Jeep Wrangler Night Eagle – Road Test

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REVIEW OF THE LATEST JEEP WRANGLER 4-DOOR NIGHT EAGLE

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

Jeep has its origins in the all-American 4WD story but the modern Jeep brand is owned by Chrysler and they are part of the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles conglomerate which in turn is now in partnership with the PSA Group of brands. Following the recent merger the FCA and PSA groups together will be known as STELLANTIS, the world's 4th largest global automotive manufacturer by production volume.

That's the 'for today' news of a new global brand but Jeep's history stretches way-back as the all-American product celebrates its 80th anniversary next year, so its timely I have been

behind the wheel of the Jeep Wrangler 4-door large hard-core 4WD SUV.

The current Wrangler range in the UK is available with 2-door short wheelbase and 4-door long wheelbase body styles, both with split lift up top half and lower side hinged open out tailgates. In the past we had had Wranglers with large capacity muscular six and eight cylinder petrol and diesel engines. With ever increasing harsher emission regulations thrust upon us today in the UK things are more meek and eco friendly with 2.0 litre 272 hp petrol and 2.2 litre 200 hp turbodiesel, four cylinder units. They are both matched with a standard fit automatic gearbox but true to its off-roader image the drivetrain includes 2WD and 4WD modes plus high and low ratio transfer box.

Jeep are also introducing 4XE Plug-In Hybrid powertrains to Renegade and Compass smaller SUV and the Wrangler 4XE PHEV has already made its debut in the USA. One new Wrangler we won't be getting is the new Rubicon 392 variant with a 6.4 litre, V8 petrol engine with 470 hp and 637 Nm (470 lb.ft) of torque. Dream on – its only for the USA and Middle east markets next year.

The on-the-road prices for the Wranglers we can buy are; the 2-door line-up starts at £41,525 and ends at £49,315. The much longer 4-door versions are priced from £43,025 up to £51,350. The full line-up of spec levels is Sport, Sahara, Night Eagle, Overland and Rubicon depending on the body style chosen. There is of course an array of extra cost work or lifestyle options ranging from various soft top to hard top alternative body styles to Safety Packs, Smoker's Pack, Towing Pack and Technology Pack.

That's the Jeep brand of today but Jeep began its life in 1941 so 2021 will be their 80th anniversary. Today Jeep is all about 4×4 freedom and adventure motoring but the brand started in a very different way. It was born in 1941 as the Willys Jeep for World War ll action and after the war production continued into the public market with the Willys Wagon which Jeep says was the World's first Sports Utility Vehicle. The arrival of the Jeep for public consumption of course heralded the birth of the first British Land Rover and both brands plus numerous other manufacturers now produce a wide range of SUV type models. These

range from the City Car Suzuki Ignis right through to the huge and flashy SUVs like the Audi Q8, Range Rover or the massive £310k Rolls Royce Cullinan.

The Wrangler of today is still a ‘go anywhere, do anything’ Jeep, prowling fashionable city streets to brushing aside the most severe obstacles in global off-road conditions. Today it maintains its authentic American styling but now with modern European Fiat technologies and better European standard levels of quality fit and finish production. The latest changes include revised and refreshed exterior styling, updated and improved interior fixtures, fittings and styling, all-new petrol and diesel engines, new LED headlights and rear lights and a new Uconnect 8.4-inch touchscreen with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity. There is also improved safety content including Blind spot Monitoring, Rear Cross Path Detection, ParkView, reversing camera and electronic stability control with electronic roll mitigation – but still only four standard-fit airbags.

There will be some customers who will buy a Jeep for its supreme off-road driving performance but most UK buyers will adopt a Wrangler because of its immediately recognisable traditional hard-core Jeep design and the current fashionable demand for SUVs. The long-standing Jeep design cues include the round headlights, the seven vertical slot grille, the trapezoidal wheel arches, the visible hinges, the folding windscreen, the sport roll bar, removable doors and for open-air configurations there is the choice of soft tops. These latest various open-air combinations are the Sky One-Touch powertop, new ‘Zipperless’ Premium Sunrider soft top and Freedom Top which is a removable three-panel hard top.

Wrangler’s latest exterior design is still bold and rugged with a wide stance but now with a lowered beltline with larger windows for better visibility. The Wrangler is the only authentic full open-air 4×4 SUV available on the market, says Jeep.



The new higher quality well finished interior of the new Wrangler combines authentic styling with its high level dashboard, together with a huge array of switches and controls. But despite its old-school layout of these controls their functionality and intuitiveness are to be praised. No having to scroll through numerous touchscreen pages with the Wrangler – hooray!

Functional features, including climate and volume control knobs, Stop Start button and media charging and connectivity ports are all designed for quick recognition and are easily within reach of the front-seat occupants. Inboard and outboard circular air vents on the

dashboard are just so easy to use – others manufacturers please note.

The instrument cluster features a 7-inch thin-film transistor (TFT) information LED display. The display is full-colour and allows the driver to configure information in more than 100 ways. Integrated buttons on the steering wheel control audio, voice and speed functions, allowing the driver to keep his or her hands on the wheel at all times, again something other manufacturers should follow especially such brands that promote safety.

The seats are big and comfy with lots of padding, the doors, pillars and other interior panels have hefty looking moulded cladding around them so they will survive the urban or rural jungle uses without harm. The only demerit, and quite a big one, was the fact that during one period of torrential rain when the front doors were opened water from the guttering poured into the vehicle, dropping down and hitting the well-padded sill and then it flowed onto and into the carpeting. Exploring the reason for this I found the roof gutters on my long wheelbase 4-door model did not extend to include the top of the front A-pillars which would have allowed the water to flow away forward of the door opening. It is a design fault which might cause soggy carpets and corrosion issues later in the vehicle's life.

