

A Superb New Compass

Handsome, Compact Jeep Sets an Impressive Direction for Brand

By Derek Price
CARGAZING.COM

It's interesting that, at least for a brief period of time, you can buy two completely different vehicles called the "2017 Jeep Compass." One is an old, out-of-date design that better be a screaming bargain if you buy it; the other is a fresh looking, quieter, better handling vehicle that's unquestionably the best off-road machine in its price class, starting at \$20,995.

If your dealer stocks both, drive the two and compare. The difference is striking.

Jeep is banking on the all-new Compass being a home run, as it's replacing two vehicles in the brand's lineup: the Patriot and the old Compass. It needs to be a high-volume seller.

And after spending a lot of time behind the wheel, both at an off-road course near San Antonio and a week running errands at home, I suspect this new Compass will be flying off Jeep lots in record numbers. It's that impressive.

For one thing, it looks gorgeous. With a front end that seems like a scaled-down version of the Grand Cherokee and a sleek back end



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEEP COMPASS

The all-new Jeep Compass looks like a smaller version of the Grand Cherokee, the brand's most prestigious model.

that tapers aggressively like the eye-catching Land Rover Evoque, it looks like a high-dollar machine at first glance.

You can see where Jeep kept the costs in check when you look a bit

closer. The interior, while a dramatic improvement over the outgoing Compass and Patriot, still has more plastic surfaces than I'd like to see in a modern crossover. Its back seat also feels more cramped than its gigantic-SUV lines make it appear in pictures.

But the driving feel is spectacular. Driving on the highways and back roads of the Texas Hill Country in a Compass Limited shows off just how quiet and refined this small Jeep can feel. It's impressively silent for the money (under \$29,000 for this luxury trim level) while still having enough off-road clearance and traction control to tackle dirt roads with ease.

If you need serious capability, the Trailhawk version is beefed up to do the job. A taller, specially tuned suspension, solid skid plates and advanced 4x4 system let it tackle terrain where few vehicles can venture. A four-wheel low mode with a 20:1 crawl ratio, rear locker and a Selec-Terrain setting to handle rock climbing are all custom engineered for extreme off-roading.

It has red tow hooks, too. That's become a Trailhawk signature that makes my heart race when I see it.

Power comes from the 2.4-liter Tigershark four-cylinder engine, which delivers a best-in-class 4x4 fuel economy rating of 31 mpg on the highway with a manual transmission.

Front-wheel-drive versions are rated for 32 mpg on the highway and 23 in town.

All 4x4 packages are available with a nine-speed automatic transmission which, thank goodness, seems tuned to perfection at the outset. In the versions I drove, the nine-speed never felt like it was hunting for gears or struggling to find the right ratio. It shifted seamlessly and predictably, something you couldn't say about it when it first hit the market a few years ago.

Technology offerings are just right for a contemporary car. It comes with either a 5-inch, 7-inch or 8.4-inch touchscreen running the fourth-generation Uconnect system, including Apple CarPlay and Android Auto functionality for seamlessly linking to your smartphone.

Even for a brand that's been seeing fast growth and record sales in recent years, driving the all-new Compass was an eye-opening surprise.

I expected it to be good. It turned out to be great.

What was tested?

2017 Jeep Compass Trailhawk 4x4 (\$34,860). Options: Customer preferred package (\$795), leather interior group (\$1,295), navigation group (\$895), popular equipment group (\$395), panoramic sunroof (\$1,295), power liftgate (\$495). Price as tested (including \$1,095 destination charge): \$34,860

Wheelbase: 103.8 in.

Length: 173 in.

Width: 80 in.

Height: 64.6 in.

Engine: 2.4-liter Tigershark four cylinder (180 hp, 175 ft.-lbs. torque)

Transmission: Nine-speed automatic

Fuel economy: 22 city, 30 highway

RATINGS

Style: 9

Performance: 9

Price: 8

Handling: 6

Ride: 7

Comfort: 7

Quality: 7

Overall: 8

Why buy it?

An all-new design makes the Compass look expensive and drive like a dream. The Trailhawk version has legendary Jeep capability, while the fancy Limited trim is quiet, smooth, efficient and gorgeous.



The new Compass' cabin is a dramatic improvement over its two predecessors, the Patriot and the aging, outgoing Compass.