

MOTORTREND

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OF THE YEAR



UNSTOPPABLE

JEEP'S INIMITABLE FLAGSHIP IS BETTER THAN EVER

Words Zach Gale Photographs Michael Shaffer

MOTORTREND
SUV OF THE YEAR 2019[®]

JEEP WRANGLER





SLOW DOWN
The Wrangler has plenty of power, but the Jeep's body-on-frame dynamics encourage drivers to slow down and enjoy the scenery.

Look past the iconic grille, and you'll see it. Behold the latest evolution of a seven-decades-old design, a soul-stirring affirmation of freedom, a surprisingly groundbreaking vehicle that shouldn't work in the 21st century as well as it does. The new Jeep Wrangler is what crossovers want to be when they grow up, and it's the 2019 *MotorTrend* SUV of the Year.

Rarely do past and future coexist so beautifully. The thoroughly redesigned and re-engineered Wrangler finds its own path to modernization, resisting the temptation to dilute its climb-that-mountain capabilities for crossover softness. Even so, beach-bound cruisers and daily commuters will appreciate the upgraded pavement game, and off-roaders will admire how much more confidently they can traverse their favorite trails. This Jeep delivers, no matter what.

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The Wrangler's diverse range furnishes a model for every need. For the Jeep lover reminiscing about the Wrangler's past, the capable two-door model with a V-6 and manual transmission costs about \$35,195—before hitting the aftermarket for customization. The four-door Unlimited model makes it easier to bring friends along for the journey. Perhaps the best part is the available mild-hybrid turbo-four, which improves Energuide-rated city fuel economy from the outgoing model.

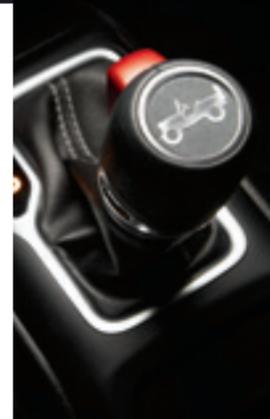
"The Wrangler is a thoughtful, thorough rework of an American original," international bureau chief Angus MacKenzie said. "It's laser-focused on improving the performance of its intended function, right down to the last nut and bolt."

Advancement in Design

It's no easy task to update the look of an icon. It's a no-win proposition. Do too much (or too little), and the critics will howl. But Jeep nailed it.

Jeep approached the Wrangler's styling with a light but deliberate touch. Relocating the Jeep badge from the Wrangler's face to the front fenders facilitates a less cluttered look, with round headlights touching the edge of the seven-bar grille. Other than LED turn signals mounted on the ends of the wheel flares and updated square taillights, not much else gives away the Wrangler as the new JL model. And that's exactly how it should be. The Wrangler isn't a crossover requiring twice-a-decade face-lifts to retain buyers' interest. It embraces a classic style that continues to attract dreamers who want to remember what SUVs used to be.

The standard canvas top and plastic side windows remain available, and like the fold-down front windshield, they're easier and quicker to disassemble and reinstall



ADD LIGHTNESS
The Jeep Wrangler's configurability is one of its many charms. The doors and roof now all pop off and on in a matter of minutes using simple tools.

than before, using simple tools. For further customization, black or body-colored hard tops are available, and the soft top comes in black or tan. A vibrant color palette, seven wheel styles, and a regular series of special editions present every opportunity to make a Wrangler reflect your tastes—and that's before you venture to Mopar for accessories and upgrades.

In so many ways, the Wrangler advances design to make Jeeping more rewarding—whatever that means to you. Open the power-retractable Sky One-Touch soft top, and a starry night will provide all the mood lighting front and rear passengers desire. The new option isn't cheap, but it's worth the money. Features editor Christian Seabaugh noted it "combines the safety of the hard top with the ease and open-air experience of the soft top" and called it a revolution for the brand.

Despite its unapologetically industrial interior, the Wrangler masters some details better than many sensible crossovers. Soft-touch and high-quality materials equal those of luxury competitors. As with many Fiat Chrysler Automobiles products, audio volume and channel-change controls are located conveniently on the back side of the steering wheel. Once you drive a car with this intuitive setup, you'll wonder why more automakers don't adopt it. The same is true of the rear-seat headrests, which conveniently fold down when not in use for better rearward visibility.

The Uconnect infotainment system, which can be optioned with a 7.0- or 8.4-inch touchscreen that includes Apple CarPlay and Android Auto support, is intuitive to use. "Its controls can be learned in seconds, and it responds quickly to your inputs," associate online editor and resident tech nerd Stefan Ogbac said.

