

# ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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JEEP® WRANGLER SAHARA 4X4



# PURPOSE BUILT

## TRICKED-OUT TRADITIONALIST

BY JOE SAGE



**W**e drive a lot of vehicles in this business. As such, two things come to mind as we recall our anticipation of the Jeep® Wrangler. One: we hadn't thought about it in any tremendous depth prior to its arrival. And two: to the degree we had, we probably weren't expecting any huge surprises. After all, everybody knows what a Jeep Wrangler is. Right?

### NEW AND BEST EVER IN 2011

We had been exposed to the new Jeep Wrangler about a year earlier, along with the rest of a highly rejuvenated Jeep lineup (see our January/February 2011 issue). We had been presented with the all-new Jeep Liberty some months prior. In the second round, we had Jeep product planners and engineers in Phoenix to show us the "best ever" new Jeep Grand Cherokee, the new Patriot and the new Wrangler and Wrangler Unlimited (all 2011 models).

"Iconic" is a word that makes some writers shudder, but it's sometimes the best word for the mission at hand. Thus, at that time, we had said, "Nothing in the Jeep lineup is more iconic than the Wrangler, and updating an icon is one of the more terrifying tasks a design and engineering team faces." Jeep

Every rugged detail built into the Jeep Wrangler Sahara 4x4 conveys the feeling that they've gone out of their way to maintain an aura of this vehicle being purpose-built, and most importantly they've gone out of their way to keep it purpose-built.

marketing chief Chris Ellis had told us then that the Wrangler "has always been and will always be the most capable off-road vehicle in the world."

The biggest changes for the 2011 Wrangler were partly comprehensive: an all-new interior and an optional body-colored hard top, along with a few details such as power mirrors (not just a creature comfort, but a practical upgrade for navigating the rocky narrows).

At the time, Ellis had said that the factory body-colored hardtop "changes the character of the car as much as anything we've ever done." (It was initially available only on the Sahara, but a surprisingly high level of interest led us to suggest we should expect this also on the Rubicon before long. Indeed, the body-colored hardtop is now available on the Rubicon for 2012.) You may have to be a little more careful owning the body-colored top than the black vinyl one, as it can surely be scratched more easily while being removed or installed. But we'd have to agree with Ellis—it wins on style points. We note this every time we see one in traffic, and while we don't have their sales numbers, we suspect we are seeing the hardtop on the majority of new Wranglers in this neck of the woods (and Arizona is one of Jeep's largest markets nationwide).

Windows were enlarged on the sides and in the back. An entirely new instrument panel provides more precise controls. Power side mirrors, which also heated, mean no more stopping to reach through windows to adjust. One-touch power windows fall in the same category as the mirrors: they may sound like a luxury, but can prove extremely useful in challenging off-road conditions where your hands belong on the wheel and your feet on the pedals. Jeep representatives made it clear at the time that, in the face of these new conveniences, the Wrangler's capabilities are in no way diminished. You can remove the top, remove the doors, fold the windshield flat—and it's still street legal (and off-road king). Drain plugs under the carpet let you use the Wrangler as intended and still hose it out up to instrument panel level.

A grab bar inside is inscribed "since 1941" to recall the Jeep's earliest (World War II) heritage. That remains a valid benchmark and is a nice touch, given the broad updated feel overall.

With that much change back in 2011, you might not expect much else for 2012, but there's something big.

### A BIG CHANGE FOR 2012

A year earlier, we were told that the plant was running at full capacity (and sales were booming with no financial incentives, despite a tough economy), so anyone interested should order as soon as possible. However, we were also told to stay tuned for another major change on the Wrangler in 2012. That change is here now: an all-new 3.6-liter 24-valve VVT V6 engine and revised powertrain, for more power and torque along

