

Contact:

Chrysler Introduces the Jeep® Jeepster Concept - the Best of Both Worlds

January 3, 1998, Auburn Hills, Mich. - A V-8 powered sports car that can cover the Rubicon Trail, the granddaddy of off-road excursions? Chrysler has a design that might just pull it off.

The Rubicon has long been the exclusive domain of Jeep® Wrangler, Cherokee, Grand Cherokee and other Jeep vehicles rich with heritage. The newest concept -- the Jeep Jeepster -- deserves consideration for that list.

"The project began as a Jeep studio designer initiative to create a crossover vehicle," said Mike Moore, Chrysler's chief designer for the interior and exterior of Jeep products. "It was a 'what if' exercise. What if you could have the power and excitement of a sports car coupled with the capability and rugged go-anywhere nature of a Jeep Wrangler.

"As we developed the concept of the 'Jeepster,' we envisioned a life-style vehicle that was as competent and fun to drive on fast, twisty black top roads as it would be on the Rubicon Trail," he said. The unique, adjustable suspension became an essential feature which enabled this extraordinary capability.

"We originally codenamed the vehicle, 'Project Grizzly.' But we decided to search Jeep heritage and settled on Jeepster, from the rare and now quite collectible 1950 Willys Convertible," Moore added.

The Jeepster's electronic, four-wheel-independent, adjustable suspension raises or lowers the vehicle four inches and adjusts the attitude for a more aerodynamic on-road ride. On-road, the vehicle has a ground clearance of 5 and 3/4 inches, which improves ride and handling by lowering the center of gravity and better managing the air flow. Off-road, the vehicle can be adjusted to a 9 and 3/4-inch ground clearance necessary for serious rock climbing. Two switches on the console raise or lower the vehicle.

"This Jeepster has short overhangs, a four-speed automatic, Quadra-Trac II transmission and an aluminum skid plate integrated in the side sill," Moore said. "It's full of interesting, functional details. For example, it's even equipped with front tow loops integrated into the hinge modules of the forward-hinging hood."

This Jeepster does not suffer from a lack of power. The two-plus-two seater comes equipped with the all-new 4.7-liter 16-valve V-8 engine -- the same engine that will debut on the all-new 1999 Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Exterior Design Points

The body, painted an intense red with contrasting deep blue fender flares and side panels, starts with the traditional Jeep grille. Its seven vertical intake slots are flanked by uniquely detailed headlamps, placed high on the steeply raked grille for lighting efficiency. The front of the hood has been lowered to maximize forward visibility. The result is the development of distinctive hood forms tapering back from the headlamps.

Like the Plymouth Prowler, the vehicle is gestured lower in the front and higher at the rear to give forward motion, creating a bold, aggressive, linear look.

The roll cage and soft top cover work in the same way as the Jeep Icon concept car shown in Detroit in 1997. The rear tail lamps, like the headlamps, are round, with similar reflector detailing.

Interior Design Points

The instrument panel has a military radio look that retains images of past Jeep military products. The compact, multi-function heater controls are arranged concentrically for a new look. The navigational system is a re-configurable colored flat screen technology display, which includes a global positioning satellite system, an altimeter, a grade and roll indicator and an exterior temperature sensor.

The seats, cognac in color, are made of the same weather resistant leather as rugged hiking boots. The front seats are structural - with integrated belts - and feature a four-point belt system with a center clasp; the rear seats have a conventional three-point belt system and fold for extra cargo room.

Chassis Design Points

The deeply sculpted, five-spoke, 19-inch wheels, with Goodyear Extended Mobility Tires (EMT), are capable of maintaining their shape, on and off-road, even after a flat, at speeds up to 55 miles per hour for 50 miles. This eliminates the need for a spare, reducing the weight of the vehicle and creating more useful space for luggage. Goodyear EMT tires first appeared on the Plymouth Prowler.

The transmission is a four-speed automatic Quadra-Trac II with 4WD high and low range. A dual exhaust system with three inch diameter pipes shows that this sports car means business, according to Moore. The curb weight is 3,400 pounds.

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