

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 18 NUMBER 3
MAY-JUNE 2019

2020
Jeep
Gladiator



**NEW JEEP PICKUP
AMG 53 EQ BOOST LINEUP
NIKOLA MOTOR LANDS IN ARIZONA
GMC-INFINITI-KIA-LEXUS-MAZDA-SUBARU-TOYOTA-VW
WAVE CAVE ROAD TRIP / NASCAR RECAP / AND MUCH MORE**

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



CAPABILITY AND VERSATILITY

OPEN AIR CLOSED CABIN DESERT RUNNING ROCK CHALLENGING MUD TACKLING LOAD HAULING NEW MIDSIZE JEEP PICKUP

BY JOE SAGE

The midsize pickup market has exploded seemingly overnight from just a couple to a crowd. We easily might have thought Ram would be next. But Fiat Chrysler has instead come up with an end run, by making their first contemporary midsize pickup entry a Jeep.

We're big fans of end runs, an element of surprise as they join the party, and a way to stand out from the crowd. The new Jeep Gladiator inherently stands out—a midsize pickup in its own right, with that distinctive gotta-have-it Jeep character.

Midsize pickups haven't always just sprung from full-size trucks. Nor have 4x4 pickups. Decades ago—but in the modern era that developed nuclear technology, the first supercomputers, and sent men to the moon—a 4x4 pickup was a rare thing. But farmers and ranchers, uranium prospectors, building contractors and outdoor sportsmen needed just such a beast in the mud and rough country. And Jeep was there, way ahead of the curve. All those computers and spaceships were post-World War II civilian dividends, and so was the first Jeep 4x4 pickup, in 1947. Then, as now, it was all about utility—which was easily adapted to flat-out fun.

Jeep, with its deep well of rugged platforms and top-capability 4x4 drivetrains, has in fact had many

a pickup over the years—that first truck, Willys Forward-Control models, an earlier Gladiator/J-Series, the Scrambler and the Comanche, sometimes with multiple trucks overlapping—through 1992.

A Jeep Gladiator pickup concept was revealed on the auto show circuit in late 2004 and early 2005, not slated for production but generating high hopes and lots of anticipation. The concept had a cab-and-a-half build, but its Wrangler styling, open top and removable doors were among features that gave solid hints of the future. Early buzz took a different turn at Moab during Easter Jeep Safari Week in 2012, where a Wrangler-chassis J-12 with styling cues based on the '60s-70s Gladiator/J-Series was among the concepts.

At the 2018 LA Auto Show last November, the wraps came off the final 2020 Jeep Gladiator.

With anticipation now running red hot among Jeep fans and truck fans, we hopped a flight to Sacramento for a deep dive and serious hands-on time before the truck's public release.

Jeep is all about that juncture between fun and utility. The Jeep development team takes your fun extremely seriously, with "authenticity" their guiding light. They won't apply their badge to a new product unless it totally fits that vision. They also

know trucks—both from Jeep's heritage and from being cousins to the Ram Trucks division—so it wouldn't suit the mission to just add a pickup box to a Wrangler. The new Gladiator is a clean-sheet design and build. Styling is certainly reminiscent of Wrangler (though the truck's grille is larger, and there are two cameras up front). It's an unmistakable nod to brand and heritage, but it's an all-new vehicle, top to bottom, inside and out, and stem to stern. Thus their slogan for the new Jeep Gladiator: it's 100 percent truck and 100 percent Jeep.

If you're a full-size pickup shopper, especially in the 150-1500 and related class, you already know two things have become nearly impossible to find: an 8-foot bed or a manual transmission.

Great news—Gladiator offers your choice of an 8-speed automatic or 6-speed manual transmission (both with overdrive) across the current full lineup. (A 3.0L EcoDiesel arrives in 2020, automatic-only.)

Evolving consumer tastes have also brought crew cabs to a majority of pickups, with the 8-foot bed relegated to a couple of full-size single cab trucks, or the biggest heavy duties, often duallies. Midsize pickup bed length varies, but all are shorter than that. On the Gladiator, a crew cab, the bed is 60.3 inches long (five feet plus a hair), which

When it comes to pickups, this is not Jeep's first rodeo. Gladiator's many forebears include this 1960 Willys Jeep Pickup (1947-65), 1957 Willys Jeep Forward Control FC-150 (FC-150/170, 1957-65), 1968 Jeep Gladiator/J-Series (Gladiator 1963-71, J-Series 1971-87), 1982 Jeep CJ-8 Scrambler (1981-85) and 1986 Jeep Comanche (MJ, 1986-92), at right top to bottom.

suits its typical purpose as an outdoor recreation tool—perfect for camping, climbing, ski or fishing gear, or two dirt bikes (see cover photo). There was much discussion during the truck's development about the best build material for the bed—aluminum? composite?—but they stuck with steel. It has extra utility touches throughout—from swivel-flat (non-snagging) tie-downs, to bed lights, to a versatile three-position damped tailgate, to an optional 120-volt power source, to a roll-up tonneau cover. The team also addressed an issue that has generated negative feedback on other trucks: someone of reasonable height (even sub-six-feet) can reach over the side of the box to the base of the bed from ground level to grab low-lying contents.