KEEP RIGHT >>

## GENERAL SPECIFICATIONS

### 2012 JEEP WRANGLER SAHARA 4X4

Final Assembly .....Toledo, Ohio  
Engine Assembly .....Trenton, Michigan

Engine .....3.6L Pentastar V6  
Horsepower .....285 hp  
Torque .....260 lb-ft  
Valves .....Chain-driven DOHC, 24 valves and hydraulic end-pivot roller rockers  
Fuel Injection .....Sequential, multi-port, electronic, returnless  
Compression Ratio .....10.2:1  
Max Engine Speed .....6600 rpm (e-limited)  
Fuel .....Unleaded regular 87 octane  
Fuel capacity .....18.6 gal  
Oil capacity .....6 qt  
Fuel economy ...17/21 city/hwy (auto or man)  
Alternator .....160 amp  
Battery .....600 CCA, mntnce-free  
Transmission:  
Manual .....6-speed overdrive  
Automatic .....5-speed overdrive  
Command-Trac® Transfer Case .....Part-time, 2WD High, 4WD High, Neutral, 4WD Low

Length .....152.8 in  
Width (w/o mirrors) .....73.7 in  
Height (hardtop) .....70.9 in  
Wheelbase .....95.4 in  
Track, front .....61.9 in  
Track, rear .....61.9 in  
Overhang, front .....26.7 in  
Overhang, rear .....30.6 in  
Max payload (occupants/gear) .....1000 lb  
Weight (manual/auto) .....3951/3976 lb  
Steering .....Power recirc ball w/damper  
Ratio .....16.7:1 overall  
Turning circle .....34.9 ft  
Turns lock-to-lock .....3.5

Clearances (depending upon wheels/tires)  
Approach angle .....40.8-44.3  
Breakover angle .....21.8-25.4°  
Departure angle .....37.4-40.4°  
Front axle to ground .....9.1-10.5 in  
Rear axle to ground .....8.8-10.2 in

Suspension/Front .....Live axle, leading arms, track bar, coil springs, stabilizer bar, low-pressure (16-in wheels) gas-charged shocks, monotube high-pressure (17- and 18-in wheels) gas-charged shocks, Electronic Sway-Bar Disconnect System  
Suspension/Rear .....Live axle, trailing arms, track bar, coil springs, stabilizer bar, low-pressure (16-in wheels) gas-charged shocks, monotube high-pressure (17- and 18-in wheels) gas-charged shocks

Brakes .....4-wheel ABS with on- and off-road calibrations, ESC  
Front .....11.9x1.1 vented rotor 1-piston  
Rear .....12.44x0.47 solid rotor 1 piston



## OUR WRANGLER SAHARA

### 2012 JEEP WRANGLER SAHARA 4X4

Engine.....3.6L 24-valve VVT V6  
Transmission.....5-speed automatic

#### Standard Equipment:

FUNCTION/SAFETY: Advanced multistage front airbags, ESC, 4-wheel ABS disk brakes, traction control, electronic roll mitigation, hill start assist, CommandTrac shift-on-fly 4WD, next-gen Dana HD rear axle and solid front axle, transfer case skid plate, fuel tank skid plate, cruise control, alarm, TPM.

INTERIOR: 368W CD/MP3 7-speaker media center, SiriusXM, one-touch-down power windows, power locks, keyless entry, leather-wrapped steering wheel with audio controls, temp/compass gauge, tilt column, reclining front seats, fold/tumble rear seat, 115V aux power, covered rear storage.

EXTERIOR: 18-in painted aluminum wheels, P255/70R18 OWL on/off-road tires, auto headlamps, power heated mirrors, deep tint windows, tubular side steps, two hooks two front one rear, fog lamps.

BASE PRICE: .....\$27,970

#### Optional Equipment:

Leather heated front seats.....\$900  
Connectivity Group package.....\$385  
5-speed automatic transmission.....\$1125  
TracLok limited slip rear diff.....\$295  
Body-colored 3-piece hardtop.....\$1715  
Media center.....\$1035  
Remote start.....\$200

Destination:.....\$800

TOTAL PRICE:.....\$34,425

with increased fuel efficiency, plus improved on-road dynamics, handling and off-road capability. Fuel efficiency is now 21 MPG (EPA estimated highway), from an engine that has been boosted a whopping 40 percent, to 285 hp, and 10 percent to 260 lb-ft of torque. There is still a six-speed manual (as in our test car), but there is also a new five-speed automatic available, shared with the Grand Cherokee.

