

Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited 2000

Jeep.



In a world that has been shrunk by the Internet to not much more than a 15-second dial-up, separating the reality from the marketing is getting harder to do every day.

North Americans want to be more Euro in style and we want to be more like the Japanese when it comes to efficiencies. But what North Americans tend to forget, is we have icons that other cultures not only respect but revere like the Harley Davidsons, Navajo jewelry and the Canadian Rockies. The outstanding example is the Jeep. I doubt there is a culture on earth that doesn't recognize the Jeep name or the look. To bring a long harangue to a short conclusion, there is no doubt today about the viability of the SUV. And while Mercedes-Benz (excuse me Daimler Chrysler) may be pumping out Mercedes-badged SUVs and Dodge-branded SUVs, the Jeep is still the name that sings out as one of the true triumphs of North American culture.

What brings on all this rapture about Jeeps was the first real snow storm of the season in the Toronto area. By design or luck (modesty makes me pick the latter), I had a Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited that romped through the snow and slush and brought back all those reasons why people buy Jeeps in the first place.

The Grand Cherokee goes back almost a decade to 1992. Amidst the sea of SUV contenders, it's hard to remember now what a breakthrough the Grand Cherokee was at the time.

Here we had a SUV with decent room for up to five adults and their belongings along with the luxury of a Chrysler New Yorker (or so I wrote at the time). Today the Grand Cherokee looks roughly the same (like I always wanted my Tonka truck to look) but it has been given the best of four-wheel-drive engineering.

The Grand Cherokee is offered in two versions for 2000, the Laredo and the Limited. The Laredo comes with Jeep's long-serving 4.0-litre in-line, six-cylinder engine that produces 195 hp and 230 lb/ft of torque. Standard engine in the Limited is a 4.7-litre V8 producing 235 hp and 295 lb/ft of torque. This V8 is new, not a rehash of the old 318 cu. inch OHV unit that soldiered on in Chrysler service from the days of the Plymouth Fury and Dodge Polara. Outwardly about the only way to tell the difference between the two is the signature seven-slat grille is chrome on the Laredo, body color on the Limited. Both versions, by the way, only are offered with a four-speed

automatic transmission. If you want a five-speed manual, better look at the Cherokee.

When it comes to how you want your four-wheel-drive, things get a bit complicated as one might expect from a leader and pioneer in the segment. The Grand Cherokee offers as standard its Selec-Trac part-time/full-time four-wheel-drive system that requires a shift lever to select modes. It is reliable and is the system used by most SUVs. Next up is Jeep Quadra-Trac II. This set the standard for automatic all-wheel-drive systems when introduced and allows power to be transferred from wheel to wheel as needed using a central differential. An industry first, it is now widely mimicked by other makers.

New, and another industry first is the Quadra-Trac II with optional Vari-Lok axles that have speed-sensing torque transfer couplings on the front and rear differentials. The Quadra drive with Vari-Lok adds \$770 to the \$45,215 list of the Grand Cherokee Limited as tested.

To truly go into the rough, Vari-Lok has a suspension to go with it. Gone are the old torsion bars and these have been replaced by coil springs on both Grand Laredo and Cherokee Limited which also both come with four-wheel disc brakes. Fitted to the tester was the optional (\$740) Up Country Suspension kit that includes skid plate, heavy duty suspension with more serious gas shocks, P245/16-inch tires, full-size spare, and tow hooks.

The beauty of the Quadra drive system is its simplicity. Put the transfer case shift lever in 4hi or 4lo and for-getta-about-it. The system (as normally used in 4hi, or about 99 per cent of the time) is absolutely non-intrusive to the driver or passengers despite the conditions on the road. Where the unprepared or underestimating were spinning off Highway 407 on the way home in above mentioned snow storm, my tester rolled along unperturbed. In fact, my biggest problem was remembering to

turn off the optional seat heaters. Set this thing on high and within a minute you could be frying eggs. I.e. it works well.

An option on my test Limited was the \$300 trailer towing group. With the V8's 295 lb/ft of torque and the Quadra drive system, towing a boat into a hard-to-get-to-lake is make easy. The Class IV towing package means you can pull 6,500 lbs (2,948 kg). If you use the 4.0-litre in-line six-cylinder, the towing limit is 5,000 lbs (2,268 kg).

An interesting option is the climate control system that relies on infrared to gauge temperature in the passenger cabin.

I was also surprised at the fuel economy, which, considering I was in four-wheel-drive most of the time, was pretty reasonable. According to Transport Canada, the 4:7 with Quadra-Trac returns 16.1L/100 km (18 mpg) city, and 11.6L/100 km (24 mpg) highway and that's with regular gas. I am still recovering after receiving my Esso statement that noted payments of \$50 and \$47.26 in one week for filling a highly-touted German SUV with premium fuel. I may even have to take out a loan.

The Limited is not limited when it comes to standard features and I dare say it is up to Mercedes-Benz standards when it comes to creature comforts and amenities. One of these is the HomeLink garage door/security/gate opener system while the CD with in-dash changer and concert hall sound is the equal of any system offered by anyone. The 10-disc remote CD changer, as fitted to my tester was \$300.

