

Light heavyweight BY JOE SAGE

For just shy of 30 years, and over four prior generations, Jeep Grand Cherokee has remained intensely popular and over-the-top capable, able to tote the team—two rows' worth, anyway—or tackle the wilds (engineered to fit within the demanding clearances of the Rubicon Trail).

The corporate family has had one notable apple-and-orange factor for some time—in simplest terms, Jeep Grand Cherokee if you wanted two rows, Dodge Durango if you wanted three. Rather than go straight to the launch of a new version of the familiar two-row Grand Cherokee, generation five enters first with a twist: the three-row Jeep Grand Cherokee L (as in Long) as a 2021 model. The new two-row version arrives soon, as a 2022.

Grand Cherokee L hits the roads at roughly the same time as Stellantis's new three-row Wagoneer and Grand Wagoneer (which are not Jeeps, but rather a separate new sub-brand—seven-slot grilles and prior Jeep Wagoneer history aside). This was perhaps deemed a better way to compare apples to apples, followed by bringing in the new two-row Grand Cherokee to bat clean up.

Jeep Grand Cherokee L Overland 4x4 with air suspension deployed

In addition to a restyling and the seven-seat option, the new Grand Cherokee includes many advances: three 4x4 systems and Selec-Terrain traction management with five terrain modes; increased off-road ground clearance and water fording capability; all-new vehicle architecture with independent front and rear suspensions and class-exclusive Quadra-Lift air suspension with electronic adaptive damping; new UConnect 5 with standard 10.1-inch touchscreen and frameless digital gauge cluster; 360-degree surround view and night vision cameras; and new LED lighting with ambient features. New trim level-dependent offerings include front seat massage and personalized climate zones; quilted Palermo leather and waxed walnut; 21-inch wheels; McIntosh premium 950-watt, 19-speaker audio; and more. Level 2 hands-on autonomous features are also available.

Our Overland sample is one of three upper trims with a choice of 293-hp V6 or 357-hp V8 powerplant with 4x4. Ours is the V6 4x4 build, priced in the mid-\$50s. We gave the engine and Quadra-Trac II Selec-Terrain AWD systems a thorough run, in town, up I-17 to higher elevation, and off-road.

The Pentastar V6 has a healthy growl and decent power around town, a feeling enhanced by its acoustics, well developed to sound like more than a V6, while not infringing upon the distinctive, rich soundtrack of the available V8.

We were blissfully unaware it was a six while pulling the climb up I-17—a good sign of a strong and capable powertrain. This is a challenging run, with twists and turns through dramatic elevation gains, all while just two lanes jockey for supremacy. We achieved all aims easily and enjoyably.

The real purpose of our run north was of course to make this Jeep be a Jeep—to hit some special off-road points in the vicinity of Agua Fria National Monument. As we left the pavement, we changed

the Selec-Terrain system to sand/mud mode, just for good measure, and headed to spots that would challenge its Rubicon-ready width and air suspension (the latter adding 2.4 inches to ground clearance, along with notable increases in approach/breakover/departure angles, especially approach).

As we got to our tougher stretches, we paused to shift to 4LO and activate the air lift. You don't particularly notice the change from the cabin—it's great to know you can clear the tougher spots, but you still feel planted and full of grip—though it's admittedly a pretty cool look from outside.

The terrain modes are great and highly recommended, and the air suspension serves a very specific dimensional purpose. But we also tried the smart system with nothing special added—as we suspect many people will do at times. If you happen upon an unexpected challenge, you can often just leave it in automatic and drive through a wide range of conditions and circumstances without really giving settings much of a second thought.

We paid attention to acceleration and power as we reentered the Interstate, where we had an immediate notable uphill, necessary to pull at speed

to join two lanes of full-bore traffic. The V6 was plenty powerful, quickly bringing us to 75 mph as we tucked into position, with buckets of reserve.

Though we sometimes pined for a V8—just because we like 'em—our longer drive reminded us that the V6—on a 5000-pound 4-wheeler that can tow 6200 pounds—is rated 18 mpg city, 25 highway and 21 combined (with 4x4), vs 14/22/17 for the V8. We didn't log our fuel mileage, but were pleased at the end of the week to realize how far we had driven, under such a variety of demanding conditions, yet we still had a half tank of gas.

As always, the new Grand Cherokee L comes in a range of models over a carefully crafted pricing staircase, with our Trail-Rated Overland 4x4 about two-thirds of the way up. The new rig does all its jobs—urban/suburban duty, distance cruising and off-roading—exceedingly well. You know whether you need the seven seats of the Grand Cherokee L, and that third row is well developed for times you need it. And again, the two-row arrives soon.