Delightful design Easter eggs, such as the on-screen air recirculation control that looks like a Jeep in silhouette, add character. Remove the doors, and the exposed hinges will remind you how much more special your Jeep is than your neighbor's anonymous lozenge every time you climb inside. And once you're there, the high seating position offers great visibility that's perfect for seeing obstacles ahead on a trail or peering over the roofs of idling cars on a traffic-choked freeway.

Another win for Wrangler fans and first-timers alike: how well the interior is screwed together. "Build quality seems so much better than before," executive editor Mark Rehtin said.

Engineering Excellence

The Jeep grille is iconic, but like the New York Yankees and their pinstripes, it can also be a distraction from the substance underneath. The Bronx Bombers also had Mickey Mantle, and likewise, this Wrangler is so much more than those seven vertical air intakes. The "sport" in



"sport utility vehicle" doesn't mean tearing up a racetrack or winding road. In the body-on-frame Wrangler's case, "sport" means heading beyond the paved road's end. Off-roading capability is its core DNA, bred for military use from the Ardennes to An Loc. And the 2019 edition got all the good genes.

Jeep added to the Wrangler's already impressive go-anywhere abilities, improving articulation and total suspension travel on the Rubicon trim. The boulevard-ready Sahara trim nonetheless offers full-time four-wheel drive that's sufficient for most trails, especially when it would be overkill to enlist the Rubicon's Dana 44 front and rear axles with electronically locking differentials and disconnecting anti-roll bars.

As for the impressive Rubicon, technical director Frank Markus aptly described the off-road-focused trim as "designed and engineered to retain the faithful."



NO EXCUSES Unlike with past Wranglers, no excuses are necessary for the high-quality materials in our 2019 SUVOTY.



SPECS	2018 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 4x4	2018 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Sahara 4x4	2018 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Rubicon 4x4
Power (SAE net)	285 hp @ 6,400 rpm	270 hp @ 5,250 rpm	270 hp @ 5,250 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	260 lb-ft @ 4,800 rpm	295 lb-ft @ 3,000 rpm	295 lb-ft @ 3,000 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	7.4 sec	8.1 sec	8.0 sec
Braking, 60-0 mph	45.7 m	42.7 m	44.2 m
Lateral Acceleration	0.63 g (avg)	0.68 g (avg)	0.68 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	31.3 sec @ 0.48 g (avg)	29.5 sec @ 0.56 g (avg)	29.9 sec @ 0.56 g (avg)

“The Unlimited Rubicon naturally behaved like the mother of all Jeeps,” Markus said after taking the SUV off-road. “In four-low with front and rear differentials locked, there’s no stopping it in the sand.”

That confidence-instilling performance is standard on every Wrangler. Only one oddity: Hill-descent control can only be activated in four-low.

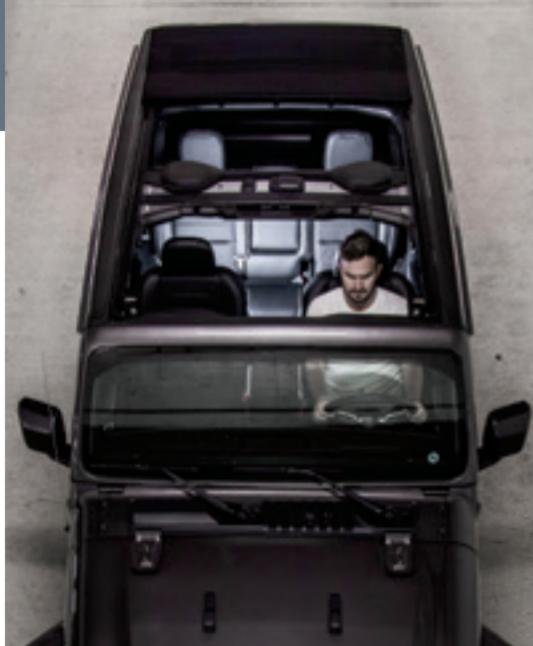
“The genius of this Jeep is that it can be configured to suit the ambitions of the off-roading neophyte and expert alike and deliver an experience that will reward them both,” MacKenzie said.

That’s also true with the new 2.0-litre eTorque turbo-four mild-hybrid powertrain, which is worth consideration regardless of how you enjoy your Jeep. The 2.0-litre powerplant provides 270 hp and 295 lb-ft of torque, making it an intriguing option. More responsive than you’d expect, the engine is mated exclusively to an eight-speed automatic and employs a system that facilitates engine stop/start and regenerative braking. The new engine isn’t impressive for a Wrangler—it’s just plain impressive. Markus called the Wrangler 2.0’s engine stop/start system “amazingly quick” to restart, lauding it as “one of the best.”

