

2008 JEEP LIBERTY SPORT



Through a strange turn of events, the new generation of the Liberty is based on the Dodge Nitro, which rests on a modified platform of the previous generation of the Liberty. The new Jeep is now a more imposing vehicle but still smaller than the Nitro. For the time being, the only available engine is a 3.7-litre V6. The Liberty is offered as a four-wheel drive in Sport, North Edition and Limited trims.

Interior and cargo area

Since the top edge of the roof is low, people of average height or more must bend quite far over to get inside. The doorsills are wide, and it is easy to get dirty on the way in and out. The seats are very comfortable, though some people may find them a bit firm. There is no adjustable lumbar support, and side support is average. The seat levers are hard to reach when the door is closed. The driving position would be better, especially for people of or above average height, if the seat could be lowered more. Headroom for tall individuals is good, but legroom is not all that generous. And with the manual transmission, there is even less room for the driver to slide their right foot over after releasing the clutch pedal. The passenger-side seatback folds down to make room for long items.

The rear bench can seat just two; the transmission tunnel, with its cup holders, takes up all the foot room in the middle. Seating comfort is good, and each section of the 60/40-split seatback reclines to several different angles. The seatback folds flat to the floor. Headroom and legroom are adequate.

Cargo capacity is average when the rear seatback is up and really becomes interesting when it is folded. The tailgate does not lift high enough to clear the head of a tall person. There are no anchor points for a vertical net.

Convenience and safety features

The cabin is very well finished in materials of adequate quality. Sound isolation is deficient, particularly for engine noise. In models with the Sky Slider canvas sunroof, you often have the impression that a window or the roof itself is open, especially when driving under an overpass or in a tunnel. There are numerous storage spaces.

Displays and controls are well laid out, except for the ventilation system controls, which are too low. Everything is lighted at night except the glove compartment and outside mirror controls. The heating system is efficient and offers several modulation possibilities, which is always appreciated. The rear wiper has only an intermittent cycle, and it leaves a large area on the left side of the window dirty.

The roof rails are flush against the roof, which makes it impossible to tie down items without side bars. Even with side bars, items cannot be solidly secured because there are no holes in the longitudinal rails.

Safety-wise, the Liberty comes equipped with two front and two curtain airbags, four head restraints, four-wheel antilock disc brakes, and stability control. Visibility is hampered by the width of the A-pillars in front and the two head restraints in the back, and it is hard to judge distances when backing up. The headlights lack brightness somewhat in the low-beam position.

In U.S. government crash tests, the Liberty obtained five stars out of five for front-occupant protection in a frontal impact and for all occupants in a side crash. It earned three stars for rollover resistance. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety awarded the Liberty a Good rating, its highest, for driver protection in a frontal offset impact, and a Marginal rating, its second lowest, for all-occupant protection in a side crash. The Liberty received a Poor rating, IIHS's lowest, for rear-impact protection.

Engine and transmission

The venerable 3.7-litre V6 puts out 210 horsepower and 235 pound-feet of torque. Acceleration and pickup are adequate, but no more. The engine is almost always noisy and seems a bit overwhelmed, though less so than with the automatic transmission. With a fuel economy of 15 L/100 km and a 74-litre fuel tank, autonomy is somewhat limited. Fortunately, this engine meets Ultra Low Emissions Vehicle II standards.

The six-speed manual gearbox is a bit stiff and requires more shift effort than most. Throws are quite precise, and the transmission is well geared. A practical hill start assist feature holds brake pressure for around two seconds after the brakes are released to facilitate starts on a climb. The electric transfer case is very easy to use, with a choice of two-wheel drive, HIGH four-wheel drive, and a LOW four-wheel drive mode that allows the Liberty to handle very rugged trails.

On the road

The new suspension, independent front rigid rear axle, is firm but with a dash of suppleness that ensures a generally comfortable ride without harsh reactions. Evidently, some bumps come through as a well-felt bounce, but no more. Road-hold is fully adequate for this type of vehicle as long as the road surface is smooth; otherwise, the rear-end tends to want to hop out of line. The Liberty's road compartment is not as refined as that of several of its competitors.

The power steering is well balanced, stable, quite precise and relatively quick. It transmits little in the way of road sensation. The turning radius is short. Braking is powerful and resists well to fade.

Inspection

At a CAA-Quebec technical inspection centre, we noted that the Liberty rests on a sturdy platform that has no anticorrosion protection. There are numerous openings in the front grille and bumper where debris can get through and damage the power steering cooler and air-conditioner condenser. The overhead camshafts are chain driven.

Conclusion

The new Liberty maintains its off-road capability on difficult trails while offering more passenger comfort. However, the cost of this off-road ability is a more rustic road compartment, and relatively poor fuel economy because of the weight of the vehicle's sturdy structure. Hopefully, Chrysler will soon offer more engine choices, including a diesel.

POS: comfortable seats, short turning radius, roadability, sturdy structure, towing capacity, off-road capability

CONS: access for people of average height and over, room for four passengers only, noisy engine, visibility, numerous openings under front grille and bumper, fuel economy

2008 JEEP LIBERTY

Engine: 12-valve, 3.7-litre V6

Horsepower: 210 hp at 5,200 rpm

Torque: 235 lb-ft at 4,000 rpm

Transmission: 6-speed manual; 4-speed automatic

Suspension: independent/live axle

Brakes: disc/disc

Wheelbase: 269.5 cm

Length: 449.3 cm

Width: 183.1 cm (with mirrors)

Height: 178.1 cm

Weight: 1,904 to 1,936 kg

Tires: P225/75R16; P235/70R16; P235/65R17; P235/60R18

Maximum towing capacity: 2,268 kg

Airbags: dual front and two curtain airbags

Fuel consumption with manual transmission:

Natural Resources Canada rating:

City: 13.4 L/100 km (21mpg)

Highway: 9.2 L/100 km (31 mpg)

Test result: 15 L/100 km (19 mpg)

Test temperature: -26°C to -6°C

Fuel tank capacity: 74 litres

Fuel requirement: regular grade gasoline

Acceleration:

0–100 km/h: 10.1 seconds

60–100 km/h: 6.1 seconds

Competition: Ford Escape, Honda CR-V, Hyundai Santa Fe, Mazda Tribute, Mitsubishi Outlander, Nissan Xterra, Saturn Vue, Subaru Forester, Suzuki Grand Vitara, Toyota RAV4

Warranty:

- Full basic coverage: 3 years/60,000 km
- Powertrain: 5 years/100,000 km
- Surface corrosion: 3 years/unlimited km
- Perforation damage: 5 years/160 000 km
- Emissions control system: 3 years/60,000 km (full coverage); 8 years/130,000 km (catalytic converter, electronic control module)

Factory replacement parts:

- Rear bumper: \$432
- Front brake disc: \$87
- Brake pads: \$223
- Muffler: \$412
- Front fender: \$165

Average insurance premium (Quebec City, replacement cost endorsement, claim-free insurance record, male or female driver 30 to 40 years old): \$953 to \$1,120

Price according to trim level:

- Sport: \$27,695
- North Edition: \$28,645
- Limited: \$32,795

Main options:

- Automatic transmission: \$1,120
- Sunroof: \$1,075
- Sky Slider full open roof: \$1,525
- Skid plate group: \$175 (Limited: \$240)
- Trailer tow group: \$600 (Limited: \$550)

Price as tested: \$30,920

Freight and preparation: \$1,300

Dealers: Quebec: 157 Canada: 595

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