

# Patriot carries the Holy Grail of 'Jeepness' in the compact SUV

**JIM ROBINSON**  
Road Worthy

SCOTTSDALE, Arizona— It may sound odd, but when it comes to a Jeep, it has to have that intangible called "Jeepness".

It has to look like a Jeep, feel like a Jeep and most of all go like a Jeep.

When you walk into a Jeep shop these days, there are seven different models to choose from.

That's a long cry from the simple Wrangler (nee TJ), Cherokee and Grand Cherokee of just five years ago. This profusion of models is due to the fact that SUVs/CUVs have fragmented into whole new segments and these seem to be evolving monthly.

Despite being the pioneer of four-wheel-drive and off-roading before it became popular, Jeep has had to adapt to stay current. And while its sister division, Dodge, also has a full lineup of SUVs, it's Jeep qualities that bring people to the brand.

So a great deal of effort had to go into the 2007 Patriot, near twin to the Compass, but the spiritual heir to Cherokee, the pioneer SUV for the masses of the 1970s and 1980s.

And while the Compass and Patriot are built on the same platform shared with the Dodge Caliber, you can think of Compass as Jeep-light and the

Patriot as a light Jeep.

There is a difference.

Like the Compass, Patriot is four-cylinder engine powered with available front-wheel-drive (FWD) or Jeep Freedom Drive I, which moves grip back and forth between the front and rear wheels but can also be locked up in a 50:50 split on rough surfaces. The Patriot goes one better offering Freedom Drive II that moves grip back and forth and from side to side as well. You can't go very far off road in a Compass, but you sure can in a Patriot. In fact with the off-road package it can journey anywhere a Wrangler or Liberty can go. Jeep calls this being "Trail Rated" and puts an emblem on the front fenders to let all and sundry know this Jeep has the right stuff.

To prove the point, Jeep sent us out off on a very challenging route through rocky desert terrain north of Phoenix that included going over rocks the size of a bar fridge and sink-holes gouged by flash floods. The Trail Rated off-road package that uses Freedom Drive II includes 17-inch all-terrain tires and it sits one inch higher. The low gear on this package (engaged by pulling up on a lever) has a 19:1 ratio, which should get you anywhere as long as you have grip on at least one tire.

Out in the desert, you could



The 2007 Patriot combines all the classic Jeep design cues with all the comforts of home in a true four-wheel-drive package that has all the off-road capability people expect when they buy a Jeep.

be rolling along at 60 km/h flat on compacted sand that tested the standard stability control and roll-over mitigation programs one minute and come to a drop-off the next that seemed like the desert equivalent of jumping off a cliff. Stopping caused no tense moments thanks to the standard four-wheel disc brakes with ABS.

In the washes created by previous flash floods where you could get up a good speed, I tried to hang it out but the stability and rollover programs were having none of it, even though the surface was primarily sand and pebbles washed down these nat-

ural sluiceways over the centuries.

When I came to a drop off, this is where the Hill Descent Control program could be switched on. All you had to do was steer straight with the computer working the brakes and engine retardation to keep the Patriot on a steady 4-6 km/h speed down until you reached another flat stretch and you barrelled off again.

At first I kind of babied it through the two-foot deep, rock encrusted ruts. But by the end, I was confident enough to simply drive through them because the

Patriot never seemed to bottom out and bang into anything.

Another difference between the Compass and the Patriot is the looks. They both have Jeep signature seven-slot grilles and round headlights, but the Compass is styled to look more like a sports car while the Patriot has the slab sides and squared off fender flares of the old Cherokee. In fact, the Patriot is within one inch to all-exterior dimensions of the Cherokee, which still personifies Jeepness for many along with the Wrangler and Wagoneer.

See JEEP, pg. 4

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