

CAR



Down and dirty

The Jeep Wrangler Unlimited is your ride into the wilderness

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HUMANS are a complicated lot. We talk about empathy, kindness and being civilised, but we all secretly love savages: Tarzan, the werewolf, that fop from *Twilight*. (Okay, maybe not that last one.)

This explains the draw of owning a sport-utility vehicle (SUV). While sports cars refract the glamour of true race cars,



SUVs channel the image of rally-bred 4x4s.

The Jeep Wrangler Unlimited doesn't need to channel anything. It already is such a monster. Its lineage can be traced directly to the US Army Jeeps that helped defeat Hitler.

Like a Neanderthal wearing a suit, the original Jeep — which had chassis updates in 2007 — has been tamed for civilian use.

Regular Wranglers have two-doors and seats. In the case of the Wrangler in this review, "Unlimited" denotes the four-door, five-seat version of this off-road soft-top. "Rubicon" refers to the highest trim level.

On the road, the Wrangler feels not so much like a fish out of water as an amphibian that's gone on safari.

Both front and rear axles are solid (for greater strength) and having enormous, dirt-biased tyres means the Wrangler wobbles and weaves into corners. On the upside, it makes for a surprisingly plush ride.

The 3.8-litre V6 engine produces just 196bhp, but it is optimised for big torque

(315Nm), making the Jeep quick off the line.

The interior is spartan, with a lot of tough black plastic and cargo/passenger space built for utilitarian purposes. You can remove the doors completely for ease of cleaning, for instance.

It's comfortable enough, just don't expect a huge amount of refinement. The canvas soft-top makes it the only four-door, off-road convertible around. The downside is there's lots of road and wind noise.

All this might start making the Wrangler sound a tad unimpressive, but know this: It was built to eat dirt for a living.

Off-road, it transforms into a completely different beast, shrugging off rocks, ruts and roots with ease. It doesn't navigate so much as bludgeon the terrain into submission.

Standard is the "Off-Road Rock-Trac" two-speed, four-wheel drive system and electronic anti-roll bars. In plain English, this means if there's an obstacle you can't cross in the Wrangler, then, chances are, nothing else is going to either.

In the modern, energy-conscious era, there are few arguments for driving a big 4x4. But the Wrangler still makes sense if you demand the ability to navigate harsh

terrain, tow 2,000kg and wade through 50cm of water.

So, if your concept of off-roading is a modern, luxurious SUV, the Wrangler's lack of on-road sophistication probably won't be your cup of tea.

But if you're a true dirt aficionado, you'll know it's better to be a beast than a fop.

Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Rubicon

Ups

- Massive off-road capability
- Built with toughness and utility in mind
- Surprisingly plush ride and quick, too

Downs

- Off-road bias shows on asphalt
- Soft-top means lots of noise
- Regular SUV fans need not apply

Engine: 3,778cc, 24V V6

Power: 196bhp at 5000rpm

Torque: 315Nm at 4000rpm

Gearbox: 4-speed automatic

Performance:

180kmh, 0-100kmh 10.6 seconds (est.)

Price: On application

News tracks

Octavia gets a step-up

Skoda's new Octavia medium-hatchback will debut here at the end of the month. It features two new turbocharged engines and dual-clutch DSG gearboxes. The Octavia 1.4 TSI has a 122bhp 1.4-litre engine and seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox, while the Octavia VRS (below) features a



199bhp 2.0-litre unit with six-speed DSG. Both are also available in hatchback or station wagon form. Initial specs indicate a generous equipment list, which includes adaptive xenon lights, Bluetooth telephony and electronic front seats. Only pricing for the VRS has been released: It is available at an introductory price of \$105,800 (with COE) until Aug 26.

Freed at last

Honda has launched its new small multi-purpose vehicle, the Freed (above right), which is based on the successful Jazz hatchback model. Interior space is maximised and the car has a completely flat floor. A 24cm increase in wheelbase allows space for a third row of seats that can seat three, for a total seating capacity of seven occupants. The car uses the same



118bhp 1.5-litre engine and five-speed automatic gearbox as the Jazz 1.5. Dealer Kah Motor is accepting bookings with first deliveries expected in mid-October. Prices start at \$81,500 with COE.

Harbinger of luxury

This is an official teaser image of Suzuki's new big-sedan, the Kizashi (right, which means "forerunner"). It reaches our shores early next year. While no official specs have

been released, the car will go up against the likes of the Honda Accord and Toyota Camry, marking a new market segment for Suzuki. Currently, only a 2.4-litre engine variant has been confirmed, likely using the same 166bhp in-line four cylinder found in the Suzuki Grand Vitara. Possible features for the Singapore market include all-wheel drive, a continuously-variable transmission, keyless entry, projector headlights and automatic climate control. **DERRYN WONG**

