

# Lightning Round

Fate delivers us our fourth Jeep® Grand Cherokee within a year—and is also 4-for-4 on weather – Joe Sage

The Jeep Grand Cherokee was all new for 2011—completely and truly all new, and claimed by Chrysler to be their “best ever.” Three trips we made to the Pacific Northwest last spring put us behind the wheel of three 2011 Grand Cherokee V6 Laredos: red, black and white (all in Washington, but with Michigan, Oregon and Washington plates, respectively). The first one was provided to us by Jeep, as we had sought its combination of style, capacity and function to carry a full load of VIPs at times, while tackling mud, rain, sleet and high water at others. It delivered so well that we rented

the other two for ourselves on subsequent trips. As we noted in our May/June 2011 issue, all three looked good wet—a lucky thing, in that part of the country.

In late 2011, we drove a new 2012 Grand Cherokee for a week, back home in Arizona: silver (with Michigan plates), also a V6 but in Limited 4x4 trim. The rain seemed to have followed us back to the desert, along with the brand—all the more reason this fourth drive seemed like a lightning round. In May/June, we noted that we liked the new Jeep Grand Cherokee a lot and would “do it all again.” Let’s compare notes.

The Grand Cherokee has two engine options—the new-last-year 3.6-liter Pentastar V6, or (on most models) a 5.7-liter V8. (V6 highway fuel economy is up one point from last year, now 16/23 MPG city/highway.) There

are three four-wheel-drive setups: Quadra-Trac I (one-speed transfer case), Quadra-Trac II (two-speed transfer case), and Quadra-Drive II (fully-automatic full-time system with locks for both front and rear axles).

Our 2012 Grand Cherokee makes us four-for-four for the V6. It was equipped with Quadra-Trac II plus optional Selec-Terrain adjustable suspension and traction.

Base prices run from the Laredo at \$27,490 to the Overland Summit at \$46,595, to the SRT8 at \$60,960. Our Limited 4X4 has a base price of \$39,295. Extensive standard features were rounded out by a media center upgrade (\$465) and rear entertainment package (\$1495). With \$825 destination charge, this one was out the door for \$42,080. (The Overland and Overland Summit add bigger wheels, more leather and a few other features; the SRT8 of course adds a 470-hp 6.4-liter HEMI® V8.)

Last spring, we had noted that “despite all its electronic advances, we appreciated very straightforward controls.” This winter’s notes were simi-

lar: controls are intuitive and the touchscreen works well, although we would definitely allocate the climate controls differently (the most prominent knob is only for the fan when on manual). We noted the audio as well above average and easy to calibrate. The backup camera’s image quality was very good, though when you’re ready to fire it up and go, you have to wait for the Jeep splash screen, then the legal disclaimer, before you get the image, making it too tempting to give up and be in motion by then. We’d find more safety in a faster camera than in the safety disclaimer.

We had noted some oddities with shifting in the hills of Tacoma last spring, but here on the flatter streets of the Valley, we found it “phenomenally smooth, with easy, strong power for entering traffic.”

Jeep marketing chief Chris Ellis had told us this vehicle would make “zero compromise, on- or off-road.” We’ve not yet taken one on the Rubicon Trail, but we know full well they could not produce this if it couldn’t dominate that. Our off-road times have been limited in both locales. Around town—where so many buyers’ real world usage occurs—we were repeatedly impressed by the Grand Cherokee’s maneuverability. Its turning circle is 37.1 feet, about the same as a Honda Accord and within spitting distance of a MINI. Despite its size, we could easily do a 135-degree turn and zip right into a parking spot on the other side of a bidirectional herringbone. No wonder it can conquer the Rubicon.

Aerodynamics are improved, engines are more efficient, creature comforts are increased, but Jeep never loses track of its prime directive. When a vehicle that can tackle terrain like a truck—or, well, like a Jeep—can also be this comfortable and nimble as a daily driver, its mission is complete. ■



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