And it is important to note Jeep has not let the significance of its icon status fritter away while trying to keep up with the other ultra-lux SUVs. Jeep markets itself as the granddaddy and leading-edge SUV and they put their claims up for anyone to test as part of what they call Jeep Culture.

Whether it is learning how to 4x4 at Jeep's own training course in Maple, Ont., or one of the annual Jeep Jamborees, owners are encouraged to bring their Jeeps along and see for themselves (with proper supervision) what real four-wheeling is all about. As far as I know Jeep is unique in this regard and it is a credit to their belief in their product.

Whether up to the hubs in mud or slush, the beauty of the Grand Cherokee Limited is the passenger cocoon is so refined, that outward disturbances are there to be passed by, not overcome. This is the crucial difference those opting for sport-cutes or soft-roaders have found out. They are nice on wet or slick roads, but they don't cut the mustard when the conditions turn harsh.

While the Jeep Cherokee Limited may be shoulder-to-shoulder with similar high-buck luxury SUVs in terms of civility, it is still a standout for its ability to provide refined accommodations when the going gets rough.

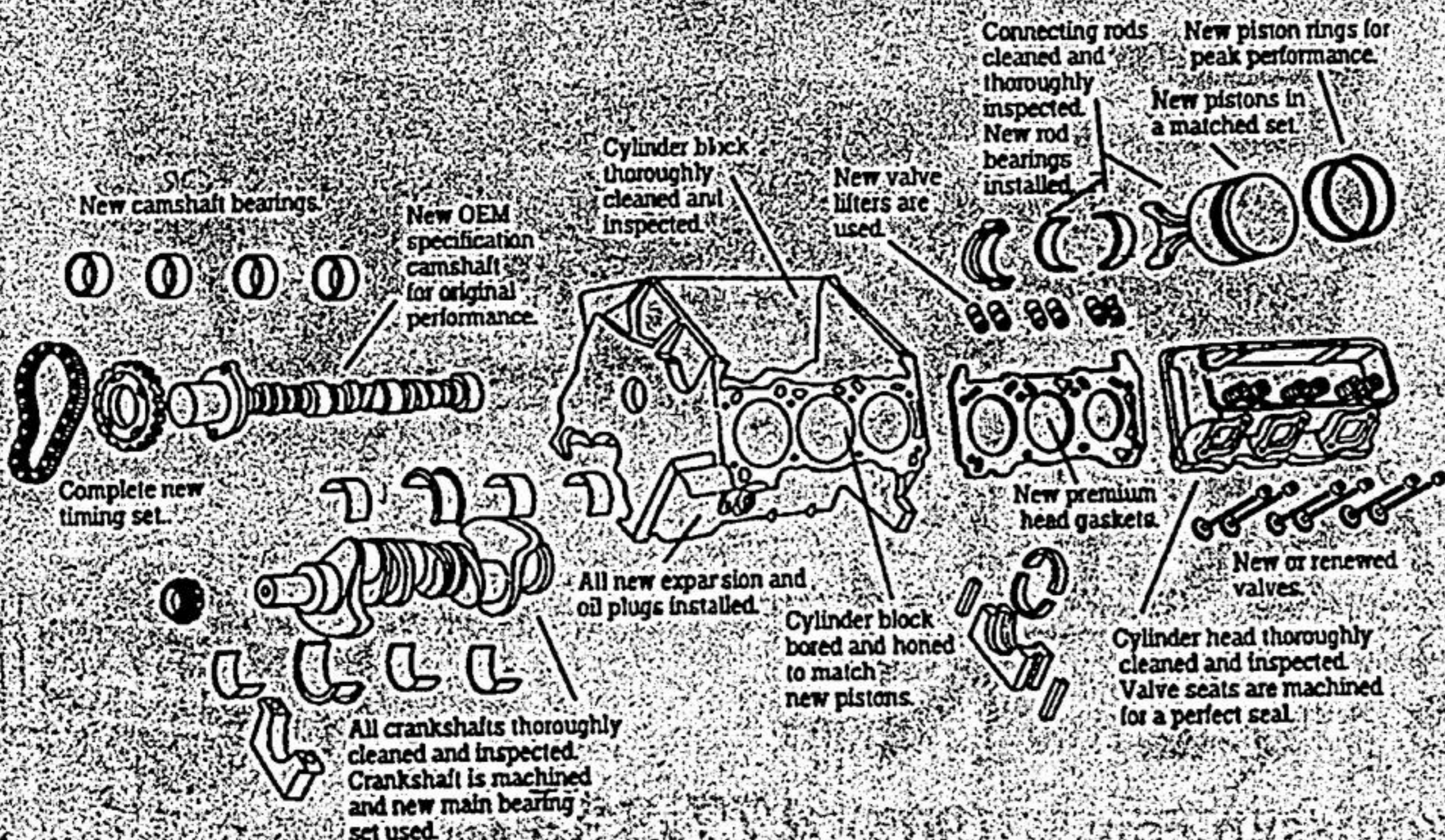
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