Connectivity and functionality carry through up front, varying among four trim levels from 3.5- to 7-inch LED binnacle display and 5- to 7-inch or available 8.4-inch top-center touchscreen with gen-four Uconnect. Details of the instrument panel are derived from key elements of prior vehicles, set up with emphasis across the wide upper area for an open sweep. Controls include glove- and bumpy-trail-friendly physical knobs for audio and climate, and a sturdy shift-on-the-fly transfer case lever. Finishes include real metal and rubberized surfaces for touch-and-grab spots.

The cab's construction is of key importance to

KEEP RIGHT >>



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY PLANT.....	Toledo, Ohio;
Engine: Saltillo South, Coahuila, Mexico	
VEHICLE CLASS / SEATS.....	midsize pickup / 2/3
BUILD.....	longitudinal front engine, 4WD, ladder frame, open steel/aluminum body
ENGINE...24v 3.6L Pentastar V6, chain DOHC, sequential multiport electronic FI, aluminum deep-skirt block, alum alloy heads	
HP/TORQUE.....	285 hp / 260 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO.....	11.3:1
ALTERNATOR.....	180A standard; 220A (prem audio pkg); 240A (HD, off-road)
BATTERY.....	650 CCA standard; 700 CCA (HD)
TRANSMISSION...850RE 8-spd auto overdrive; 6-spd manul w overdrive; multi-rail system	
TRANSFER CASE...2 high, 4 high, neutral, 4 lo; Sport, Overland: low range 2.72:1; Rubicon: 4.0:1	
AXLE RATIO.....Sport, Overland: 3.73; Sport, Overland (Sport Max Tow): 4.10; Rubicon: 4.10	
AXLES.....3rd gen Dana heavy-duty; F: Sport, Overland: open diff; Rubicon: Tru-Lok electronic locking	
R: Sport, Overland: open w avail Trac-Lok; Rubicon: Tru-Lok electronic locking	
SUSPENSION..F/R: solid axle, link coil, leading arms, track bar, coil springs, stblzr bar; Rubicon: electronic sway-bar disconnect;	
SHOCKS: Sport, Overland: gas monotube shocks w multi-tuned valve (MTV) tech; Rubicon: high-pressure gas Fox alum monotube w front hydraulic rebound stop;	
STEERING.....electro-hydraulic power; 13.3:1 3.24 turns lock-to-lock	
BRAKES.....F: 12.9x.86 vented, 2 twin-piston floating caliper; R: 13.6x.86 vented, 2 single-piston floating caliper	
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....	218.0 / 137.3 in
HEADROOM (F/R).....	soft top: 42.8 / 42.8 in; hard top: 40.8 / 40.8 in
LEGROOM (F/R).....	41.2 / 38.3 in
BOX LENGTH.....	60.3 in / tailgate open 81.3 in
CARGO WIDTH...lift gate 56.8 / btw whls 44.8 in	
BOX HEIGHT.....	lift gate: 33.9 in; liftover height: 29.7 in; load floor height-axle: 33.3 in; open tailgate to ground: 34.8 in
WHEELS.....Sport: low gloss black 17x7.5; Sport S: cast alum high gloss silver 17x7.5; Overland: alum high gloss granite 18x7.5; Rubicon: alum high gloss granite 17x7.5	
TIRES.....Sport: 245/75R17; Overland: 255/70R18; Rubicon: LT285/70R17	
TURNING CIRCLE.....	44.5 ft, Rubicon 44.8 ft
APPROACH / BREAKOVER / DEPARTURE:	
Sport, Overland: 40.8 / 18.4 / 25°	
Rubicon: 43.4 / 20.3 / 26°	
GROUND CLEARANCE...10 in / Rubicon 11.1 in	
WATER FORDING...(carpet removbl) up to 30 in	
WEIGHT.....Sport, Sport S auto: 4672 lb; Sport, Sport S manual: 4650 lb; Overland auto: 4742 lb; Overland manual: 4720 lb; Rubicon auto: 5072 lb; Rubicon manual: 5050 lb	
TOW CAPACITY.....Sport: 4000-7650 lb; Overland: 4000-6000 lb; Rubicon: 4500-7000 lb	
FUEL / CAPACITY.....	87 oct reg unl / 22 gal
MPG.....auto 17/22/19 (city/hwy/comb); manual 16/23/19 (city/hwy/comb)	
PRICING.....Sport.....	\$33,545
Sport S.....	36,745
Overland.....	40,395
Rubicon.....	43,545

