

# Shifting Gears

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## [Over Hill, Over Dale In the Baby Jeep](#)

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**By Roger Witherspoon**

It was supposed to be spring and, according to legend, a time when the apple trees were full of fluttering white petals waving over a horde of white and pink azaleas flanked by marauding multi-colored bands of wildflowers.

By all accounts, it was supposed to be a great time to drive through a sun-draped Hudson River Valley along winding roads through the Catskills. It should have been a perfect time to put Hiroshima's *One World* in the stereo hard drive, crank up the bass in the boom box built into the rear of the compact SUV and rock and roll all over the Hudson River Valley.

But the climate never got that memo.

So the spring road run came as the temperature dropped into the upper 30s, the wind bolted into the 40 mile per hour zone and the rain – which hadn't

been seen in these parts since January – came down with pent up fury, causing somnolent streams to roll over their banks and cover the roadways and turn packed gravel and dirt roads into gravel and mudways.

In other words, it was a great time to be in a Jeep.

The 18-inch, wide track wheels rolled over water, dirt, mud and rocks with equal aplomb as the Jeep's independent suspension and gas-charged shock absorbers smoothed out any changes in the road surface. And the Compass' four-wheel drive and traction control meant that there was never a hint of loss of control, regardless of what the weather did.

The compass is an interesting addition to the Jeep family of on and off-road vehicles. It is much smaller than the boxy, rugged-looking, go-anywhere Jeep Wrangler, but offers a lot in terms of comfort instead of off-road driving capabilities. It is still a Jeep, however, and can roam through small streams – or large, deeper ones if you spring for the optional “Freedom Drive” off-road package – or get you through all sorts of unpleasant road conditions.

On the outside, the Compass stands just a shade over five feet tall and looks like a smaller version of the Jeep Grand Cherokee with its same trademark, wide-toothed grill, extra-wide stance, sculpted sides, and flat, black, inset door handles.



Under the hood, the Compass has a modest 2.4-liter, four-cylinder aluminum engine producing a modest 172 horsepower and 165 pound-feet of torque. That's not going to turn the Compass into a race car like its 150-mile-

an-hour big brother, the Grand Cherokee SRT-8. But it is more than enough power for a compact like this to stay ahead of traffic. And in locked 4-wheel, low gear it is powerful enough to tow 1,000 pounds and pull the car through sucking mud or deep snow, and roll easily up wet, bumpy, 30-degree slopes.

The Compass is primarily an all purpose car, good for a family or anyone with an active lifestyle who wants enough room to haul either stuff or friends. In that category it competes with the Kia Sportage, GMC Terrain, and Hyundai's Santa Fe and Tucson. It has also been pulling motorists out of small cars like the Toyota Corolla, who are looking for a low-cost vehicle in the \$25,000 range with the space associated with an SUV.

Chrysler put a lot of thought into the interior of the Jeep, which has no hard surfaces. The seats are thickly padded, double-stitched leather. The front seats are manually operated, but fully adjustable and heated. The rear seats are also mobile , and can be slid forward several inches so the back can recline enough for a comfortable nap There is also enough leg and headroom for four average basketball players. The doors are also padded so you don't come away from a bumpy, off-road trek with an armful of bruises.

For entertainment, the Compass comes with a Boston Acoustic sound system with nine speakers, including a hinged pair built into the trunk door which can swing down and out to provide more than enough sound for the average block party. There is a 40-gigabyte hard drive to collect a few thousand of your favorite jams, as well as Sirius satellite radio and connections for a USB drive, iPod, or MP3 player. There is a CD player and Bluetooth – the latter will let you play music directly from your Smartphone.



As a thoughtful addition, the Compass has a 115-volt outlet with a

standard electric plug – which is great for running a game or powering a laptop – in addition to the standard 12-volt power port used to recharge phones. There is also soft lighting embedded in the cup holders, making them easy to find in the dark.

On an off note the Compass – and the entire Jeep line – offer a Garmin navigation system with a built in, 7-inch color screen. Garmin has its admirers, and its quirks. If you set the system at 200 feet so street names are legible on the screen, the Garmin will abruptly change to setting to a half mile or more shortly after you enter a highway. The longer view may be fine in general on a highway – but it is too long to be able to navigate a complex exit interchange. Spokesmen for Garmin said in a statement that the automatic zoom feature is intended to save the driver the trouble of adjusting the map. They did not explain why they felt the built-in robot should tell the driver what settings to use instead of the other way around.

Garmin can also retrace previous trips with a feature called “bread crumbs.” That might be fine for keeping tabs on what the teenage driver in your house was *really* doing last night. But it does seem a bit creepy and begs the question of *why* is the robot keeping tabs on the driver and *where* is that information going?

Chrysler might want to reconsider installing a smart system which could become an expert witness in messy family court proceedings. Or the auto maker could give buyers an option on the types of navigation systems sold. Chrysler’s Fiats use the Tom-Tom system which, like Garmin, was originally designed as a hand-held unit, while their Chrysler and Dodge lines use more traditional, technologically flexible, satellite-based navigation systems designed just for cars.

Jim Morrison, the director of Jeep product marketing, said “the Garmin is a lower cost navigation system for us. The one in the Compass costs \$685. There is a premium system, the traditional kind rather than the Garmin, but

it costs \$465 more and is available with the Jeep Grand Cherokee.

“The customers for the Compass and Jeep Patriot are more tuned into affordability, and don’t typically get a fully loaded car. So we only offer the Garmin for those vehicles.”

But that’s a minor complaint about a go-anywhere vehicle which should go far in an evolving, small car market.



### **Jeep Compass Ltd 4×4**

**MSRP:** **\$28,910**

**EPA Mileage:** **21 MPG City** **26 MPG Highway**

**Towing Capacity:** **1,000 Pounds**

**Performance / Safety:**

2.4-Liter, DOHC, 4-cylinder, aluminum engine producing 172 horsepower and 165 pound-feet of torque; 4-wheel drive; 18-inch painted aluminum wheels; rack and pinion steering; independent MacPherson strut front suspension; multi-link independent rear suspension; anti-lock brake system; stability and traction controls; fog lights; halogen headlamps; front and side curtain airbags.

**Interior / Comfort:**

AM/FM/Sirius satellite radio; Boston Acoustic sound system with 40 GB hard drive, 9 speakers and 2 adjustable liftgate speakers; USB, MP3 and iPod ports; Bluetooth; CD player; leather seats; heated front seats; leather steering wheel with fingertip audio, phone and cruise controls; fold flat or reclining rear seats, with 60/40 split; 12-volt and 115-volt power outlets; Garmin navigation system with touch screen.