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Jeep

REVIEW • MOTOR MATTERS 2016 JEEP CHEROKEE

The 2016 Jeep Cherokee builds something completely new onto a very familiar name and heritage. While the original Jeep Cherokee that launched in 1986 set the bar for sport-utility vehicles that could be used as family transport, inspiring a generation of competitors (and perhaps, the SUV trend as a whole), times have changed, and the market has come to favor models that are far more carlike.

For the most part, that's what the Cherokee is—although Jeep has managed to build a surprising amount of ruggedness and off-road ability onto a package that's designed primarily for families, road trips, and the daily grind. Top rivals for the Cherokee include some established crossovers like the Ford Escape, Honda CR-V, Subaru Forester, and Toyota RAV4. It's a clean break from the more truck-like Jeep Liberty it replaced, and its styling is less blunt and bluff.

The current Cherokee may be the first compact SUV get the midpoint right, masterfully bridging the gap between city-friendly crossover and serious (or, serious enough) off-roader. It's an unlikely subject, stuffed with the heart of a Trail Rated Jeep. There's plenty of ruggedness and a general zest for things outdoorsy, while remaining perfectly suitable for families that merely want AWD security and the suggestion that they might have enjoyed camping a time or two.

Instead of taking a design direction that's closer to that purpose—or going with something a little edgier—the Cherokee enters the fray with a startling variation of the Jeep face, then becomes something entirely derivative at other points. The cabin does paramedic duty here though, healing up all that poorly thought-out stretching with some palliative shapes and some truly nice finishes and Easter-egg touches (consider it a challenge to find all the hidden Jeeps inside).

The Cherokee really sizes right in with models that would be called compacts in the U.S., like the CR-V, Forester, and Escape. Jeep might call it a mid-sizer, but it's right in with those models. There's no third-row seat, but it's a relatively roomy five-seater, with a back seat that's suitable for adults—or even asking three to sit across for shorter distances—but the jutting front headrests might enforce a slouching position that robs some of that rear-seat space. The second row slides fore and aft to choose between legroom and cargo space, and there's a handy

organizer for the more retentive fans.

You have a choice between a four-cylinder engine and a V-6—which helps it stand out in a class that includes several models that have gone all-four-cylinder. The standard 184-horsepower, 2.4-liter in-line four is plenty strong for quick acceleration (as well as smooth and quiet for this class), provided there isn't too much weight aboard. The other new 3.2-liter V-6 makes 271 hp and 239 lb-ft of torque; it's torquy and generally happy with whatever work you throw its way. With the V-6 and a Trailer Tow Package, the Cherokee can pull 4,500 pounds. No matter which version, the Cherokee has fairly numb but accurate steering, with a well-tuned and well-damped ride.

The Cherokee also sports a ZF nine-speed automatic that offers a shockingly wide range of ratios—allowing even the four-cylinder versions to take off very quick from a standing start and cruise with very low revs on the highway. Yet there's some unhappiness in the way that this transmission sometimes balks, sometimes shifts with a bang, and sometimes holds a gear a lot longer than needed. It's not a deal-breaker, but it makes us wonder if the Cherokee would have been better with fewer gears. Its top figure of 31 mpg highway isn't class-leading either, but we've seen close to it in real-world conditions; 4WD models post a few mpg lower. All V-6 Cherokee models now include engine stop-start (ESS), which might not boost the official EPA numbers but will save some fuel in low-speed stop-and-go commuting.

Sport, Latitude, Limited, and Trailhawk editions are offered, with each model serving a different kind of buyer. Sport and Latitude models appeal to cost- and value-conscious families, while Limited models are the luxurious flagships of the lineup and Trailhawk models are ready for the trail. Jeep's Trail-Rated badge applies to the Trailhawk, and it gets a one-inch lift, unique front and rear fascias, an Active Drive Lock and locking rear differential, added skid plates, and red tow hooks. There are several different four-wheel drive systems, including Active Drive I, and Active Drive II (adding a dual-range transfer case). All models with 4WD have the Selec-Terrain system, with separate 'smart' modes for Snow, Sport, Sand/Mud, and Rock, and in low-range models with four-cylinder engines, its crawl

ratio is an astonishingly good 56:1

Latitude and Trailhawk models now include a ParkView backup camera plus automatic headlamps. And on Latitude, Limited, and Trailhawk models, there's a new package that combines Blind-spot Monitoring, Rear Cross-Path Detection, ParkSense rear park assist, and signal mirrors with courtesy lamps. About the only thing missing in the Cherokee's safety feature set is a clever surround-view camera system, which would be a boon for off-road use.