both its character and functionality—foldable windshield and removable doors (with tools included to make both easy), and standard Sunrider folding soft top (with sunroof) with three other soft or hard tops available. The soft top can be configured multiple ways—folded back with the windshield down, sides removed but top in place for a “safari roof,” or removed completely. Yes, its Jeep character leans heavily toward Wrangler, reinforcing its distinctive spot among the midsize pickups.

The cab is steel, with aluminum for the fenders, hood, doors and windshield frame. Storage behind and under the rear seats totals 33 cu.ft. (a best-in-class claim), with optional lockable bins available—adaptable from five smaller bins to space for long items—for those who park in the middle of nowhere with open roof and no doors, or removable to bring gear into camp. Eight-speaker audio is standard, with a 552-watt nine-speaker Alpine system with all-weather subwoofer available, as well as a removable Bluetooth speaker.

For our drives between downtown Sacramento and an off-road course in the Sierra foothills—a typical combination of city streets, urban freeways, Interstate and considerable two-lane blue highways, all with notable elevation changes, all in all much like Arizona—we took the Gladiator Overland one way and the Sport S the other. The experience is similar to that in the new Wrangler JL, in that they’ve built an extreme off-roader that also has nice, modern highway manners. Gladiator’s sophisticated suspension—picking up elements from the Ram 1500—is optimized and adaptable for top performance on- and off-road, both. Gladiator has

the added advantage of a wheelbase about 19 inches longer than a Wrangler Four-Door and 23 inches longer than Grand Cherokee.

Our off-road sessions were all in the Gladiator Rubicon. Jeep had commandeered a huge ranch in the foothills for this, where they can blend a custom-engineered course into natural surroundings, ensuring everything from the vehicle’s maximum extreme approach, breakover and departure angles to the minimum width clearance of the Rubicon Trail itself, with gravel, dirt, mud and rocky climbs all incorporated. Wild spring storms had delivered plenty of mud on even the tamer stretches. Prepping for our drive is an enormous undertaking, creating an equal to the challenging Lyman Trail at FCA’s Chelsea (Michigan) Proving Grounds but in a new location—vital because, as they’ve reminded us, this pickup is 100 percent Jeep.

(In case you wondered, they will return it all to its pristine state when we’re done, unless, as was the case here for some of the trails, the rancher prefers to keep some of it in place for new permanent access to their own Back 90.)

Rubicon is the tour de force Gladiator for off-roaders—or anyone. It includes stock 33-inch OD tires below fenders lifted by two inches, Tru-Lok electronic remote locking differentials front and rear, electronically-controlled front sway bar disconnect, Fox shocks, and a heavy winch-capable metal front bumper with removable end caps,

The general challenges presented on our off-road course are as tough as those on a dedicated Wrangler course, though the specs accommodated are a little different—approach angles are al-

most identical for the Gladiator, while breakover is about two degrees less on Gladiator than on the Wrangler Four-Door, and departure angles are notably different (about 36 degrees on a Wrangler Four-Door and 25-26 on the Gladiator, the natural result of motorcycle-capable bed length. Ground clearance, on the other hand, is three-tenths of an inch more on the Gladiator, up to 11.1 inches on the Rubicon. Gladiator Rubicon also has a 30-inch water fording depth, with removable carpet and sealed electronics to keep it penalty-free.

One feature that will spoil even the most jaded off-roader is Gladiator’s front-facing off-road camera, an option on Rubicon only. No longer need you wonder how your best buddy or significant other is doing, standing in the middle of a rocky trail way down below, waving you forward but blocked from your view. And it’s all the handier if you’re out there on your own. The camera view is accessed through Off-Road Pages in the main display.

We also broke away from the off-road course for some tow time—with sizable boats and Air-stream trailers to try out (see photo below)—back on the main two-lane roads. The Gladiator’s longer wheelbase is also a plus here, delivering smooth, stable behavior at highway speeds. Its tow capacity ranges as high as 7650 pounds (another best-in-class, as is its 1600-pound 4x4 payload). This is also best within the Jeep lineup, with only the Grand Cherokee coming close (at 7200 pounds 4x4 or 7400 pounds for a rear-drive diesel, while the Wrangler Four-Door tows 3500 pounds).

