

The 2008 Patriot combines all the classic Jeep design cues with all the comforts of home in a true four-wheel-drive package that offers the off-road capability people expect when they buy a Jeep. If you want to go off-road, the Patriot has a Trail Rated version.



New Patriot has classic Jeep styling

LORNE DRURY
Special to The IFF

If you're a Jeep fan these days, you have lots to choose from.

Gone are the days when your only choices were the Cherokee (or Grand Cherokee) and Wrangler (or TJ).

Today, Jeep dealers can offer you a selection of seven vehicles, including the Patriot and Compass, which are both based on the same platform as the compact Dodge Caliber.

While the Compass has a more rounded, Liberty-ish look, there's no mistaking the Patriot for anything but a traditional Jeep.

It has what Chrysler describes as "a modern interpretation of classic Jeep styling".

In other words, it has the boxy, rugged look associated with Jeep designs of the past. When equipped with the optional Freedom Drive 11 4WD system, the Patriot is Trail Rated and meets a variety of off-road standards.

While many of us will never take our vehicles off-road, the Patriot gives you that option and provides decent fuel economy to boot. With fuel prices heading well over the \$1-a-litre level these days, that's certainly a plus.

My tester was a 2008 Jeep Patriot 4WD North Edition and it came at a perfect time for a trip north into snow country earlier this year.

While the roads were clear at the time, we had just been walloped with a major snowfall and the Patriot fit the bill nicely for a drive to an oldtimers hockey tournament.

The Patriot can be described as a compact SUV or a tall wagon, as many in the business like to describe them.

It has the packaging and interior flexibility of a sport utility combined with the performance, handling, fuel economy and price of a compact car or small pickup.

It is available in three drive configurations: front wheel drive, Freedom Drive 1 (a full-time active four-wheel drive system with lock mode) and Freedom Drive 11 (a full-time active 4x4 system with low range that provides the Trail Rated capability).

Three trim levels are offered including Sport, North (exclusive to Canada) and Limited.

Prices start at \$16,995 for the Patriot Sport FWD. Add \$2,000 for the AWD version of the Sport Package. The Patriot North Edition is \$19,595 (\$21,595 for AWD) and Patriot Limited \$22,695 (\$24,695 for AWD). Jeep claims the Sport version is the lowest priced 4x4 in Canada.

Standard engine is a 2.4-litre four-cylinder, producing 172 hp and 165 lb/ft of torque. A five-speed manual transmission is standard, but if you opt for the Sport FWD model with continuously variable transmission (CVT) you get a 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine, producing 158 hp. The CVT is a \$1,300 option.

My tester, the Patriot North 4x4 with CVT, topped out at \$25,870. The Patriot North Edition includes air conditioning, power windows/locks/mirrors, remote keyless entry, 60/40 reclining rear seats/fold flat front passenger seat and removable/rechargeable flashlight integrated with the rear cargo lamp.

Options included 17-inch aluminum wheels (\$600), a security and cargo convenience group (\$500), heated front seats (\$300),

CVT with AutoStick (\$1,300) and speed control (\$275).

Also standard on the Patriot North is Chrysler's YES Essentials seat fabric that resists water and stains. Perfect for anyone who has kids or dogs that can easily make a mess of the seats.

Inside, the cabin of the North Edition has a number of neat features, including the fold flat front passenger seat—ideal for hauling long loads or for use as a table for the laptop. The flashlight in the rear cargo area is a great idea and the younger crowd, who will likely make up a big chunk of Patriot buyers, will enjoy the optional swing-down liftgate speakers that would be neat for camping trips or tailgate parties.

The cabin is spacious and the instrument panel is well thought-out. Everything is accessible and easy to use. There's lots of storage bins placed throughout the cabin. As for the seats, I found them comfortable and supportive even after a two hour drive up to cottage country.

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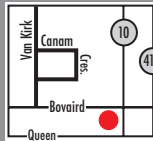
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