

Grand Cherokee in the Great Cascades



The Jeep Grand Cherokee takes in the sights of Anderson Island, accessible by Pierce County ferry.



Electronics are all new, as are the drive systems and the structure itself. The Grand Cherokee comes with a 5.7-liter V8 or an all-new 3.6-liter Pentastar V6 (the first application of this engine). The V6 has a rated fuel economy of 16 mpg city, 22 mpg highway, and boasts a range of about 500 miles between fill-ups—a plus for a vehicle you can take anywhere whatsoever.

There are three available four-wheel-drive systems: Quadra-Trac I (a one-speed transfer case), Quadra-Trac II (a two-speed transfer case), and Quadra-Drive II (a fully-automatic full-time system with locks for both the front and rear axles). Selec-Terrain adjusts suspension and tractive capability for rock, sand/mud, snow, sport—or auto. Active air suspension provides additional ground clearance of 2.6 inches on demand—10.7 inches total—



Three trips to the Pacific Northwest and three Jeep Grand Cherokee V6 Laredos; a red one with Michigan plates, a black one with Oregon plates and a white one with Washington plates. All three looked good wet.

and automatically lowers at highway speeds. Everyday ingress and egress are great, with wider doors and door angles front and rear, plus keyless entry and start. Knee room, legroom and cargo volume are all increased significantly, and its combination of full gate and flip-glass rear window are the only such offering still in this class.

We did no towing on our trip, but with the V6, the Grand Cherokee is rated for 5000 pounds (the same as the all-new Ford Explorer); with the V8, it can tow 7400 pounds.

Options and interior appointments are thorough, with models including stitched leather armrests and instrument panel and a new steering wheel with more controls, so you can keep your hands on the wheel. Base prices run from the Laredo at \$30,215 to the Overland at \$41,910.

Using all of the above—other than towing—for a combination of airport runs with luggage, executive chauffeuring and island hopping by Pierce County Ferry was all comfortable, rugged, stylish and flawless—and we know we barely scratched the surface of what this machine can do over the long haul. Despite all its electronic advances, we appreciated very straightforward controls—technology adapted to simplicity and elegance of function instead of overkill is always preferable.

Backing into parking spots at our hotel, we

found the proximity sensors to be a bit oversensitive, getting increasingly alarmed until we figured we dared go no farther, only to find three more feet available back there.

The audio system was well above average, easy to calibrate on the go, with simple equalizers and a CD slot that resides behind a primary video screen that pivots up and out of the way for this seemingly simple need.

We may need to spend more time with the 5-speed automatic. Climbing a steep hill in Tacoma, stuck behind a small pickup traveling below the speed limit, we found the range struggling a bit—not just shifting down but stalling, lugging, hunting down for the sweet spot. Using the manumatic was a mixed solution, as we never did find a way to get it back into D, other than to pass through N. We suspect there's another way.

All in all, we liked the new Jeep Grand Cherokee a lot. We liked it so well, in fact, that we went ahead and rented one on our own dime on each of two subsequent trips to the same area. We didn't so much need the VIP style on those trips, nor the four-adults capacity. We didn't scratch the surface on the Grand Cherokee's overall capabilities on any of the trips. But all three times, we had a comfortable, solid vehicle that suited our needs perfectly. We'd do it all again. ■

TACOMA SCRAPBOOK