We drove preproduction builds in California, but the new 2020 Jeep Gladiator will be rolling off the



assembly line and arriving at dealerships by the time you read this. Expect to see them in traffic (or at the lake or on the trail) at any time.

Jeep always brings intriguing concepts to the Moab Easter Jeep Safari, and this year, they concentrated on dream variants of the new Gladiator (see the next feature in this issue).

There are a couple of vehicle comparos coming up that the Jeep Gladiator is likely to be entered in: “Mudfest,” the NWAPA Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year Awards on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, which we’ll be participating in; and an Off-Road Invitational with the new Texas Motor Press Association (which we may or may not be participating in). We have a hunch the new Jeep Gladiator may do well in both. Stay tuned!

Gladiator brings a double whammy to the marketplace, appealing to two of the most loyal groups in the vehicle landscape: Jeep owners and pickup owners. Its success seems assured. ■



Archaeology meets crystal ball

JEEP AND MOPAR ROLL HERITAGE INTO CONCEPTS BASED ON THE NEW JEEP GLADIATOR PICKUP

(Top row, left to right)
Jeep Gladiator Gravity,
Jeep Wayout, Jeep Flatbill.

(Front row, left to right)
Jeep JT Scrambler,
Jeep Five-Quarter, Jeep J6.



It doesn't take long for engineers, outfitters and enthusiasts to start thinking about what they could do with a new vehicle—and Jeep has plenty of all of the above right in-house. The team always brings special builds to Moab Easter Jeep Safari each spring; this year's batch of six were based on the all-new Jeep Gladiator midsize pickup.

Jeep® Wayout is an overland concept utilizing Gladiator's best-in-class payload to accommodate a full rooftop tent with integrated ladder and 270-degree custom canopy, with amber LED lighting for after-dark setup. Its body-armored exterior is in stock Gator Green paint. A 12,000-lb winch, two auxiliary fuel tanks, an ARB onboard air system and a two-inch lift kit get you off the grid.

Jeep Flatbill is a nod to desert motocross culture, a great toy-hauler with vented carbon hood, high-clearance flares, and a skid plate and shortened front bumper for an extreme approach angle. The tailgate has been removed and dedicated slide-out wheel ramps installed, making it easy to access and load an included pair of MX bikes. The floor inside is bedliner-finished.

Jeep Five-Quarter (a nod to past one-and-a-quarter-ton Jeep trucks) is a resto-mod incorporating a 1968 Jeep M-715 military vehicle, a vintage/modern showpiece atop a modern chassis and 4x4 drivetrain. Front sheet metal was replaced with carbon fiber, and a 6-foot aluminum bed has water-jet-cut panels and wood slats. The soft top is dropped 3.5", and rocker panels are replaced by body-length rock rails. The engine is an over-700hp 6.2L supercharged Hellcrate HEMI® V8.

Jeep J6, in custom Metallic Brilliant Blue paint evoking the 1978 Jeep Honcho, is a single-cab two-door with 6-foot bed (a foot longer than standard) and the wheelbase of a Wrangler 4-Door. J6 is a showpiece for prototypes—body-color spray-in bedliner, 2.25" steel sport/roll bar with four 4800-lumen LED lights, 37-inch spare carrier, 2-inch stinger bar for the Rubicon front bumper, and more.

Jeep JT Scrambler is a retro remix of Jeep Performance Parts and 1980s CJ8 Scrambler style, down to its Punk'N Metallic Orange and Nacho stripes, vintage amber freedom top, bronze 17-inch slot wheels and Katzkin Amaretto Brown leather interior with orange stitching. The engine adds a Mopar cold-air intake and cat-back exhaust.

Jeep Gladiator Gravity, in Punk'N Metallic Orange, is a rock-climber built with ready-to-order-at-launch Jeep Performance Parts from Mopar—bed-mounted cross rails and cargo carrier basket to store rock-climbing ropes, carabiners, helmets and shoes, plus a Mopar/Decked bed storage system with lockable cargo space through dual sliding drawers, still allowing for storage on top in the bed area. Gladiator's open-air potential is optimized with 2" steel tube doors, a mesh sunbonnet and windshield tie-downs. ■



Jeep® Wayout



Jeep Flatbill



Jeep Five-Quarter



Jeep J6



Jeep JT Scrambler



Jeep Gladiator Gravity