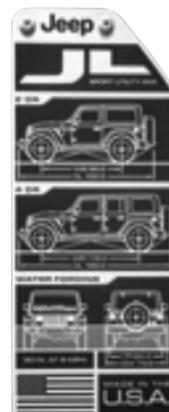
Those who are nonetheless wary of a four-cylinder Wrangler can stick with the 285-hp 3.6-litre V-6 (which develops 35 lb-ft of torque less than the turbo-four). However, we’d recommend upgrading the V-6 to the eight-speed automatic. The standard six-speed manual may be new, but multiple judges found the engine’s torque delivery poorly matched with this transmission.

Performance of Intended Function

Just as no one expects last year’s SUVOTY, the Honda CR-V, to traverse Hell’s Revenge, the Jeep Wrangler doesn’t ride as smoothly, handle as crisply, or travel in such isolated splendor as a car-based crossover. (Such is the



BREATHE DEEP
The Sky One-Touch power top is a game-changer. Not only does the cloth section retract, but the rear quarter windows also easily pop out for an open-air experience.



philosophical predicament in defining this category in today’s market.) Yet for a vehicle more capable off-road than any other new SUV offered today, the Wrangler’s everyday trade-offs aren’t as severe as you’d think.

Revised suspension tuning makes both the Sahara and Rubicon trim levels more comfortable than their predecessors. New electrohydraulic steering brings more precision, but the Wrangler never pretends to be a sports car. Instead, the Jeep provides a deliberate pace, encouraging you to appreciate your surroundings.

“The Wrangler doesn’t wallow or flop around,” features editor Scott Evans said. “It moves with a purpose. The ride quality is so, so much better than it was before.”

Stronger performance off-road is part of the package, and a stretched wheelbase provides more room in the rear seats. For those more interested in image-building than trail-running, Jeep offers nearly endless customization possibilities and ways to enjoy the sunshine.

Efficiency

The 2.0-litre eTorque engine is a huge upgrade, but even the 3.6-litre V-6 sees fuel economy improvements, and both engines feature stop/start tech. No matter the powertrain, Wranglers benefit from lighter aluminum used for the doors, hood, and windshield frame. With the V-6, fuel economy improves by 1–2 L/100 km in the city and 2–3 L/100 km on the highway.

Go for the eTorque engine, and fuel economy improves to 10.5 L/100km city and 9.4L/100km hwy on 2-door models. Put another way, the Wrangler’s 2.0-litre engine’s efficiency means more miles of Jeeping before you have to stop to refuel.

Safety

The best way to stay safe is to avoid accidents altogether,



and the Wrangler’s superior maneuverability compared to its predecessors provides a good foundation. The Jeep’s frame is strengthened with high-strength steel, and every new Wrangler comes with seat-mounted front side airbags. Blind-spot monitoring, rear cross-traffic alert, and LED headlights are available, and the Wrangler can apply maximum braking force in a panic-braking situation even if the driver hasn’t pushed the pedal all the way down.

For optimal on-road safety, the 2019 model offers forward collision warning—it’s a feature you’ll value once it saves you from damaging the Jeep’s iconic face. The Jeep’s active safety also impresses off-road; its ABS system has a rough-road detection feature, which adapts its settings to improve performance over off-pavement surfaces.

The body-on-frame Wrangler, which hasn’t yet been crash-tested, won’t handle a panic maneuver as well as a unibody crossover, obviously. Even so, the Jeep’s all-around visibility rises above that of most new CUVs, and the Wrangler is a sure bet if you’re seeking a vehicle that will feel secure off-road.

Value

Not everyone will fully appreciate the Jeep’s appeal. But what price do you place on the smile a car puts on your face? The Wrangler is as far from a four-wheeled appliance as you can get. And when the going gets rocky, sandy, or snowy, the Wrangler outperforms vehicles costing more than twice as much.

A two-door canvas-soft-topped Wrangler with 285 hp and four-wheel drive starts around \$35,195, though a well-equipped four-door Unlimited with the excellent 2.0-litre engine and an automatic transmission can clear \$50,000. That’s a ton of cash, but some buyers feel Jeep’s seven-bar grille carries just as much cachet as certain luxury automaker logos. Compared to the Wrangler, no Fordyce Creek forder combines such capability, efficiency, infotainment tech, and overall appeal in quite the same way.

For the Gold

The Wrangler isn’t for everyone. Guest judge, veteran automotive R&D executive, and 2013 Wrangler owner Gordon Dickie noted that second-row ingress and egress remains cramped, tire and wind noise is quieter but still intrusive, the manual transmission’s clutch will ruin your Achilles tendon in rush-hour traffic, and the Rubicon’s around-town ride—though improved—is still flinty compared to car-based crossovers. Such are the trade-offs Jeep lovers willingly endure.