#### ON THE ROAD IN THE WRANGLER

It was completely refreshing to walk up to a vehicle whose identity and sense of purpose are clear from the get-go and carried through thoroughly: there's no mistaking this is a Jeep. We unlocked our Wrangler Sahara 4x4 and hopped in. Satisfaction was immediate: we liked the door handles, liked the vents, liked the whole cabin, the view from the driver's seat, the stance. The presence of a transfer case sealed the deal.

Controls are clean and straightforward. Our Jeep didn't have everything it might... no backup camera, no automatic climate control on this particular one. The steering wheel may have a few too many buttons for such a purposeful vehicle: several on the front which you can largely choose to ignore, but several on the back, which you can too easily activate by accident. (We could be driving along thinking this is a nice simple interface, when suddenly we're skimming through radio stations by the dozens.) All in all, Jeep has avoided electronic interface overkill in the Wrangler, though, and we appreciate this mightily.

The business-only layout of the Wrangler prioritizes headrests, and at the rear window hinges and wiper mechanism, all of which reduce inside rear visibility.

A 40 percent increase in horsepower is impressive. But with this relatively small vehicle weighing in at over two tons with a driver on board, we find it a little short on pep for a freeway ramp. For normal surface street driving, it's more than adequate, pushing just shy of 300 hp. For

off-roading, or for powering on slick or shifting surfaces, it's very appropriately balanced. Full-bore heavy-duty service remains job one for the Jeep Wrangler.

We received our Wrangler with about 5000 miles on the odo, and in cool January weather. The door had such a snug fit against the hardtop, it triggered the door-ajar alarm many times, till we gave it a second slam. No doubt this could either be adjusted or might still be breaking in. Everything else about the hardtop is worth it, from the tighter cabin to style. You can still take it off if you want, going topless or soft. On the freeway, buffeted by wind on the non-aerodynamic windshield, we did have interior noise, but it basically made us feel as though we were on an adventure. Good Jeep stuff.

In neighborhood traffic, we contemplated how this hardtop Jeep stacks up against, say, an Escalade pulling up next to us. Our Jeep is stylish enough, inside and out, to take your date to the prom, nightclub or country club, so against the Cadillac folks, you'd have nothing to feel bad about. The Wrangler Sahara is styled-up, modernized, comfortable and well-finished. The only difference is that this looks like it can handle any job. Maybe they both can, but the Jeep has the look and feel.

We didn't have an opportunity to take the Jeep on any serious off-road adventures, but that's a known entity. What's interesting is that it fulfills its General Purpose mission so well, in a modern world.

#### TWO-DOOR OR UNLIMITED (FOUR)

The 2-door Wrangler holds the most immediate recognition as "a Jeep." Its sibling, the 4-door Wrangler Unlimited, has a boxy style that evokes the original midsize Jeep Cherokee (in the '80s, the only 4-door smaller SUV in a market with the 2-door Chevy S-10 and Ford Bronco II). Differences between the 2-door and 4-door Wranglers are the breakover angle (approach angles are the same) and overall length. Sales are actually stronger on the 4-door Wrangler Unlimited, at about a 60/40 split. The 4-door Unlimited can tow more (3500 lb) than the 2-door Wrangler (2000 lb, which is no more than the Patriot). For more serious towing needs, you'll need the Jeep Liberty (5000 lb) or Grand Cherokee (7400). Clearly, the most active owners need a two-Jeep garage.

#### MORE THAN A FEELING

As for our preconceptions or lack thereof, before delivery: it all makes sense, as the Jeep Wrangler's ultimate charm is in not being electronically featured to death, but rather built like a truck and bolted together for real duty. This feeling comes through despite its thorough set of utterly modern performance and comfort features (see sidebars). Even if you never leave the pavement, you can appreciate both the function and the style of this approach. Add in all the features that were added for 2011—none of which take one iota away from the Jeep's core personality—and you have a formula that others can try to duplicate, but never will.

And as for driving a lot of vehicles in this business, sometimes we finish up with a "we could own this one" feeling, and this was one. We were therefore not surprised in the least when we learned that one of our colleagues, who had spent a week in the same Jeep Wrangler Sahara 4x4, had gone right out and signed on the line for his very own. Easy to understand why. ■

