing and reading while I took a quick break. As I came back her way, I heard a splash and turned my head, expecting to see ripples from a jumping fish. Instead, a large osprey was rising from the water like a phoenix. I missed its attack dive, and the osprey missed its prey, flying away with empty talons.

Next, we set a course on the nav system for the mountain town of Alpine. The route calculated to about thirty minutes, and the Trailhawk's suspension smoothed out eighteen miles of washboard dirt road with barely a ripple in our water bottles. The route provided a perfect backdrop for photos and reflection on how much Rosalie and I enjoy traveling together.

On Sunday, after a long, soggy weekend of camping, we again loaded up the Trailhawk. One feature I overlooked until we got into the Jeep with muddy shoes was its all-weather floor mats. They make perfect sense on the Trailhawk and add a level of ruggedness without diminishing the upscale interior feel. We were both tired from battling the rain, and the Trailhawk's interior felt like home. The midsize Jeep did everything we asked and did it well. After commuting comfortably, road tripping economically and off-roading competently, I'd describe the Jeep Cherokee Trailhawk as a Swiss Army knife on wheels. It's a perfect place to command a weekend of adventures. ■

All-American side trip to Alpine

Coming from a big city, Nick and I love opportunities to visit and explore cute little towns. For me, it takes me back to Mayberry, where everyone knows everyone else, and stores and restaurants have likely been there for at least as long as I've been alive.

So when Nick suggested that we visit Alpine during our rainy camping trip, I was elated. Elated to see the little town and, quite honestly, elated to be out of the rain, and in the comfort of the Cherokee once more. As we pulled into town, the rain had stopped, and we noticed that the town was packed with people. They had just finished the postponed 4th of July parade, and were still milling about the main drag. Fun!

We hopped out of the Cherokee and immersed ourselves in the quaint small town life. We strolled along, breathing in the pine air, and smiled fondly at the red, white and blue sprinkling of parade goers.

And then, jackpot—small town candy store! Never one to turn down a sugary treat, it took little convincing to get Nick to go inside. We didn't spend a lot of time in Alpine, but it was enough for me to see that it is an adorable town, that left me with a smile on my face, an old fashioned cola in a glass bottle and a Chick-O-Stick in my hands.

—Rosalie Michaels

