

An all-electric off-roader...

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FIRST DRIVE

TEST DRIVE

Tradition, Evolved

2018 Jeep Wrangler

DAN LYONS | text and photos
Special to the Times Union

The Jeep brand first popped into the collective consciousness of many Americans in the 1940s, when the Willys-Overland military models gave distinguished service during World War II.

In the decades that followed, the company established itself on the forefront of the fledgling sport utility vehicle market, and the Jeep with the smallest footprint (first CJ, then Wrangler) cast the largest shadow in off-roading. Today, as the SUV/crossover market continues to expand, Wrangler remains the icon of the Jeep brand. The rugged, compact ute is sold in over 150 countries worldwide.



Wrangler is all new for 2018. Two-door models are offered in Sport and Rubicon trim, while four-doors are available in Sport, Sahara and Rubicon trim. My test drive covered Sport and Rubicon two-doors, as well as Sahara and Rubicon four-doors. Taking care not to mess with success, the fourth generation Wrangler's design shows subtle styling differences from

First Drive: 2018 Jeep Wrangler
MSRP: \$26,995-\$40,495

previous versions. The top of the seven-slot keystone grille now slopes back, in the interest of improved aerodynamics. The outer slots intersect with the headlights — a heritage nod to the Jeep CJ. The windshield angle has added rake, and all windows have added size which, along with the lowered beltline, improves visibility. Headlights are — in the Jeep tradition — still round, but the base, halogen bulbs can be swapped for available, projector LEDs.

Trail riders who enjoy the full-on, wind in the face/bugs in the teeth experience you get with a lowered windshield will note that Jeep has simplified the process. What once involved 28 bolts now takes four (and about four minutes) to accomplish. Several door and top choices are offered; among the latter, one soft, two hard and one power. Removing the soft top on previous models was a cumbersome process that, realistically, discouraged people from opening up their Jeeps. The new version of the ragtop dispenses with all the zippers in favor of a sort of tongue and groove design, that substantially streamlines the business of going from closed to open. The new power top (available on four-door models only) is essentially a full-length, retractable, canvas sunroof.

Engine choices are a rolling trio. Available now is a 3.6L V-6. Coming later this winter is an optional, 2.0L turbocharged inline four-cylinder. Waiting in the wings is a 3.0L EcoDiesel V-6, which will arrive in 2019. I



JEEP'S RUGGED, COMPACT WRANGLER is all new for 2018, with only subtle changes in the classic seven-slot grille to accommodate aerodynamics. The two-door in Rubicon trim level (above) is ready to take on any off-roading trail.

drove the 2.0L four and 3.6L V-6, both of which were linked to an eight-speed automatic transmission. The eight-speed is new to Wrangler; a six-speed manual is offered only with the V-6. The direct injection, turbo-charged four is rated at 270 horsepower and 295 lb.-ft. of torque, and includes FCA's eTorque system.

The hybrid functions include electric power assist, auto start/stop (defeatable), transmission shift management, intelligent battery charging, extended fuel shutoff, and regenerative braking. EPA has not yet rated the four's fuel economy. The six checks in with 285 horsepower and 260 lb.-ft. of torque. It also is equipped with engine start/stop technology, and the EPA estimates its mileage at 17/23/19 (manual); 18/23/20 (automatic). Both engines have a maximum towing rating of 3,500 lb.

in the four door, 2,000 lb. in the two-door.

I found the turbo four to be quite lively. It steps away smartly from a stop, feels responsive up and down the rev range, and seems unstressed at speed. Though I drove it in the lighter two door, it feels like it would be the quicker of the two motors, even in the heavier four door. And with eight gears to stretch across, it's a good bet to get better mileage, too. Jeep regulars will find the feel that the six feels largely the same as past Jeep power plants, though the eight cogs it has at its disposal smooths out the power distribution. Many people just like the traditional sound and feel of a six, and I get that.

But, by my seat of the pants reckoning, the turbo four has better midrange acceleration, and figures to have higher mpg's. So, if you're not in a hurry to buy, I'd wait 'til the turbo four arrives, and give them both a try.

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