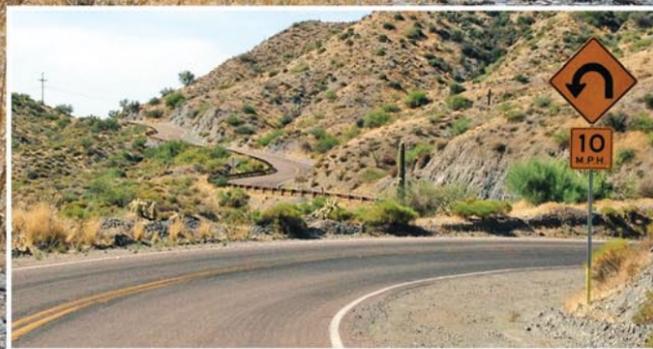


daily driver or weekend warrior: this Jeep knows no limits.

BY JOE SAGE



We seem to have the same experience every time we get our hands on a Jeep Wrangler. We like it from the first moment we get in, and we like driving it from the first moment its rugged wheels start turning. It's as though there are no bad Wranglers. They seem so well thought out, so perfectly assembled, and most of all conceived and executed by people whose genuine enthusiasm and interest in the brand show through in every detail. The mark of the Jeep team is everywhere.

The Wrangler at hand is a special trim, the Moab Edition. As we got close to delivery, we had looked it up so we could pop a photo on social media and on the "upcoming" page of our prior issue. And from that photo, we had visualized and basically expected a white, 4-door (Wrangler Unlimited) hardtop. Surprise. We received what you see here: a screamin' Gecko Green Pearl Coat two-door ragtop. As with the Sahara, Rubicon, Freedom Edition and other versions, it turns out the Moab Edition is available every which way.

The Wrangler works its way up from a Sport model through a Sport S and Sahara, to the Moab Edition, successively adding features. Or from the Sahara you can branch up to the Freedom Edition, adding different features. Or you can choose the Jeep Wrangler Rubicon, which until Moab has been the top model. (Moab comes in at a base price about \$2400 higher than Rubicon, although you can still get a Rubicon 10th Anniversary Edition at \$3000 higher than Moab.)

They're well equipped throughout the lineup. All models are powered by the same 285-hp Pentastar 3.6L V6 with 260 lb-ft of trail-tackling torque. A 6-speed manual transmission is standard, with a 5-speed automatic available—as our sample here had. Working up the lineup brings larger wheels with more stylish (though always rugged) finishes, a few upgraded interior touches at the Sport S level, and by Sahara you'll be driving away with embroidered seats (standard cloth or available leather), body-color fender flares and the option of a body-color hard top, upgraded 368-watt Alpine seven-speaker audio and more.

Our Moab Edition has the same Command-Trac part-time (shift between 2WD and 4WD) transfer case as Sport and Sahara models, with a 2.72:1 low ratio, as opposed to the Rubicon's Rock-Track at 4.0:1. (Moab, Utah, is not for the timid, nor is this Jeep, but if you are maximally serious about your off-road challenges, you may still want to compare the Rubicon, which has several more duty-specific features.)

Other add-ons are part function and part fun, such as an available locking rear differential for tough trails, Mopar fuel filler door and tail lamp guards, and 17-inch semi-gloss black wheels from

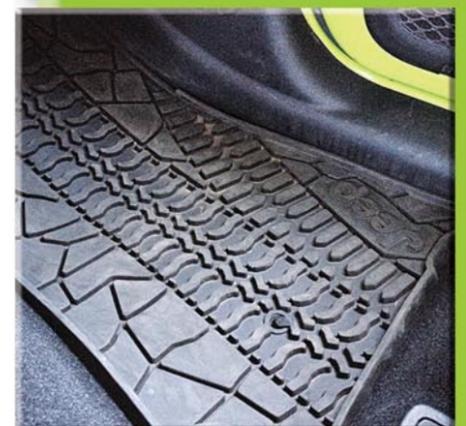


the Rubicon. Heated leather seats with accent stitching are standard, and the interior reminds you of red rock glory with "Moab" grab bar, vent rings and door pulls. Especially Jeep-like rubber floor mats are also included, as is an expanded electronic connectivity group of features.