But when you’ve gotta have an off-roader—or want to look like you spend weekends stomping terra firma—the Jeep is impossible to beat. Tracing its lineage to the original Willys MB, the Wrangler navigates nostalgia without getting stuck in it. The Jeep Wrangler is remarkably well-rounded for its core purpose, and it’s a most deserving SUV of the Year. ■

POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS	2018 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 4x4	2018 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Sahara 4x4; Rubicon 4x4
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front-engine, 4WD	Front-engine, 4WD
ENGINE TYPE	60-deg V-6, alum block/heads	Turbocharged I-4, alum block/head
VALVETRAIN	DOHC, 4 valves/cyl	DOHC, 4 valves/cyl
DISPLACEMENT	219.9 cu in/3,604cc	121.7 cu in/1,995cc
COMPRESSION RATIO	11.3:1	10.0:1
POWER (SAE NET)	285 hp @ 6,400 rpm	270 hp @ 5,250 rpm (gas)/10 hp (elec)/270 hp (comb)
TORQUE (SAE NET)	260 lb-ft @ 4,800 rpm	295 lb-ft @ 3,000 rpm (gas)/71 lb-ft (elec)/295 lb-ft (comb)
REDLINE	6,600 rpm	5,800 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	15.3 lb/hp	16.8; 17.6 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual	8-speed automatic
AXLE/FINAL-DRIVE/LOW RATIOS	4.10:1/2.95:1/4.00:1	3.45:1/2.31:1/4.00:1; 4.10:1/2.75:1/4.00:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Live axle, coil springs, adj anti-roll bar; live axle, coil springs, adj anti-roll bar	Live axle, coil springs; live axle, coil springs
STEERING RATIO	17.4:1	15.6:1
TURNS LOCK TO LOCK	3.6	3.2
BRAKES, F; R	12.9-in vented disc; 13.4-in disc, ABS	12.9-in vented disc; 13.4-in disc, ABS
WHEELS	75 x 17-in cast aluminum	75 x 18-in; 75 x 17-in cast aluminum
TIRES	LT285/70R17 (M+S) BFGoodrich Brand Tires	255/70R18 113T (M+S) Bridgestone Brand Tires; LT285/70R17 (M+S) BFGoodrich Brand Tires

DIMENSIONS		
WHEELBASE	2460 mm	3008 mm
TRACK, F/R	1598/1598 mm	1598/1598 mm
L X W X H	4,237 x 1,875 x 1,868.4 mm	4,785 x 1,875 x 1,868.4 mm
GROUND CLEARANCE	274 mm	254 mm; 274 mm
APPROACH/DEPART ANGLE	44.0/37.0 deg	41.8/21.0; 43.9/37.0 deg
TURNING CIRCLE	10.5 m	12.0 m
CURB WEIGHT	1975 kg	2060 kg; 2157 kg
WEIGHT DIST, F/R	51/49%	51/49; 52/48%
TOWING CAPACITY	907 kg	1588 kg
SEATING CAPACITY	4	5
HEADROOM, F/R	1083/1036 mm	1036/1023 mm
LEGROOM, F/R	1038/904.2 mm	1038/974 mm
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	1417/1458 mm	1417/1458 mm
CARGO VOLUME BEH F/R	1328/12.9 L	2050/898 L

TEST DATA		
ACCELERATION TO MPH		
0-30	2.3 sec	2.5; 2.6 sec
0-40	3.6	3.9; 4.1
0-50/0-60	5.2/7.4	5.8; 5.8/8.1; 8.0
0-70/0-80	10.6/13.8	11.1; 10.7/15.1; 14.7
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	4.6	4.6; 4.4
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	45.7 m	43; 44 m
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.63 g (avg)	0.68; 0.68 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	31.3 sec @ 0.48 g (avg)	29.5 sec @ 0.56 g (avg); 29.9 sec @ 0.56 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1,900 rpm	1400; 1750 rpm

CONSUMER INFO		
STABILITY/TRACTION CONTROL	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes
AIRBAGS	4: Dual front, front side	4: Dual front, front side
BASIC WARRANTY	3 years/60,000 km	3 years/60,000 km
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	5 years/100,000 km	5 years/100,000 km
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	5 years/100,000 km	5 years/100,000 km
FUEL CAPACITY	70L	81.3L
ENERGUIDE FUEL CONSUMPTION RATINGS	13.7 (city)/ 9.6 (hwy) L/100km	10.9 (city)/ 10.0 (hwy) L/100km; not tested
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded regular	Unleaded premium



