# Latest Jeep Wrangler Road Test

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Author: David Miles

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Old World rugged 4×4 styling for a modern day market – the Jeep Wrangler…

## Road tested by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

In a world where SUVs have become more sophisticated and are generally soft off-roaders or Crossovers more used to dealing with school runs, shopping trips and family holidays than hard-core off roading, the Jeep Wrangler now stands alone in the rugged 4×4 market following the demise of the Land Rover Defender.

The Wrangler's design DNA dates back to the original Willys jeep of WW2, indeed the brand's heritage goes back to 1941 so we have known Jeeps for 76 years.

Today's 2017 model year hard-core Wrangler is available in two forms, the SWB two-door and the LWB four-door. There are a total of four rugged trim and equipment levels, depending on the body style and engine chosen. The SWB has Sahara, Overland and the hard core Rubicon, the LWB the same with the additional plusher and just announced limited edition Night Eagle. There are two engine options, a 2.8 litre four cylinder 200 hp CRD turbodiesel and a 3.6 litre V6 Pentastar 284 hp petrol. All are 4×4 models and all have an automatic transmission. Prices range from £34,740 to £39,810. Old world styling they maybe, old world pricing they are not!

The Wrangler in this day and age is an extremely niche model even within Jeep's overall

range of 4×4 SUVs. Last year in the UK Jeep was the fourth fastest growing brand with a record 14,090 sales. So far this year Jeep's new vehicle sales have not been so kind with a fall of 38% for the first four months with just over 3,000 Jeeps of all type sold; the Wranglers will not be a very high proportion of that figure due to their niche nature.

Who buys a new Wrangler in this day and age considering the demand for cheaper and high-end soft 4x4s? Its high price, rugged off-road ability and high running costs are not compelling reasons to go down this track. From my observations there seems to be two types of UK customers that have bought a new but retro looking Wrangler. These are those who like to make a fashion statement because of its retro styling and its fun-to-drive appeal and those hard-core mud-pluggers who want to get down and dirty with their 4x4s but are most likely to have spent much less money and bought a 'used' one.

Even the iconic American 'surfer' image seems to have been transferred to lifestyle double cab 4×4 pickups. Whoever has bought one you don't see many on our roads so the Wrangler has 'exclusivity' appeal.

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Driving on the road is a relatively basic experience, some would say crude, but it has its appeal for a short time, it's more of a vehicle to be used occasionally, not as your everyday transport. That said, surprisingly with its long travel off-roading rugged suspension, it isn't that uncomfortable or rustic, with the impact-absorbing dampers and well padded supportive seats all combining to do a good job at cushioning the ride. There is a considerable amount of body roll during cornering because of the long travel suspension, and the power steering seemed vague.

I got to grips with the latest incarnation of the 2017 Jeep Wrangler in its SWB layout with two passenger doors and rear twin tailgate. It had a 2.8 litre CRD 200 hp turbodiesel engine, auto transmission, AWD with high and low ratio transfer box, all wrapped up in the most popular Overland level of specification. The price – a wallet crunching £36,140.

This version has a three piece modular hardtop with twin pop-out roof openings over the front seats, and the whole unit can be unbolted and removed if you have the time and the tools to allow for open-top motoring and the canvas roof option. For safety a rollover cage is fitted as standard. The rear twin tailgate has a top hinged glass section and a side hinged lower section which gives access to a compact 142 litre (5.01 cu.ft) boot with the rear seats in use. Fold the seats away and this increases to 435 litres (15.36 cu.ft). The spare wheel is mounted on the outside of the lower rear tailgate.

The rear seats can accommodate two adults in relative comfort – three at a squeeze, and it is a bit snug clambering into the rear seats through the two front door openings. It was also a bit of a squeeze in the driver's footwell with a lack of space for my left foot, even with the vehicle being an automatic with no clutch pedal. Although a right hand drive Wrangler, there are also other touches of it being inherently a left hand drive vehicle, such as the positioning of the handbrake and transfer box lever for 2WD/4WD selection which also operates the high/low ratio settings. Hill Descent Control is included but for serious off-roading Jeep's Tru-Lok locking differential function is only available on the Rubicon version.

The facia is a combination of old-school flat fronted, high level layout but the controls and instruments are logically laid out and the dashboard looked a higher quality than before. The fuel gauge is still an oddity giving the option of US gallons or metric l/100kms readings. For the Overland version I tried there is leather upholstery and leather covered steering wheel, trip computer, a 6.5-inch touchscreen with sat-nav plus, from Jeep's ownership by Fiat Chrysler, their Uconnect connectivity system. There is cruise control, hill descent control, air-con, auto lights, electric front windows, heated front seats, Alpine sound system with a rear subwoofer, central door locking and good quality carpets so you can appreciate this mid-range spec version is no wash-out off-roader.

The body styling and equipment includes the iconic Jeep front grille with its vertical slats flanked by signature round headlights, a clamshell bonnet, wide reinforced fibreglass wheelarch extensions covering the wide track axles and 18-inch polished alloy wheels, plus

this high off the ground vehicle has side steps. The overall length of 4,223 mm (13.85 ft) is now slightly longer due to the larger impact-absorbing front bumper mounted well ahead of the front grille. Under the skin is a strong chassis with long travel durable suspension and a transfer case protective skid plate.

The 2.8 litre, four cylinder CRD turbodiesel engine produces 200 hp but with a high torque figure of 460 Nm (339 lb.ft) delivered from only 1,600 rpm. This unit has been reworked to comply with EU6 emission regulations but it is not the most modern of diesel engines available these days. It sounds noisy under load but to its credit it felt strong and responsive. Unfortunately it is mated only with a five-speed automatic gearbox which was slow to change ratios and the combination of engine and gearbox definitely felt 'old school' rather than what we have come used to with the latest SUVs.

The fuel economy and CO2 emissions are not up to today's 'norm' for a mid-sized SUV with an official Combined Cycle figure of 31.4 mpg. During my week long test driving, all of it on-road, the figure was 24.3 mpg (UK mpg figure) and the CO2 emissions are a high 237 g/km. This means the new VED road tax rate is £1,700 First Year rate reducing to £140 for the Standard rate for year two onwards. Company car drivers will pay the maximum 37% rate of Benefit-in-Kind tax but insurance costs are not that harsh, being rated in Group 25E.

## VERDICT

In today's new car market against the modern SUVs and Crossovers the Jeep Wrangler is an odd-ball choice, but with iconic styling in some people's eyes and potentially fashionable, and for a few it's a mighty off-road performer. Mainstream motoring it isn't and perhaps that's its charm but the bottom line is – it's expensive to buy and costly to run.

For: Iconic retro Jeep styling, high specification, scarcity value, fun motoring for some, immense off-road performance.

Against: Lacks modern driving on-road performance, high tax and running costs.

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

## Jeep Wrangler 2.8 CRD Overland Auto 4WD SWB.

Price: £36,140.

Engine/transmission: 2.8 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel 200 hp, 460 Nm (339 lb.ft) of torque from 1,600 rpm, five speed auto, 2WD/4WD with high/low ratio transfer box.

Performance: 107 mph, 0–62 mph 10.6 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 31.4 mpg (24.3 mpg on test for on-road driving).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 237 g/km, VED road tax £1,700 First Year rate and £140 thereafter, BiK company car tax 37%.

Insurance Group: 25E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,223 mm (13.85 ft), W 1,873 mm (6.15 ft), H 1,840 mm (6.04 ft), maximum braked towing weight 1,500 kg (3,307 lb), boot/load space 142 to 435 litres (5.01 to 15.36 cu.ft).