



# Back to roots?

On a 6 000-kilometre trip into the Kalahari and Namib Desert, Dieter Losskarn tested the new third-generation Jeep Cherokee to see if it's as tough as it used to be – or as 'sissified' as its more recent predecessor. Photos by Elke Losskarn.

I've been looking forward to the new Cherokee. I must admit to being biased as I've owned a couple of Jeeps before and currently drive a 2000 model Cherokee with more than 180 000 kilometres on the clock. You know – the square, tough and durable old-style one, introduced in 1984. It's a classic Jeep with great ground clearance, a short wheelbase, a flat-panned, square-edged styling and was reasonably inexpensive.

Like many other Jeep fans, I wasn't impressed by the second-generation Cherokee launched in 2001. Recently

Jeep brought out the Patriot and Compass for Sandton and Constantia pavement cowboys (and girls) – reason enough to make the Cherokee square and tough as nails again.

I got my first glance at the new mid-size off-roader during the Geneva Motor Show in March and liked the look of it. The familiar seven-slot grille, a Jeep trademark for the last 65 years, was once again paired with squared-off wheel arches. The facial expression resembled that of the Commander, but the new one definitely



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has inherited some of the rugged, first-generation Cherokee genes. It's built on the same platform as the bling on-roader Dodge Nitro, but low-range gearing, a newly developed hill-descent and a solid rear axle give credit to the 4x4 badge of the Cherokee.

The full-size spare wheel has been moved under the back of the vehicle, instead of on the tailgate. It feels more spacious, thanks to a wheelbase that is 45 mm longer. A great innovation is the new fabric sunroof, dubbed Sky Slider (R12 900), which opens the entire length of the roof, ideal for game-viewing in the Kalahari and Namib Desert. So when the vehicle was launched in the Drakensberg, I decided to drive it back to Cape Town, kick-off point for my journey north.

But what felt great cruising around on small country roads at a leisurely pace turned into a bit of a nightmare when the roof was closed and we reached speeds of 120 km/h and more on the highway. The noise was deafening and oncoming trucks on the N2 literally lifted up the roof each time they passed.

Worse, the vehicle was fitted with an optional MyGIG multi-media infotainment system (R14 900), that features built-in navigation, audio, entertainment and communication systems with touch screen or voice commands. At highway speeds, I couldn't enjoy any of the approximately 1600 saved songs, despite nine speakers and 368 watts of amplifier power.

Back in the Mother City, I swapped the Jeep for one without a sunroof for our trip to Namibia. Unfortunately, it came without the MyGIG.

The trip started with some of the heaviest rainfalls the Karoo had experienced in years. Between Touwsrivier and Matjiesfontein, it came down so hard that it felt like driving through a car wash.

North of Sutherland, former dusty tracks had turned into slippery mud-

slides – the first real challenge for the new Cherokee. Thanks to the Selec-Trac 4x4 system, I changed from rear to all-wheel drive without even braking, by just flicking a button in the middle console. Despite sinking into the soft ground, the Jeep pulled through with ease.

Our first overnight stop was at a historic corbelled house on Stuurmansfontein Farm, where owners Piet and Charmaine Botha served us some fantastic gemsbok meat. The house is as it was in the old times, with no electricity, just candles and a gas heater.

The next day in Prieska, the trip odometer showed not quite 600 kilometres. Remembering the 725 kilometre range that Jeep claims for the new 2,8 litre common-rail diesel mated with a five-speed auto box, I decided to fill up in the next village. I almost made it, with just another six kilometres to go.

Great: stranded on a Sunday in the middle of nowhere. After about an hour, I boarded a beaten-up red Passat with two okes in the front and tons of junk in the back. They were going flat-out, with obviously shot shocks, weaving across both lanes. The petrol station in Marydale is closed on a Sunday, the driver told me, but dropped me there anyway. I was very lucky.



Not only did I survive the lift, but the service station owner had come back to fetch something in his office. He even drove me and a five-litre jerry can filled with diesel back to the Jeep.

Our next night was at Tswalu Private Game Reserve, one of the most luxurious lodges in the country and a member of the prestigious Relais & Chateaux group. Rooms, food and service were world-class. The Jeep experienced some nice dune and sand driving there. With ESP off and the massive torque of the oilburner, it managed with ease. An afternoon game drive with a mini-migration of wildebeest completed the safari experience.

A 35-kilometre single, sandy one-way track through the red Kalahari sand dunes snaked all the way to !Xaus Lodge, a private concession inside Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. There I realised what the 'Limited' in the

**ABOVE:** Tet aci tat voloreet, con ent praestrud eriuustio exerostrud eu faci blan henibh ex euguerit nibh et, quis aute vent ullan hent in henit outpat.

**BELOW:** Tet aci tat voloreet, con ent praestrud eriuustio exerostrud eu faci blan henibh ex euguerit nibh et, quis aute vent ullan hent in henit outpat.

