



HERE 4 MOTORING JEEP RENEGADE 'NIGHT EAGLE'

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The Jeep was made for battle. In 1940, the looming U.S. involvement in World War II pushed the army to appeal for a new vehicle appropriate for war. And so the Jeep - a work-in-progress vehicle - relentlessly evolving on its open patent, tailoring to shifting demands of combat, was produced - and sent overseas to the hostilities.

The Jeep name itself is infused with folklore, but the label is most likely derived from GP, or General Purpose, which may have been the initial moniker of the military-design vehicle.

Indisputable, however, is Jeep's far-reaching saga. It's quite literally a narrative of movement: U.S. soldiers across European borders during World War II; women working on Jeep assembly lines, President Roosevelt sitting in a Jeep in front of lines of black American soldiers.

Fast forward seven decades and, on the eve of the 75th anniversary of the first Jeep, I was invited to Sicily to sample Jeep as it is now – and as it will be. The line-up of Jeep concept cars being showcased at the company's 'You Don't Drive it, You Live it' Italian event perfectly underlined the brand's natural synergy with customisation, and the desire for personalisation that the brand inspires.

Vehicles were on hand for us to drool over and try out around the Italian island, which, by the way, is home to Europe's highest active volcano, Mount Etna. The smoke pouring from the top of the angry volcano seemed to add to the drama of the Jeep models. They demonstrated how Jeep can meet the requests of customers looking for a unique look, combined with the legendary capabilities of the American brand.

Hero of the firm's extreme aesthetic treatment is, perhaps, the Renegade. Launched in September 2014, the model has expanded the Jeep global vehicle line-up massively. By entering the growing small sport-utility vehicle (SUV) segment, while staying true to the fun-and-freedom lifestyle Jeep is known for, the Renegade delivers something special. It offers a blend of best-in-class off-road capability, open-air freedom and convenience.

The result is an efficient vehicle offered to attract an adventurous customer to the Jeep marque. Taking it up a level is the new 'Night Eagle' special edition. Designed to enhance the bold design of the Renegade, it is based on the Longitude mid-range trim. It features black styling cues with satin-finished grey elements - such as the 'Jeep' badge on the front grille, the fog light frames, the roof bars and the dedicated badge, combined with exclusive 17" black alloy rims.

What's more, this special edition introduces a new matte paintwork, appropriately named Volcano Sand, which was on the model I drove. It complements the other four available colours: Carbon Black, Alpine White, Glacier Silver and Solar Yellow. The Volcano Sand-liveried Renegade Night Eagle sports a 2.0 diesel 140 engine, combined with a six speed manual transmission and Active Drive 4x4 system. On the inside, a leather steering wheel, exclusive fabric seats with electric lumbar adjustment on the driver's seat, UConnect with five inch screen, manual climate control system, cruise control and rear parking sensors make for a highly comfortable and technological ambience.

There is an instant charm to the Renegade's driving behaviour. Thanks to light pedals and its high driving position, from where you can see the swollen American-style bonnet, the Jeep feels authoritative and yet user-friendly. Over normal bumps the ride is slightly quivery and it hardly ever settles, but such a criticism could be directed at any contender in the class. The engine pulls vigorously, although it becomes harsh beyond 3,000rpm. However, this doesn't matter, because it's a bona fide resilient off-roader first and foremost, and so sounding tough is part of the appeal. Undeniably, the Renegade is the most capable small SUV on the rough stuff.

It's also a top family motor because the seats are wide and there is ample room for four people. Additionally, the Renegade has a far more appealing character than most cars of its ilk. What's more, it sports a stout interior design and wide-opening doors that allow good space for fitting child seats.

It is expected that a limited number of Night Eagle models will be produced in 2016, so if you're interested, visit your local Jeep dealer quickly. The Renegade Night Eagle can be specified with a 2.0 Multijet (120 HP or 140 HP) lump; a 1.6 Multijet 120 HP power unit or a 1.4 MultiAir 140 HP engine, depending on the market.