The 2015 Cherokee also offers more options than you'll find in most other affordable crossovers—if you're willing to spend extra, of course. Highlights include a CommandView panoramic sunroof and Sky Slider roof, memory heated/ventilated seats, and soft Nappa leather upholstery with ventilated front seats in the top Limited model. Infotainment systems include 8.4-inch Uconnect media center audio-streaming app connectivity (Pandora and Slacker, among others); and top models include a full-color reconfigurable LED instrument cluster.

This year, all models with that 8.4-inch system get a new Drag and Drop menu bar that allows more personalization, plus Siri Eyes Free compatibility and a Do Not Disturb mode that blocks out calls and text and can send a customized "I'm driving now" message.

Available adaptive cruise control that can bring it to a full stop if an impending collision is detected; optional lane-departure and forward-collision warning systems are also an option; and blind-spot monitors and parking sensors that can also trigger the vehicle to a full stop at low speeds, if obstacles are detected.

www.thecarconnection.com

2016 JEEP CHEROKEE

BASE PRICE	\$23,395
EPA est. MPG	22/31
SPECS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 184-Horsepower • ZF Nine-Speed Automatic • Engine Stop-Start (ESS) • Select-Terrain System • Four-Cylinder Engines • Blind-Spot Monitors • ParkView Backup Camera



CLICK and CLACK TALK CARS

by Tom & Ray Magliozzi

DON'T DISMISS OLD WORKHORSE BEFORE GETTING IT CHECKED OUT BY RAY MAGLIOZZI

Hi, Ray:

I bought a '95 Chrysler Town and Country from my brother last year for \$1,500. He had recently bought new tires and struts and some other part, so I basically reimbursed him for the recent work he had done and got the car for free. Since I have owned it, I have spent about \$1,300 for new rear brakes, a new battery, a new belt and something else. Now I am faced with spending a bundle to replace the failing transmission, and I cannot decide if it is worth it. The car has only 120,000 miles, and I drive it about 4,000 miles a year. I kind of hate to part with it, because the back is plastered with my Bernie bumper stickers, because it is great for

hauling my frequently dirty dog and 50-pound bags of horse feed, and because it is the hippie van I never had in the '70s. My other car is a 2012 Beetle, and I am trying to keep it nice, so my dog is not welcome in it, and its hauling capacity is rather limited. My question: Is this old-timer worth repairing for the above reasons? Thanks. -- Barb

It might be. Start by having your mechanic do an oil-pressure test on the engine. That'll tell you a lot. If the engine's oil pressure is marginal, then you can just go ahead and put a "Do Not Resuscitate" order on the Town and Country's health-care proxy.

For instance, if the oil pressure is supposed to be between 35-55 psi at idle, and the test shows it's at 36, I'd say drive it until it drops, then remove the plates and the dog and leave the van by the side of the road.

If it passes the oil-pressure test, then ask the mechanic to look over the rest of the car to determine what other key parts are about to -- in terms your horse would understand -- buy the farm. He can check the water pump, the tie rods, the front brakes, the rack and pinion, etc. Because on a car with 120,000 miles, any or all of that stuff could be ready to go.

If the car checks out reasonably well, then I'd say keep it, and put a rebuilt transmission in it. It'll probably cost you about \$2,500. But what other car are you going to get that meets your needs for \$2,500? With a rebuilt transmission, no less!

And at 4,000 miles a year, you might get another five years out of it. And then, if you want to preserve your Bernie stickers, you can hacksaw off the rear bumper and weld it onto your next vehicle.

Bumps and potholes do more than merely annoy drivers. Find out what, and how you can ease the pain, by ordering Click and Clack's pamphlet "Ten Ways You May Be Ruining Your Car Without Even Knowing It!" Send \$4.75 (check or money order) to Car Talk/Ruin, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

Got a question about cars? Write to Car Talk in care of this newspaper, or email by visiting the Car Talk website at www.cartalk.com.

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