**OPPOSITE:** Tet aci tat voloreet, con ent praestrud eriuustio exerostrud eu faci blan henibh ex euguerit nibh et, quis aute vent ullan hent in henit outpat.



## The low-down

### Jeep Cherokee Limited 2,8 CRD

Price: from R299 900 for the Cherokee Sport; from R319 900 for the Cherokee Limited 3,7 I V6; R369 900 for the Limited 2,8 CRD (featured here).

Engine: 2,8 l common-rail 4 cyl. Diesel – 130 kW/177 hp (3,7 l V6 – 151 kW/203 hp)

0–100 km/h: 11,5 (10,5) secs

Top speed: 180 (193) km/h

Consumption/100 km: 11,8 litres (average consumption for the 2,8 CRD during the 6 000 km trip)

Fuel tank: 70 litres

Range: 593 km

Weight: 2520 kg

Approach angle: 38,2°

Departure angle: 30°

Ground clearance: 189/196mm front/rear

Towing capacity: 2 800 kg

For more information: [www.jeep.co.za](http://www.jeep.co.za)

For the same amount of money (R299 900 to R369 900), you could buy:

Jeep Wrangler Sahara Unlimited 2,8 CRD R339 900

VW Tiguan 2,0 TDI R299 900

Honda CR-V 2,4 VSi R312 500

Chevrolet Captiva 3,2 LTZ AT R336 600

Nissan X-Trail 2,5 LE AT R368 100

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Cherokee name stood for. The *middelmannetjie* was quite high, braking the Jeep hard – Limited ground clearance. The 189 mm in the front is ridiculously low for a real Jeep.

Even compact soft SUVs like the VW Tiguan or the new all-mode Nissan Qashqai boast 200 mm. Why did they make it that low? Jeep developers designed a movable front airdam,

resulting in better underbody airflow when driving fast on tarmac, and a much improved approach angle after taking it off.

But I'm sure before the front 38,2-degree approach angle comes into play, the low ground clearance will already have beached the Jeep.

Time to try it out. The private farm track into the upper Fish River Canyon on the property of the Vogelstrausskluff Lodge could be the Namibian version of the famous Rubicon Trail in California. The lodge organises 4x4 day trips into the canyon and I followed their open Land Cruiser game-tracking vehicle.

Just when I thought I'd make it through Namibia without a puncture, the warning light and beep came on and I braked immediately. I was well prepared, carrying two spares, but I only needed one.

The tyre-pressure monitoring system (it should be standard on all SUVs) saved the punctured rubber, which could be repaired easily later. Without the warning, it would have been destroyed.



## footnotes

### Where we stayed

#### \$ Stuurmansfontein Corbelled

**House** Take the R63 and 30 km outside Williston towards Carnarvon, turn off to the left. It's 24 km to the farmhouse and another 6 km to Corbelled House, built around 1850. It's R400 a night for the house, which is big enough for two adults and two kids. Tel 053-382-5900, 082-221-7500 or 072-352-8070, e-mail [stuurmansfontein@telkomsa.net](mailto:stuurmansfontein@telkomsa.net).

#### \$\$\$\$ Tswalu Kalahari Reserve

Among the top lodges in Southern Africa in one of the biggest private game reserves near Kuruman, there are 10 newly decorated natural stone and thatch 'palaces' with open fireplaces. Rates start from R4 900 a person sharing DB&B, including two game drives. Children under 12 stay free. Tel 011-274-2299, e-mail [res@tswalu.com](mailto:res@tswalu.com), web [www.tswalu.com](http://www.tswalu.com).

**\$\$\$\$ !Xaus Lodge** This private concession of the San and Mier people



inside Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park offers 12 wood/canvas chalets overlooking a huge pan and traditional food is served. Rates start from R1 850 a person all inclusive. Tel 021-701-7860, e-mail [info@xauslodge.co.za](mailto:info@xauslodge.co.za), web [www.xauslodge.co.za](http://www.xauslodge.co.za).

**\$\$\$\$ Sossus Dune Lodge** This surprisingly luxurious Namibia Wildlife Resorts lodge inside Sossusvlei has a fantastic view and friendly staff. It's a great spot for photographers as you don't have to leave the park before sunset. Rates start from R2 250 a person sharing DB&B and children stay free. Tel +264-285-7200, e-mail [reservations@nwr.com.na](mailto:reservations@nwr.com.na), web [www.nwr.com.na](http://www.nwr.com.na), or book through Namibia Tourism in Cape Town.

**\$\$\$ Vogelstrausskluff Country Lodge** Turn south between Aus and Seeheim to this gateway to the private part of the magnificent, untouched upper Fish River Canyon. The 4x4 canyon day trip is R1 000 a person

and B&B starts from R740 a person sharing. Tel 021-930-4564, e-mail [reservations@vogelstrausskluff.com](mailto:reservations@vogelstrausskluff.com), web [www.vogelstrausskluff.com](http://www.vogelstrausskluff.com).

