

8-30-09
2009 Jeep Wrangler X

OK so I still got sand in my shorts, but I love playing in the desert and the test vehicle this week is the 2009 Jeep Wrangler X. Now for you folks that follow my column weekly you're probably saying, "Hey he did a Jeep in January", your right but it was a loaded Sahara. This time I wanted a base 4X4 Jeep, no frills just a base work horse. Well thanks to my buddy Doug Wilson, Fleet Manager at Rancho Jeep I picked up a base Jeep, fire engine red, six speed manual transmission, I know an automatic transmission is better suited for the desert but hey I like to shift! Then it hit me, I asked for a base model Jeep, the last time I asked for a base model vehicle I got a KIA with no A/C and roll up windows, could this happen again? No, Doug knew it would be real hot out in the back country so this Jeep had an option I couldn't do without, Air Conditioning for a meager price of \$895. I was surprised to see a six speed manual transmission what I expected was a five speed manual. I had a Jeep as a demo (Remember I was a Service Manager for 30 years) for a couple of years, a soft top A/C equipped Wrangler that I had a blast in. I must admit the old Jeep was really a rough ride but today's Wrangler rides as smooth as any vehicle this size and thanks to a 3.8-liter V6 it really moves out. Fuel mileage is decent, 15 miles per gallon in the city and 19 miles per gallon on the open road, but of course your mileage could be better or worse depending on your right foot!

Walking around the Wrangler you will find hard plastic fenders that work well off road and another feature that has improved the Jeeps acceptance is how easy it is to drop the top, back in the day you needed a degree from the erector set toy company but today flip a couple of latches and remove side panels and the top drops and store neatly in the rear. Also while driving at freeway speeds you won't hear the top flapping at all four corners like before in fact other than a mild wind noise it drove almost like a hardtop. The seats were very comfortable for the driver and passenger, as far as the rear seats I didn't try them out but that seat flips and fold down and out of the way.

This Jeep is not a stripped down vehicle at all in fact you get today's technology like Electronic Stability Control, Hydraulic Brake Assist, Traction Control, Electronic Roll Mitigation, four wheel ABS, Hill Start Assist, Next Generation Dana 44 heavy duty rear axles, Next Generation Dana 30 solid front axle and Command-Trac Shift on the Fly 4WD system. At one time Dana axles were an aftermarket item that now are part of this Jeep standard equipment, see the manufacturer really does listen to his and her customer! Oh and instead of canvas doors and windows you get hard doors roll up windows and door locks. You get skid plates standard and a tire pressure monitoring system and the only other option on this Jeep was upgrading the stock 3.21 gears to a great off road ratio, 3.73.

This Jeep based out at \$20,710 and with the A/C and differential up grade you're looking at \$22,405 plus tax and license and if you haven't heard this is the last year for the lifetime powertrain warranty on Chrysler products. Bernie Vassalo, GSM at Rancho is a Jeep fanatic, in fact he has customized his Jeeps by lifting

them so they have better off road capabilities and all covered under warranty, how cool is that and their parts department is full of Jeep goodies, check them out at www.ranchoautogroup.com. Also Vassalo did an on air interview about the Wrangler, you can listen to the complete interview at www.kcbq1170.com or www.davestall.com.