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## Car review: Taming the wild and rugged Grand Cherokee



Bigger and badder: The new Jeep Grand Cherokee is longer and wider than its predecessor, as well as quicker and faster. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM



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SINGAPORE – What if Hyundai Motor launched a Singapore-assembled car and named it Ioniq 5 Orang Laut Edition? Will it incur the displeasure of the indigenous community here or across the strait?

In this day and age, businesses are likely to steer clear of controversy, no matter how small it may be. No more car advertisements with even a hint of leg, for instance. Better be safe than sorry.

But when Jeep named what was to become one of its best-selling models – the Cherokee – half a century ago, the world was an un-woke place with unleaded fuel and smoke-filled flights.

In 2021, the Cherokee Nation made a call for Jeep to drop the Cherokee name.

Will Jeep accede to that call? Perhaps it should, now that the brand is part of the Euro-American group Stellantis. After all, the Cherokee nameplate was retired briefly in the United States in the early noughties, and Liberty was used in its place. But in 2013, it returned.

A name change would be significant, but the changes in the latest car are just as, if not more.

First, the fifth-generation Grand Cherokee gets its first 2-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine, a quick departure from the 3.6- and 3.7-litre V6 units found in its predecessors.

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The engine is paired with a ZF eight-speed automatic – again a first – and a huge leap from its predecessor's five-speeder. The driver gets proper steering-mounted paddles for manual shifting this time, versus the innocuous shift tabs previously.

The downsized powertrain punches above its weight. With 268hp and 400Nm of torque going to all four wheels, the Jeep hits 100kmh in 8.2 seconds and a top speed of 210kmh. Its 3.6-litre V6 predecessor – launched more than 10 years ago – clocked a 9.1-second 0-100kmh sprint, and a top speed of 206kmh.



Beneath the bonnet: A 2-litre turbo engine which outguns Jeep's previous normally aspirated 3.6-litre V6. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

The performance of the new car is surreal for a 2.1-tonne vehicle with a 2-litre engine. Even with all five seats occupied, it betrays not a hint of the lethargy. Granted, it will not win many drag races, but for everyday driving, it is adequate.

Such is the magic of modern turbo engines. With 400Nm of torque, the Jeep's 2-litre has nearly as much shove as Porsche's first Cayenne S had from its 4.5-litre V8.

There is no cheating physics, though. The Grand Cherokee's responsiveness comes with a thirst. The car averages 13.3 litres/100km, which is substantially higher than Jeep's declared 9.7 litres/100km.

Second, the car is decidedly more urbane than any other Grand Cherokee.

Its vertical chromed radiator grille is super slim now, and connects with equally slim LED headlamps on either side.

Aggressive air intakes lining the lower section of the bumper add complexity to what has traditionally been a no-nonsense straightforward design. A shiny strip running across the bottom of the front bumper adds a dash of bling – utterly out of place in a Jeep, but times have changed.



Posh and polished: A rotary gear selector, a 10.1-inch infotainment touchscreen, and digital instrumentation with head-up display. ST  
PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

The car's windscreen is more rakish, and its D-pillars are slimmer. At first glance, it has a hint of minivan. The absence of side-steps adds to this impression. (Access to the cabin is rather high, so side-steps would actually be welcome.)

At 4,900mm long, 1,979mm wide and 1,797mm tall, it is 72mm longer and 36mm wider than its predecessor, but sits 5mm lower. At 2,964mm, its wheelbase is 49mm longer than before. For once, the car has decent interior space befitting its size.

Its stowage is also out of this world, with a capacity of 1,067 litres with all seats up. You will not find more stowage outside of a flatbed truck.



Big boot: More than 1,000 litres of stowage even when all seats are up. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

The new car is 34kg lighter despite being bigger, possibly because of its significantly smaller and lighter engine.

Third, even though this is still a full four-wheel drive with automatic torque distribution and a conventional rear differential, a rotary gear selector on board softens its image as a go-anywhere sport utility vehicle (SUV).

Also, the cockpit is decked out with modern amenities such as a 10.1-inch infotainment touchscreen (with wireless phone pairing and voice command), a panoramic glass roof, a 360-degree camera, adaptive cruise control and a suite of active safety features (with rather loud, naggy chimes). It also has an excellent hi-fi system.

What has not changed is the car's ride and handling. The latest Grand Cherokee still behaves like an old-school SUV, with plenty of body movements, a rather disengaged steering and noticeable wind noise intrusion. Engine noise and vibration, however, are kept well at bay. That said, roadholding is above-par for an SUV.



Light and airy: A panoramic glass roof and light tone upholstery contribute to cabin spaciousness. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Its leather seat upholstery aside, the quality of cabin materials lags behind what you find in, say, equivalent Land Rover cars. Perhaps it is part of hanging on to vestiges of ruggedness and rustic durability. Rather pointless if so, given that the car has already undergone so many changes.

A name change next, then? Why not? A good time would be when the Jeep brand goes electric from 2025.

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