On a pinnacle of success – Jeep's 75th Anniversary Range Review

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Jeep Range Roundup, on the firm's 75th Anniversary.
By Keith Ward, reporting from the top of the North York Moors…

IT is 75 years since the birth of Jeep as an iconic World War II US military vehicle. And the celebrations are in full swing over here, this side of the pond.

Last year the Yank brand, now owned by the FIAT group, recorded its best-ever sales in the UK. So far in 2016 they have leapt by a further near-40 per cent against an all-makes average rise here of just 2.5 per cent. To put this in context against Land Rover figures (for example), Jeep sales in the UK January to September 2016 were 11,762, up 40 per cent; Land Rover 63,644, up 28 per cent. Globally, Jeep sell 1m-plus vehicles annually against Land Rover's 432,000.

By way of celebration, Jeep has been showcasing to the UK Press their current range, including special Anniversary limited editions. And they chose some of the bleakest parts of the North York Moors as an off-road challenge over a designated circuit. They even towed a "pop-up" mobile showroom up to a site overlooking glorious Robin Hood's Bay.



Jeep's Wrangler 'on top of the world' overlooking the beautiful Robin Hood's Bay.

That is why on a mixed day of mist and brilliant sunshine we came to be coaxing £50,000-worth of big Grand Cherokee, with all its 4WD kit engaged, to pick its way up a long and steep boulder-strewn moorland track. On a worse day it might transpose, you suspected, into a tumbling river bed.

The dial-up air suspension of the Jeep surely played its part. There was in places some hesitation, and throughout much flying mud, bumping and scraping, pitch and toss, enough to alarm one inexperienced back-seat passenger. It made you as a driver thankful that this was not your own vehicle.

But this was a Cherokee brave, calling upon its hearty 3.0 litre V6 to breast the summit of the tough ascent, well enough to suggest comparisons with arguably the best in the business, the Range Rover Sport.

In its 75th Anniversary garb, this Grand Cherokee comes with an all-new unique grille and front fascia, that air suspension, embossed leather seats – front pair powered, both front and rear heated – adaptive cruise control, sat-nav and power tailgate.

Earlier, on a much shorter and kinder circuit, we tried the smaller and lighter Wrangler 3.6 V6 petrol automatic (£36,435 as a four-door in 75th Anniversary trim). Packing 280 bhp against the Cherokee's 247, it proved a nimble negotiator of lower reaches of the moorland, where it felt slightly happier off road than on.

Tried earlier this year, the chunky Jeep Renegade compact SUV, built by Fiat in Italy, proved adept at "soft-roading" – slithering across muddy fields, enough to be dubbed 4×4 of the Year by a leading off-road magazine. At prices from £17,350, it is credited with "young appeal" and outsells the rest of the Jeep stable combined – Cherokee, Grand Cherokee and Wrangler.

Keith's Verdict: "Meanwhile Yee-hah! On with the party".

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:
Model: Jeep Grand Cherokee 3.0 CRD V6 75th Anniversary.
Size: Length 4828 mm (15.84 ft); width 1,943 mm (6.37 ft); height 1792 mm (5.88 ft); weight 2,328 kg (5,132 lb); towing weight, max, 3,500 kg (7,716 lb) Boot 782 to 1,554 litres (27.62 to 54.88 cu.ft).
Engine: Diesel; V6; 247 bhp @ 4,000 rpm; max torque 570 Nm (420 lb.ft) @ 1,800 rpm.
Drive: 4WD; 8-speed automatic.
Performance: 0-62 in 8.2 secs, top speed 126 mph.
Tyres: 265/50 R20 “3-season” performance.
MPG: On test 30.4; official Combined 40.4; tank 93.5 litres (20.56 gallons).
Emissions and taxation: CO2 184 g/km; band I; VED £355 then £230 per year.
PRICE: £50,550.