

CAR CHRONICLES —

# Jeeps — Part 2: New Jeeps



BY CAL APPLEBEE  
Special to the Siuslaw News

"It's a Jeep thing — you wouldn't understand" is a slogan that has been around for at least a couple decades now, in an attempt to explain society's fascination with Jeeps that has contributed to it become such a success.

Having now owned 26 different Jeep brand vehicles over the years myself, including ten different "new" Jeeps, even I have a hard time explaining it. I just do it.

Along with the post-war success of the legendary CJ up through the decades, AMC (American Motors Company), the parent company of the marquee at the time, found itself under pressure in the late '70s and early '80s to do something about the safety concerns of the CJ platform from roll-overs.

That attempt was a departure from referring to the popular little vehicle as a "CJ" and coming out with a new model known as the Wrangler in 1987. Technically called the "YJ" platform, it resulted in a more stable chassis and suspension — let's face it — the CJ suspension was designed in the 1940s from components out of the 1930s.

The YJ still had leaf springs at all four corners, but a wider stance and lower center of

gravity. Gone was the V8 option and power only came from a four-banger or the work-horse in-line six cylinder.

This all helped address the safety issues of the earlier CJ versions and sales once again were brisk.

There was at least one area of concern with the new design: the square headlights, which were so prevalent on American designed cars in the 1980s. One time, I spotted a bumper sticker on a CJ-7 that proclaimed "real Jeeps have round headlights", summing up that owner's disdain for the new styling.

Despite that, it became a very popular model and still holds its value today, particularly with serious off-road enthusiasts. Meanwhile, 1995 saw the last production of the

YJ platform Wrangler, and with the production of 632,231 at that time, nearly the same as all WWII jeeps, I'd say it was a success despite its square headlights.

In 1996, it was actually a void production year for Jeep Wrangler, with the introduction of the TJ platform Wrangler starting in 1997.

Finally, gone were the square headlights, as well as leaf springs; coil springs now graced all four corners enhancing handling even more — but the ride was still stiff as a Jeep!

This platform, like its predecessor, was very popular and continues so with off-road users past its production end in 2006. It was followed by the current platform designated the KJ, which now comes in the "Unlimited" four-door model as well.

I've owned one of these and while there were many positive features, such as enhanced towing and cargo capacity, the six-speed manual wore out my

clutch leg in Eugene traffic. Plus, I felt the gear ratios in between the six speeds weren't spaced well.

With that Jeep, plus several of both YJ and TJ models that I've owned and driven over the years, I think my favorite was my first YJ — a 1995 soft-top with half doors. It was extremely fun and had a very comfortable cockpit. I get warm thoughts every time I see one on the road. (and my wife gets nervous).

Hopefully, this edition has provided a little understanding of the "Jeep thing."

By the way, since the last edition on Old Jeeps ran, I have hit that century mark having recently brought home a 1946 CJ2A, a very early civilian production model with features that only appeared in the first two percent of production.

Watch for it to make its debut next summer on a road way near you.

Travel safe!

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