Grand Cherokee maintains its prominent position: smaller than the new not-a-Jeep Wagoneer, more polished than a Jeep Wrangler, and capable of doing most all of both their same duties.

We've loved the gen-four Grand Cherokee and have adjusted to the new styling easily—readily spotted by a more vertical rear window. Gen four is a classic. But a new one's time has come, and we can report that all is well—brand equity is firmly intact, while they've moved the ball forward significantly. A job well done. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY.....Mack Plant, Detroit Assembly
ENGINE...Saltito South Engine Plant, Mexico
CONSTRUCTION.....steel uniframe
ROWS / SEATS.....three / seven (2/3/2, opt 2nd row buckets)
ENGINE.....3.6L Pentastar V6, 24v, chain-driven DOHC, sequential multiport electronic returnless FI, alum/alum
HP/TORQUE.....293 hp / 260 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO.....11.3:1
DRIVETRAIN.....Quadra-Trac II® AWD, Selec-Terrain® System
TRANSMISSION.....850RE 8-spd automatic
TRANSFER CASE.....2-spd electronically shifted: 4x4 low (lock, 2.72), neutral, full-time active 4x4
AXLES.....conventional, front axle disconnect, F/R: 7.7-in ring gear, F/R: 3.45:1 ratio
SUSPENSION.....F: multi-link indep, coils, gas-charged twin-tube coilover shocks, all-aluminum arms/knuckles; R: multi-link, coils, load-leveling twin-tube shocks, all-aluminum arms/knuckles incl extruded aluminum spring links
STEERING.....electric rack-and-pinion
BRAKES.....elec boost: F: 13.94x1.10 vented, 2.00 two-piston pin-slider caliper; R: 13.78x0.87 vented, 2.00 single-piston pin-slider caliper
WHEELS.....(std) 20x8.5 machined cast alum w Black Noise pockets; (ours w Off-Road Group) 18x8 polished alum w High-Gloss Black pockets
TIRES.....(std) 265/50R20 Bridgestone A/S; (ours w Off-Road Group) 265/60R18 Michelin Primacy XC All-Season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....204.9 / 121.7 in
HEADROOM (F/2/3).....39.8 / 39.9 / 37.3 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3).....41.3 / 39.4 / 30.3 in
TURNING CIRCLE.....38.3 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE...(w air susp) 8.5-10.9 in (fuel tank) 10.3-12.6 in
APPR / BRKOVER / DEPART.....20.6 / 18.2 / 21.5° (Overland w air, position2) 30.1 / 22.6 / 23.6°
CARGO CAPACITY.....17.2 / 46.9 / 84.6 cu.ft
WEIGHT.....(Overland 4x4 3.6L) 4,997 lb
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION.....(") 50/50
GVWR.....(Overland 4x4 3.6L) 6,700 lb
PAYLOAD.....(Overland 4x4 3.6L) 1,270 lb
TOW CAPACITY.....6200 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY.....unl 87 oct / 23 gal
MPG.....18/25/21 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE (Overland V6 4x4).....\$54,995
VELVET RED PEARL-COAT PAINT.....345
LUXURY TECH GROUP IV: Nappa leather, auto-dim mirror, wireless charge pad, 12-way power front seats w back massage, manual 2nd row window shades, 4-zone automatic climate control.....1995
ADVANCED PROTECH GROUP III: heads-up display, intersection collision-assist, night vision w pedestrian & animal detect, surround view camera, interior rear-facing camera, backup camera washer, integrated off-road camera, in-cluster map display.....1995
OFF-ROAD GROUP: 18x8 polished/painted alum wheels, 265/60R18 on/off-road tires, 230mm rear axle, electronic limited-slip rear diff, fuel tank skid plate, transfer case skid plate, front suspension skid plate.....1095
UCONNECT 5 nav w 10.1" display, McIntosh 950-watt 19-sprkr high performance audio.....1795
DESTINATION CHARGE.....1695
TOTAL.....\$78,885

2021 GRAND CHEROKEE L LINEUP

Laredo	4x2.....V6	\$36,995
	4x4....."	\$38,995
Altitude	4x2.....V6	\$40,195
	4x4....."	\$42,195
Limited	4x2.....V6	\$43,995
	4x4....."	\$45,995
Overland	4x2.....V6	\$52,995
	4x4....."	\$54,995
	4x4.....V8	\$58,290
Summit	4x2.....V6	\$56,995
	4x4....."	\$58,995
	4x4.....V8	\$62,290
Summit Reserve	4x4.....V6	\$61,995
	".....V8	\$65,290