Electronics in the windshield frame are in the shape of the famous Jeep grille and headlights, while floor mats have an off-road tire tread pattern. The Jeep team puts its Jeep heart and soul into each and every piece of the Wrangler—a 100 percent dedicated branding effort you will always appreciate.

We took a couple of serious excursions into the farther reaches of the northeast Valley—once out Seven Springs Road, where we could negotiate tight, paved hairpins at cruising speed. We then wandered off on what anybody anywhere could only rightly call Jeep trails into the upper wilds. This included serious climbs and serious cliffs, rocks and ruts and tight, tight turns. It pretty much goes without saying that our two-door Wrangler took everything this drive could dish out and only wanted more. A second drive brought us to a bit of an off-road park area, some of it de facto. This area had fewer jagged boulders than the first, but more extreme bumps and rolls, tight pirouettes around and between boulders and trees, and a few spots that seemed borderline impossible. But we knew better than to even think that, and the Wrangler again did it all.

We know the Jeep is supremely off-road capable. It's also very daily-driver capable. We had fun and drove it aggressively, in city traffic and freeway traffic, on surface streets against competitive groups on sharp corners and through challenging



KEEP RIGHT >>

traffic knots—and we could drive it without any special thought for its specialized mountain goat form factor. In any and all conditions, we loved the vehicle's stance, we loved the solid hydraulic power steering (in an age of variously implemented electrics), we loved the solid mechanical feel of everything. Whether we would buy the manual or automatic transmission—we generally welcome the manual—might depend upon just what kind of rock-crawling and/or mall crawling we had in store. In our driving, the five-speed automatic performed brilliantly. And five speeds is plenty for this purpose-built machine.

Inside, we liked the simple controls, such as fan, heat and cooling, or mirror adjustments. We liked the style of speakers and vents in their purposeful and industrial-styled installations.

Temperatures were well over 110 while we had our Wrangler Moab Edition, but the spirit of the machine moved us to do many a mile with the windows open and the breeze blowing in. The Jeep handles so well and performs so smoothly on paved roads, we probably just wanted to connect a little more with the thrill of the ride—the occasional burst around a corner as the cactus whizzed on by. Felt just right. (We didn't take the top off, though—maybe next time. Even with the top installed and buttoned up, though, access to the rear cargo area couldn't be easier—the Jeep team has provided secure and weather-resistant access as easy as if it were all steel.)

Alpine makes a good system, but the Wrangler is limited by its removable doors. With a sub-



woofer in the back and optimized speaker locations in the front, sound is pretty good, and it holds up at speed with windows open, but don't expect a full concert hall in here.

About a year and a half ago, we drove a Jeep Wrangler Sahara for a week. We liked it so well, we put it on our cover. One of our colleagues drove it next and liked it so well, he went out and bought one just like it. This year was much the same. It was too soon to put another Wrangler on the cover, or you just might see this there. Every one of us, and everyone polled online, liked the Gecko Green finish. And that same colleague is wrestling with whether to already trade last year's Sahara for this year's Moab Edition, as we go to press. We say go for it. ■

JEEP WRANGLER MOAB

ENGINE3.6-liter V6 DOHC 24-valve VVT
TRANSMISSION*.....(standard) 6-spd manual*
POWERTRAINCommand-Trac® shift 4WD
POWER/TORQUE285 hp / 260 lb-ft
FUELUnleaded regular
MPG.....17/21/18 city/hwy/comb
TURNING CIRCLE34.9 ft

BASE\$27,795
MOAB EDITION PACKAGE\$5200
OPTIONS: *5-speed automatic\$1125
 Tru-Lok® locking rear axle\$1500
 U-Connect® infotainment\$1035
DESTINATION\$995
TOTAL AS TESTED\$37,650