**\$\$\$\$ Cañon Lodge** Close to the Fish River Canyon, this lodge boasts one of the best sunset views in Namibia. The new pool area is a dream. B&B is from R725 a person sharing. Tel +264-61-23-0066, cell (after hours) +264-81-129-2424, e-mail [info@gondwana-collection.com](mailto:info@gondwana-collection.com) or web [www.gondwana-collection.com](http://www.gondwana-collection.com).

**\$\$\$ Norotshama River Resort** At Aussenkehr Farm, there are a couple of chalets on the banks of the Orange River and self-drive 4x4 tracks on the property. B&B is from R300 a person sharing. Tel +264-63-297-215, e-mail [norotshama@africaonline.com.na](mailto:norotshama@africaonline.com.na), web [www.norotshamaresort.com](http://www.norotshamaresort.com).

**Namibia Tourist Board** Tel 021-422-3298, e-mail [namibia@saol.com](mailto:namibia@saol.com), web [www.namibiatourism.com.na](http://www.namibiatourism.com.na). ■

Despite the Land Cruiser, our tour guide and farmer Jannie Liebenberg is a die-hard Jeep fan. His brother owns five of them in various conditions and ages. As a kid, Jannie had his first 4x4 lessons in the canyon in a Willys with his dad.

He was adamant, 'You'll never get this vehicle all the way down into the Fish without destroying it.'

I hate not finishing what I've started, but I had to admit that he made sense.

Reluctantly, I left the Cherokee on the rim of the last descent and boarded Jannie's modified Land Cruiser.

It would have been impossible to clear the big loose rocks covering the steep track further down the track in the Cherokee. Coming back up, even the raised Cruiser had problems.

If you want to do the real tough stuff with the new Cherokee, it definitely needs a little bit of pimping. On the Rubicon Trail, you'll find that most of the 4x4s are modified.

At the recent Camp Jeep gathering in the Berg, there were some attractive examples of raised Wranglers and Commanders on display.

In my opinion, the new Cherokee would be stunning in a hardcore version. As soon as I can get hold of one, I'll be back to show Jannie that even after 65 years, you can go anywhere in a Jeep. ■

**Next month:** The awesome looking BMW X6, a fusion between a sports car, SUV and coupé.

## Wheels etc.



### Power-diesel with oomph

Audi's Q7 will change attitudes towards diesel-powered vehicles with its 4,2 litre-V8 TDI 240kW/322hp powerplant with 760Nm of torque. This is how Audi builds winning Le Mans racing cars with oilburners. Its performance is smooth, agile (6,4 sec 0-100km/h) and quick (236km/h) and is almost totally quiet. Sitting inside, you'll never guess you're driving a diesel-powered SUV. Prices for the Q7 4,2 TDI start at R738 500. Want even more? Wait until February 2009 for the upcoming V12 TDI with 500hp and 1 000Nm of torque. Web [www.audi.co.za](http://www.audi.co.za).



### Qashqai goes 4x4

Nissan has introduced the 4x4 version of its successful Qashqai. The only visual difference to the 'normal' one are the 17" rims. The all-mode system is borrowed from the X-Trail. The Tekna version features leather seats and a very agile 2,0 turbo-diesel. This capable mini-SUV sets you back R293 590. Web [www.nissan.co.za](http://www.nissan.co.za).

**TESTED**



### Cutting a dash

Motorcycle fashion is big business and customers have become very discerning. *Getaway* tested Lookwell's Endeavour jacket and trousers on a 2 500-kilometre trip to Mozambique. They boast an impressive array of CE-approved padding and shapers sandwiched in high-impact areas, such as spine, elbows and shoulders. The three-layer system comes with an outer shell of 500D active breathable membrane, a zip-out waterproof membrane and a zip-out thermo isolation lining.

*Getaway* tested the jacket in temperatures varying from -2°C to 32°C, one downpour and a couple of spills for good measure. Interchanging the inner linings is a bit irritating, as snapping one set of looping press studs inside a jacket within a jacket in the wet takes time, especially with cold fingers. The trouser venting could do with some tweaking as at 32°C it felt a bit like a microwave inside. These minor irritations aside, Lookwell's Endeavour is a good product and, at around R5 500 for the jacket and trousers, is significantly less than more established competition and very good value. — Rob House

## Stuck

While in Angola on a fishing trip, our Nissan Patrol got stuck in soft black mud on the way to cast for live bait at low tide. It could only be recovered after two high tides and had to be pulled out by a construction Caterpillar loader.

*Timothy Smith, xxxxx?.*

If you have photographs of a 4x4 getting stuck, e-mail them to [wheels@getaway.co.za](mailto:wheels@getaway.co.za) or post them to Getaway Wheels, PO Box 180, Howard Place, 7450 Cape Town. You could win a Nissan Secure Tech Survival Kit worth R1 000, comprising an Off-Road Tactix manual and DVD, as well as a recovery bag with pull strap, shackles and a pair of gloves. ■





