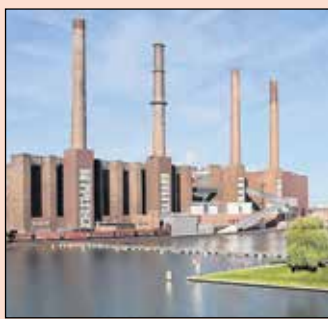


And the new number one automaker is...

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TEST DRIVE

Rugged, Retro

2017 Jeep Wrangler Sahara 4x4

DAN LYONS | text
Special to the Times Union

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to drive in some of the country's best off-road sites. Whether it's on the Rubicon Trail or the red rock country of southern Utah, you see Jeep Wranglers and CJs all the time, negotiating trails that you would not think possible to traverse.



Showroom versions of Jeep's Wrangler bask in the glow of their hardcore cousins in the same way that sports cars do their racing circuit counterparts. We like to have the capability to do things, even if we rarely (or never) explore the edges ourselves.

Since 2007, Wrangler has been offered in two models that are variations on a theme, small and medium. Two-door models are built on a 95.4-inch wheelbase, stretch

2017 Jeep Wrangler Sahara 4x4
MSRP: \$30,445 · As Tested: \$37,960

164.3 inches long and are classified as compact SUVs. Four-door models — known as Wrangler Unlimited and considered midsize — roll on a 116-inch wheelbase, and measure over 20 inches longer, from nose to tail. Both lines are offered in four trim levels — Sport, Sport S, Sahara and Rubicon. My Wrangler Sahara 4x4 had a base MSRP of \$30,445, and an as-delivered price of \$37,960.

The Freedom Top accounted for \$1,995 of said sticker. The body-color, three-piece hard top adds a finished look that complements the Sahara's style, and provides more insulation (and security) than does a soft top. But, it's a two-person job to put on or take off. The soft top can be configured for varying levels of wide open spaces. It's versatile, but manual, and labor intensive. The hardtop has removable T-tops, which offer a nice combination of easy access open air, and a buttoned up, weatherproof feel.

The interior's straight forward design is in line with Wrangler's function-first outlook. HVAC controls are in a simple bank of buttons and rheostats in mid-dash — easy to reach and use. The steering wheel tilts but doesn't telescope. In an era where center screens are growing to the size of tablets, the largest available touchscreen display here is the size of a smartphone. Side view mirrors are oversized, designed for go, not show.

Back window visibility is limited by the rear seat head rests and the rear-mounted spare tire. The Wrangler's compact footprint pays dividends off-road, where it can



JEEP WRANGLER is offered in two-door models (classed as compact SUVs) and the 20-inch longer four-door version, known as the Wrangler Unlimited. Both are offered in Sport, Sport S, Sahara and Rubicon trim levels.

negotiate tight spaces. But there's a giveback in terms of rear seat room and cargo space. Leg room in back isn't enough for most adults to fit in. And access to the back with the top on is a real squeeze play. Storage space in back runs small — 12.8- 56.5 cubic feet (61.2, if you remove the rear seat instead of fold it). These limitations have much to do with the success of the four-door Wrangler Unlimited. While less nimble and capable off-road than the two-door, the Unlimited is bigger in back (37.2 inches of rear seat leg room vs. 35.6 inches, and cargo capacity of 31.5 - 70.6 cu. ft.), and still more trail-worthy than almost anything on the road.

The comparative lack of tech bells and whistles compared to contemporary rides gives the small 4x4 a throwback feel inside. But, this is not to say that all Wranglers are all about roughing it. The basics are

covered (power steering, A/C, etc.). A pretty stout (552-watt) sound system (9-speaker Alpine, w/all-weather subwoofer and 40GB hard drive) is available (\$1,195), as is satellite radio and navigation. Indeed, a new-for-2017 option package (the Cold Weather Group) includes a few items (heated seats, remote start) that may strike some Jeep owners as downright decadent.

We like to have the capability to do things, even if we rarely (or never) explore the edges ourselves.

Wrangler is offered with one engine and a choice of two transmissions. The motor is a 3.6L V-6 that makes 285 horsepower and 260 lb.-ft. of torque. The standard transmission is a standard transmission. A six speed manual, to be precise, with overdrive and hill-start assist. A five speed automatic can be added

for \$1,400, and it comes with hill descent control. Though small in size, Wrangler is no lightweight, tipping the scales at about two tons. The six has ample power for the package; and feels better with the manual

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Going down the road feelin' ...good!

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