

FUNDAMENTAL By Joe Sage

We received our 2015 Jeep Patriot at a pretty opportune time. It arrived mid-day on a Wednesday, and we would have it for a week. However, as fate would have it, we were headed to the airport at dawn the next day to fly to Michigan, for an event at the FCA US Chelsea Proving Grounds. That seemed simpatico, even if it reduced driving time.

This, however, turned out to provide us a big bonus: off-road time in the Jeep Patriot, and not just any off-road time—we would get our hands on one and take it for a spin on their most serious of test courses (see sidebar).

Jeep pitches the Patriot as the best-priced SUV in America. The lineup starts at just \$16,895, less than the Compass, which to us is a win-win situation. (We had never been fans of the Compass, which shares its platform with the Dodge Caliber, which in turn replaced the Neon econocar from an earlier era.) KBB.com has named the 2015 Jeep Patriot as a winner of its 5-Year Cost to Own Awards. Patriot is available with 5-speed manual or 6-speed automatic, and in various trims as FWD or 4x4. Our Latitude 4x4 falls in the middle. Lower trims with FWD have a base 2.0L engine.

All offer advanced off-road options and packages, some with hill descent and crawl modes.

This was also opportune timing because we hadn't really gotten to know the Patriot before, yet we know it is slated for the end of its run.

We do not yet know what the replacement vehicle will be. But we expect something very good. When the Cherokee replaced the Jeep Liberty in 2014, they moved the ball forward considerably. It quickly proved itself as a winning member of the Jeep lineup, including a Trailhawk model, and the buying public has taken to it in droves. When the Jeep Renegade launched for 2015, they nailed it again—a completely new entry, also including a Trailhawk, at the roomier end of a booming new subcompact SUV segment.

The Compass and Patriot are both, in aggregate, slated to be replaced by one new entry-level Jeep model in mid-2016. We anticipate one more dose of something wonderful, after the recent Cherokee and Renegade introductions. (And, of course, the Wrangler and Grand Cherokee have had sainted status for years now.)

In short, the Jeep Patriot proved itself to be quite a machine, and you can move considerably

away from its entry-level aura as you option it up, with package prices all very reasonable, in typical American style. Even the larger Patriot engine is a little short on power by current standards, and its styling is a bit vanilla. (We did find a few intriguing aftermarket items to dress it up.) Jeep is sure to be actively addressing both style and substance as they have developed its replacement, so as much as we liked the Patriot, we have considerable anticipation and high expectations for what's next.

We suspect most people use the Jeep Patriot in town quite a bit, but also anywhere and everywhere, any time they dang well please. It strikes us as tailor-made for this job.

We discovered the simple, solid, straightforward Patriot late in its life, and thus sort of hate to see it go. But we know there will be an even better tomorrow. Here's to the impending replacement—may it promptly make us forget about the Patriot. We are confident that will be the case.

We reflect upon how a much earlier vehicle named Cherokee—the original four-door compact SUV from the final decade and a half of the prior millennium—continues to find new fans in the modern era. This generation of Patriots is sure to endure. As with that earlier Cherokee, the Jeep Patriot really nails the basic concept. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE.....	2.4L inline-4 DOHC 16v dual VVT
TRANSMISSION	6-speed automatic
DRIVETRAIN	four-wheel drive
POWER/TORQUE	172 hp / 165 lb-ft
SEATING CAPACITY / HEADROOM	five / 41 in
WHEELS	17x6.5 mineral grey aluminum
TOW CAPACITY	1000 lb / 2000 lb w tow package
APPROACH ANGLE / W OFF-ROAD PKG	26.4° / 29.0°
BREAKOVER ANGLE / W OFF-ROAD PKG	20.9° / 23.7°
DEPARTURE ANGLE / W OFF-ROAD PKG	28.5° / 33.9°
GROUND CLEARANCE / W OFF-ROAD PKG	8.1 in / 9.1 in
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION (4WD)	57/43
CARGO VOLUME	23.0 to 53.5 cu ft
WEIGHT	3367 lb
MPG	21/27/23 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE **\$24,795**
INCLUDED: Long and considerable features list.

CUSTOMER PREFERRED PACKAGE: High Altitude package/badge, leather-trimmed bucket seats, power 6-way driver's seat w manual lumbar, 17x6.5" mineral grey aluminum wheels, power express open/close sunroof

1095
SECURITY/CARGO GROUP: Security alarm, auto-dim mirror, electronic vehicle info center, universal garage door opener, soft tonneau cover.....

695
AUDIO: AM-FM-CD-DVD-MP3-HDD-NAV w 40GB drive (28GB available), 5 years SiriusXM Travel Link

1435
UCONNECT PKG: Uconnect® voice command, Bluetooth, auto-dim mirror with microphone, remote USB port, 1 year SiriusXM radio, remote start

495
DESTINATION CHARGE:.....995

TOTAL **\$29,510**

DEMO

We arrived at the FCA Chelsea Proving Grounds in Michigan knowing we would see a lot of things and be driving some of them around the paved track areas. We soon found out that an off-road course was also part of our day. This would be not just any off-road course—we had access to the Lyman Trail, the set of test courses Jeep uses for maximum challenge during product development. And there sat the Jeep Patriot, the same vehicle we had just received the day before and had just parked at the airport in Phoenix. Opportunity was knocking.

Different routes and courses bear the names of famous trails worldwide. Just as surely as not every Jeep customer buys a Wrangler, not every Jeep model runs every possible obstacle. But our course for the Patriot was far more extreme than we would have envisioned before this week.

There are rough rock stretches, deep ruts, high breakover ramps, low departure points, the requisite spots you teeter on two out of your four wheels (always with grip), water hazards—the steep, the deep—more than we had thought people bought the Patriot for, though we have now completely updated our thinking on that.

We had one dirt breakover spot where we almost high-centered, but this could happen in a properly challenged Wrangler. A little quick jockeying and we were on our way again. The Patriot is a bit of a beast, in a plain white wrapper.

We fully expect next year's Patriot/Compass replacement vehicle to wash away the errand-runner feel of the Compass for all time. But with Patriot DNA, we now anticipate the new vehicle will have a degree of Jeep off-road worthiness on a par with the Renegade and Cherokee.

We are late to the game in realizing a Jeep Patriot would be a pretty cool vehicle to have in the garage. But we now have a significantly broadened concept of the reasons why. ■

