Jeep New Renegade – Taster Drive/First Impressions

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Keith Ward samples the new Jeep Renegade...

LEADING the military-style charge by Jeep to its best ever sales in the UK and an industry-topping 176 per cent year-on-year increase in 2015 – from however modest a base* (see below) – is this plucky compact SUV.

The Renegade, launched 12 months ago and dubbed 4×4 of the Year by a leading off-road magazine, accounted for more customers here than the combined forces of the rest of the Jeep stable – Cherokee, Grand Cherokee and Wrangler.

Offering chunky looks and “young appeal”, it has also lowered the average age of the typical Jeep owner, says Head of Brand Jeep UK, Damien Dally, to 35-45 for the Renegade compared with the Grand Cherokee’s mid-50 year-olds.

It also bears the distinction of being “The only Jeep model built outside the United States and shipped back to the USA”. It comes off a line shared by its close sibling, the 500X of parent company Fiat, at the Italian giant’s Melfi plant near Naples. Undoubtedly Jeep in appearance, it houses a range of Fiat engines, diesel and petrol, manual or automatic transmission and, high up the range, 4WD.

While the Americans could not be termed backward at trumpet blowing, it must be said that the inscription “Since 1941”, worked discreetly into the dashboard screen surround of all current models to mark the 75th anniversary this year of Jeep’s birth as an iconic World War II military vehicle, is modesty itself. Without peering closely, you could miss it.

As well as its near-twin Fiat 500X, the Renegade takes on such as the Renault Captur, Nissan Juke, Mazda CX-3 and Skoda Yeti.

The Renegade offers comfort and space for four adults, five at a squeeze. The boot is average, offers two floor levels as an option and expands in customary fashion by folding down the divided rear seatbacks into a sloping extension. There’s a generous glovebox and more storage under the front passenger seat. On the rev counter, a splash of brown mud replaces the normal red sector.



From an eight-strong Renegade range priced from £17,295, we drove first the flagship Trailhawk at £28,595, with a willing 170 hp 2.0 MultiJet diesel and four-wheel-drive through a smooth 9 speed automatic.

It comes with dual zone climate control, heated front seats and steering wheel, leather upholstery with Trailhwak logo, a modest seven-inch colour touchscreen, sat-nav, cruise control and rear parking sensors but no camera.

Options fitted including an enhancing black roof (£900) on its Colorado Red body, cosseting eight-way powered front seats (a bargain £250) and a full length electric sunroof (£1,100) helping up the final price to a hefty near-£32,000.

The Trailhawk does have serious off-road credentials, with Range Rover-style dial-up settings for snow, sand, mud and rock, hill descent control and protective skid plates all round. Left on Jeep advice in automatic 4WD to kick in from 2WD when needed, it managed to slither across unchallenging muddy fields in the Yorkshire Dales on its standard Goodyear M&S rubber, which on the road proved quite noisy.

It was recording a slightly disappointing 32.5 mpg in real life motoring, against an official combined figure of 47.9. At 155 g/km, CO2 emissions take it into band G with VED £180 annually and a tax liability of 25 per cent.

Feeling unexpectedly more wieldy in its ride and handling was the much bigger and heavier £36,795 New Cherokee 2.2 MultiJet 200hp 4WD 9-speed automatic Limited tried next, on road only. Its more sophisticated suspension was no doubt at work here.

It was recording 41.8 mpg, against an official 49.6, with a lower CO2 rating of 150 g/km.

What next? Jeep are embarked on a five-year plan of new model launches and promotional links to outdoor sports like ski-ing, surfing and mountain biking to further increase UK sales by 30 per cent by 2018.

* Jeep UK sales rose to 10,794 last year from 3,909 the year before – up by 176 %. Rival Land Rover UK at 66,574 sales in 2015 outsold Jeep by more than six to one while recording an 18.6 per cent increase. Globally, Jeep sell more than 1 million vehicles annually against Land Rover’s 432,000.



DETAILS AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Model: Jeep Renegade Trailhawk 2.0.

Body: SUV; 5 door; 5 seats; length 4,236 mm (13.90 ft); width 1,805 (5.92 ft); height 1,697mm (5.57 ft).

Weights Kerb 1,548 kg (3,413 lb); towing max. braked 1,500 kg (3,307 lb).

Boot Length 730 to 1,280 mm (28.7 to 50.4 in); width 950 (37.4 in); vol. 351 to 1,297 litres (12.4 to 45.8 cu.ft).

Engine: Diesel; 4cyl; 1,956 cc; 9 speed automatic; 4WD.

Power: 170 hp @ 3,750 rpm.

Max torque: 258 lb ft @ 1,750 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 8.9 secs.

Top speed: 122 mph.

Fuel consumption: On test 32.5 mog; official Combined 47.9 mpg.

CO2 emissions and taxation: 155 g/km; Band G; VED £180 annual; tax liability 25%.

Tyres and wheels: Goodyear 215/60 Mud & Snow on 17 inch rims.

Insurance Group: 15E.

Warranty: 36 months/60,000 miles.

PRICE: £28,595; as driven, with options £31,765.

Rivals: Fiat 500X; Renault Captur; Nissan Juke; Skoda Yeti; Mazda CX-3