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On the subject of warranties, the Jeep Wrangler has a five year warranty, a three year servicing programme plus five years roadside assistance so all they need to add is off-road assistance for over enthusiastic drivers and it will be fully covered no-matter what.

My exact test drive Wrangler was the 4-door Night Eagle 2.0 litre turbo petrol 272 hp with its 8-speed standard fit auto gearbox and 2WD/4WD High and 4WD Low ratio transfer box plus hill descent control and priced at £49,850. In addition it had the Technology Pack, anti wheelspin rear axle and the Sky One-Touch Power Top which added a further £2,500 to the overall price. The Power-Top is a full length insulated fabric soft top opening in the metal roof. This didn't get an airing other than a brief open/close, due to the horrendous weather. As well insulated from the exterior cold as it was, unfortunately it did allow in more wind

and general road noise than a full metal roof at motorway cruising speeds.

The Night Eagle spec level is high and comprehensive but worthy of mention, over and above the spec items I've already listed are, 18-inch alloy wheels with 255/70R all season tyres, auto headlights, cruise control, speed limiter, 60/40 split folding rear seats, climate control and power operated windows on all four doors. There is plenty of rear seat leg and headroom, the driver's footwell was cramped for space as it's still essentially designed as a left hand drive vehicle. It has amply sized comfortable seat squabs but stepping up into, and stepping down out of, the vehicle can be difficult for even averagely tall people and the side sill steps didn't greatly help either. I also thought the door openings were on the narrow side, especially the rear doors. At the rear is a twin tailgate with the glass section being hinged at the top and opening upwards and the metal bottom tailgate is side hinged and opens outwards away from the kerb which is quite safe for street loading. The load space is huge, well able to cater for fashionable luggage or countryside assault equipment.


RX68 HKZ



Under the large and heavy bonnet is a 2.0 litre, 4-cylinder turbo petrol engine with Fiat genes developing 272 hp and more importantly 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque at a mid-range engine speed of 3,000 rpm. With such a big square shaped and heavy vehicle it needs this torque to make the Wrangler a viable performance offering now that big capacity multi-cylinder engines are no longer available in the UK market. Performance figures; Jeep don't give them in their media information but looking elsewhere my test drive version has a top speed of 110 mph with a zero to 62 mph of a very impressive, for its size, 7.4 seconds.



The official WLTP Combined Cycle fuel consumption figure is a costly 24.8 mpg, a sure sign of a relatively small capacity engine in a big heavy vehicle, and during my week of limited test driving due to the then current lockdown period, it was 25.6 mpg overall with 28.8 mpg on a long motorway journey. Given its size and weight and brick-like aerodynamics that's not bad but it's not only fuel costs that will be high. What isn't good at all are the CO2 emissions at 260 g/km so First Year VED road tax is the current maximum cost of £2,175 followed by the Standard rate of £150 but as the vehicle cost over £40k you have to add £325 per annum to that charge for 5-years. Company car drivers will pay the maximum 37% rate of Benefit-in-Kind tax and insurance is Group 40E.

To drive the Jeep Wrangler 4-door was, I have to admit, a lot of fun with its high up driving position with plenty of comfort – and the new multi-link rear suspension has transformed the

ride quality. It provided a very compliant ride. With its long spring/damper suspension travel for off-road driving there is body roll during cornering and the steering felt too light at times during cornering on open roads but the lightness was a bonus driving in town traffic and of course trying to park.



On one very poor weather motorway journey with gale force winds and torrential rain, after counter-steering against gusting winds and trying to avoid the Jeep aquaplaning I selected from 2wD High ratio to 4WD High ratio and that sharpened up the grip, steering response

and handling considerably. I didn't get to do any off-roading, not sure that was allowed during lockdown even if it's considered work for us motoring writers, but I know from driving past less technically sophisticated Jeeps, this latest Wrangler model will be undaunted by any, or most, adverse obstacles put in its path.

VERDICT

Yes I know the Jeep Wrangler is not perfect, it's expensive to buy, it's costly to run, but it's still a true iconic 4WD warrior. So enjoy it while you still can in what is becoming a very 'woke' motoring world.

For: Iconic heritage and styling, roomy, very well equipped, easy to use sensible driving controls, improved build quality, better safety and driving support features, immense off-road driving ability, good real life fuel economy for its size and unforgiving non-aerodynamic styling.

Against: Huge running and tax costs, expensive to buy unless it's going to really work for a living, rain water poured from the gutter ends into the front cabin when the doors were open, limited space in the driver's footwell, lots of wind and road noise intrusion.

Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:



Jeep Wrangler 4-Door, Night Eagle, 2.0-litre, 272hp, auto, 4WD.

Price: £49,850 (£52,350 as tested with options added).

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, 4-cylinder, turbo petrol, 272 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque at 3,000 rpm, 8-speed auto gearbox, 2WD/4WD high/low ratio transfer box, hill descent control.

Performance: 110 mph, 0 – 62 mph 7.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 24.8 mpg (25.6 mpg overall on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 260 g/km, VED First Year rate road tax £2,175, Standard rate £150+ £325 annually for 5-years as it costs over £40k, BiK company car tax 37%. Insurance Group: 40E.

Warranty: Five years/75,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,882 mm (16.02 ft), W 1,838 mm (6.03 ft), H 1,848 mm (6.06 ft), wheelbase 3,008 mm (9.87 ft), load space is 898 to 2,050 litres (31.71 to 72.40 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,495 kg (5,500 lb), 4-doors + twin tailgates + 5-seats.