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2011 Jeep Grand Cherokee

The 2011 Jeep Grand Cherokee will debut with wholesale changes from its predecessor, the largest in the model's 18-year history. But yes, you can still get a Hemi.

Stylists well aware of trail conditions have given the all-new Grand Cherokee short overhangs, with length up by just two inches but space between front and rear axles more than five inches longer. The results are improved cabin space and access, especially in the rear seat, 15 percent more cargo area behind, and a wheels-out-at-the-corners aggressive look. A Jeep-traditional seven-slot grille is framed by adaptable bi-Xenon headlamps on some models; all have four back-up lamps.

The 2011 Grand Cherokee will come in Laredo, Limited, and Overland models. Read more equipment, more money from left to right. Each will offer two- or four-wheel drive, a five-speed automatic transmission, a brand-new four-cam, 280-hp flex-fuel 3.6-liter V6 engine and the option of a 360-hp 5.7-liter Hemi. Jeep has said nothing about a diesel engine choice but their photos clearly show an instrument panel with USA-spec MPH speedometer and a diesel-specific tachometer.

Fuel-economy ratings are expected to range from 16/23 mpg to 13/19 mpg. The top tow rating is 7400 pounds.

This is the first trail-ready Jeep with all-independent suspension, and if you look underneath there are some resemblances to the Mercedes ML-Class. Conventional steel coil springs are standard. Quadra-Lift air suspension is an option; this allows lifting the truck for trail travel from 8.7 inches underneath to more than 11, and lowers it for higher speeds or loading.

Also new on the 2011 Grand Cherokee is Selec-Terrain, a single control that adjusts all the truck's operating parameters for different purposes, similar to Land Rover's Terrain Response system. Suspension and 4WD controls are grouped around it behind the shifter.

Higher-grade materials and more flowing lines than any previous Jeep highlight the cabin, the leather and wood the real items. The 60/40 split rear seat folds flat, and there is a spare under floor with gear cubbies around it. We are happy to see there is no seven-seat option.

Equipment highlights include dual-temperature climate control, 506-watt Alpine sound system with HDD, Garmin-powered navigation, Sirius Travel Link, UConnect, Bluetooth, dual-pane panoramic moonroof, four heated seats and steering wheel, driver memory system and power steering column adjust, blind spot warning, adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning and LED cabin lighting that includes map pockets that look like bottle holders.

An SRT8 version has not been announced but rumors persist about a 6.4-liter Hemi with more than 500-hp and 500 lb-ft of torque, not unlike the numbers Mercedes gets out of their ML63 AMG version. Stay tuned.

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