

# Jeep Compass has unique feel

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Inside, it's the same story. Even entry-level consumers have become more demanding. We may want cheap prices but we don't want a cheap-looking product. Crappy hard plastics have been replaced with new soft touch trim pieces on the doors and dash.

The instrument panel is well laid out and would not look out of place on a higher priced vehicle.

New premium cloth bucket seats up front are comfortable, complemented by a new centre armrest. Backlighting of door switches, door locks, windows and power mirror controls bumps up the sophistication level. And a new three-spoke Jeep tilt steering wheel houses integrated controls for audio, cruise, phone and other vehicle functions.

All the stuff mentioned so far is standard in the entry Sport trim, along with a 60/40 folding rear seat, Electronic Stability Control with Hill Start Assist, Electronic Roll Mitigation, ABS with Brake Assist and a few other do-dads.

My tester, glowing in Deep Cherry Red, was a North trim model, a mid-range level that Jeep would expect most Canadians to dip into. It adds niceties like air conditioning, power windows and locks, remote keyless illuminated entry, power heated folding mirrors, darker tinted windows, height adjustment for the driver's seat and a fold-flat front passenger seat for long loads, along with a handy 115V AC power outlet and body-coloured door handles.

Moving up to the Limited level at the top of the trim ladder, adds bigger wheels, better audio, heated leather seats and all the expected bells & whistles, too numerous to mention here.

Under the hood, due to popular demand, Chrysler Canada offers a standard 2.4-liter four-cylinder making 172 hp at 6000 rpm and 165 lb/ft torque peaking at 4400 rpm. It can be mated to the standard five-speed manual shifter or to a CVT automatic, in either 4X2 or 4X4 models.

Unfortunately, diesel engine choices from other continents are not available in North America. In the U.S., 4X2 models start with a 158 hp 2.0-litre engine and, curiously, it is still an available no-cost option here in Canada.

But why would you bother? The fuel economy improvement with the smaller engine would be negligible and the 2.4-litre itself has enough on its plate motivating the Compass.

It's not exactly a slug but don't expect a hair-raising rush of adrenaline from the Cessna-like constant rpm drone of CVT-controlled engine as it tries to keep up with accelerator demands.

Although I tested the automatic version, I think the lighter, lower-cost manual tranny would be better suited to the Compass, for both fun and fuel efficiency.

I haven't gotten into any offroad aspects, since that was never really part of the original Compass plan but, for 2011, the Compass did finally achieve Jeep's coveted Trail Rating badge with improved



An exterior modeled on the upscale Grand Cherokee is reflected by an upgraded interior design with soft touch textures, new cloth and leather upholstery choices, and with a healthy list of standard and optional equipment choices.

offroad capabilities from the 4X4 (\$2,200) systems.

The Freedom Drive I automatic four-wheel-drive system works like most AWD systems, directing power to the rear wheels when the front wheels slip and it even comes with a lock mode for snow or severe conditions.

The newly-added Freedom Drive II Off-Road Package includes a second-generation continuously variable transaxle with low range (CVT2L), 17-inch all-terrain tires and aluminum wheels, a one-inch raised ride height, a full-size spare tire, skid plates and tow hooks.

So now the Compass can actually walk the talk.

Although my test was in a 2011 model, the new 2012s on sale now are priced the same and remain relatively unchanged except for a few new colours and some tweaks to the CVT transmission.

But, at the time this review was written, Chrysler Canada's Jeep website was offering 2011 models discounted by \$2,000 and canny customers might find further savings on the even cheaper Patriot.

There are rumours that the Compass and Patriot will be replaced by a new Fiat-based vehicle platform in the immediate future but there is no solid date on that development yet.

For now, the Jeep Compass adds a unique take with a more capable contender in a very competitive compact SUV and CUV market.

## Jeep Compass 2011 (at a glance)

**BODY STYLE:** Compact five-passenger SUV

**DRIVE METHOD:** front-engine, front-wheel or all-wheel drive.

**ENGINE:** 2.0-litre I-4 (158 hp, 141 lb/ft); 2.4-litre I-4 (172 hp, 165 lb/ft)

**FUEL ECONOMY SAMPLES:** 2.0-litre five-speed 4X2 9.1/6.8L/100km (city/hwy); 2.4-litre CVT 4X4 9.9/7.5L/100km (city/hwy) (as tested)

**CARGO:** 643L (22.7 cu.ft.); 1519L (53.6 cu.ft.) with second row folded

**PRICES:** Sport 4X2 \$18,995; Sport 4X4 \$21,195; North 4X2 \$22,295; North 4X4 \$24,495; Limited 4X2 \$24,695; Limited 4X4 \$26,895

**WEB SITE:** www.jeep.ca



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