Jeep Patriot's price, drive options have a lot to offer

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A big negative for me with many Chrysler products these days is their use of too much shiny, hard plastic in their interiors. This was especially evident in the Patriot's sibling, the Compass. With the Patriot, I didn't find it nearly as noticeable and all in all, I found the interior attractive and functional.

On the road, the Patriot's 172 hp four-cylinder engine is fairly quiet at highway speeds, although engine noise is evident on hard acceleration. Acceleration is not this vehicle's strong point with the CVT and extra care is needed in passing situations. I haven't driven a manual version so I can't speak to that.

However, gasoline consumption is what it's all about these days and the North Edition gives 9.9L/100 km (29 mpg) city and 8.2L/100 km (34 mpg) highway with regular gasoline, according to Transport Canada ratings.

The Patriot has a solid feel on the road, although there is some body lean on hard cornering. Steering is fairly precise and predictable.

The all-wheel drive system operated like a charm in the snowy north. It works with the front wheels most of the time but shifts grip back and forth between the front and rear as needed. For more severe driving situations, the drive system can be locked, giving a 50:50 split of the torque.

On the safety front, anti-lock brakes (ABS), electronic stability control (ESC), brake assist, traction control and electronic roll mitigation are standard along with front and side-curtain airbags.

In an increasingly crowded compact vehicle segment, the Patriot has a lot to offer with its attractive price and four-wheel drive options. It's more Jeep-like than its Compass counterpart and well worth a look for anyone shopping this segment.

2008 JEEP PATRIOT AT A GLANCE

BODY STYLE: Compact SUV
DRIVE METHOD: front-engine, front/four-wheel drive
ENGINE: 2.0-litre DOHC inline four-cylinder (158 hp, 141 lb/ft); 2.4-litre DOHC inline four-cylinder (172 hp, 62 lb/ft).
FUEL ECONOMY: 2WD versions city: 2.0-litre CVT/2.4-litre CVT/2.4-litre manual, 9.0L/100 km (31 mpg)/9.7L (29 mpg)/9.0L (31 mpg); highway 7.3L (39 mpg)/8.0L (35 mpg)/7.1L (40 mpg). 4WD versions city: 2.4-litre CVT/2.4-litre manual 9.9L (29 mpg), 9.2L (31 mpg); highway 8.2L (34 mpg), 7.3L (39 mpg).
PRICE: Sport 2WD/4WD, $16,995/$18,995; North 2WD/4WD $19,595/$21,595; Limited 2WD/4WD $22,695/$24,695.

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Have you considered upgrading your vehicle?

Considering the cost of trading in your vehicle vs. investing in enhancement accessories, the latter decision may be a "no brainer."

As they make the rounds to select their new vehicle, many shoppers recoil at sticker prices. With cars now averaging well above $25,000, some buyers reevaluate their needs and desires, reluctantly settling for the nofrills, "plain vanilla" model.

With time, however, these same motorists may find themselves with a few extra dollars they can invest in their vehicle. Is it time to buy another car, even though there still are payments to make?

Car Care Canada says instead of replacing your vehicle, consider repairing and upgrading what you already have.

The accompanying list includes some of the accessories that can add new personality to your basic vehicle.

Most of the products in the customizing/accessory industry are totally functional; some combine function with cosmetic improvement.

The cost of these components ranges from a few dollars to a few thousand. Still you could have most of them installed for much less than the price of a new vehicle. A classified phone directory or a referral from your automotive service dealer are two good ways to find your local sources.

So if you're considering trading, crunch the numbers first. You might find you'd be just as happy, and many dollars richer, with a few selected enhancements.

Vehicle Personality Enhancement List
- Air dams and spoilers
- Anti-theft devices
- Bug deflectors
- Camper caps
- Car phones
- Carrier racks
- Custom seats
- Custom wheels
- Grille guards
- Instrumentation
- Keyless entry systems
- Neon trim lighting

Car Care Articles
- Personal breath alcohol testers
- Pick-up bed mats
- Pick-up box tonneau covers
- RV and towing accessories
- Radar Detectors
- Remote engine starting systems
- Running boards
- Special shock absorbers
- Stereo systems
- Striping and/or decals
- Sun roofs
- Upgraded Headlights
- Vehicle navigation systems
- Wheels & tires

—Car Care Canada