

History of America's Open Top Short Wheelbase Vehicle



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Sensing the need for a new four wheel drive reconnaissance vehicle to take the United States into battle, the US Army contacted 135 companies in a request to build a working prototype before World War II. Only two companies responded, American Bantam Car Company and Willys. Willys needed more time to engineer their design, so did not have a working prototype. The American Bantam Car Company had a design ready the next day and costing was complete the following day. The American Bantam entry was well liked by the Army, but fell short on the power requirements. Willys and Ford were asked to submit changes to the design to bring it up to par and to reduce manufacturing cost. Willys had an ace in the hole with their reliable "L" head "Go Devil" 4 cylinder engine. The final design was submitted by Willys and was approved for manufacture. Ford was asked to supplement the needed units by being a secondary manufacturer of the Willys design. The Ford models had parts marked with an "F" including bolt heads. As a concession to manufacturing cost, Ford changed the Willys slatted grille design to a stamped grille with 9 slots after which Willys followed suit. Production began August 1, 1941 and in all, 670,000 Willys MBs and Ford GPWs were manufactured for the War Department.

Following its successes in World War II, Willys-Overland decided to take their war-horse to the public in the form of the CJ or "Civilian Jeep". The first model was the CJ-1 which

was purely an internal prototype. Next was the CJ-2 or AgriJeep which was a limited production prototype not available for the public. Only 45 of these were produced. Successful testing of the CJ-2 led to the CJ-2A, which was released to the public in 1945. This model was almost identical to the MB minus the military items such as blackout lighting and field tools. To facilitate the new larger headlights, Willys had to remove two slats from the grille. This led to what would become the trademark JEEP 7 slot grille. Most of the other parts on the CJ-2A were interchangeable with the MB and during a few strikes, vehicles were completed by using surplus MB parts to pick up the slack. In all, over 214,000 CJ-2As were produced between 1945 and 1949.

In 1949, Willys-Overland released the CJ-3A. It featured the new one piece vented windshield, bottom mounted windshield wipers and a new beefed up suspension. Slight changes were made to the body and the driver's seat was moved to allow more leg room. Starting in 1951, a power take off or PTO was fitted to allow the Jeep to be more handy on the farm, to which the majority were sold. Between 1949 and 1953, nearly 132,000 CJ-3As were produced. In 1953, the CJ-3B replaced the CJ-3A and Kaiser bought out Willys. The CJ-3B was set to receive the new Willys Hurricane "L" head 4 cylinder, which required the designers to raise the grille and hood to accommodate the new power plant. The M606 was the militarized version of the CJ-3B. The CJ-3B was produced until 1968 with 196,000 produced.

Beginning in 1954, Willys released the CJ-5. The CJ-5 saw a totally new body design including curved fenders and a sleeker body with stamped features. The CJ-5 saw many changes over its lifetime even though it still carried the same model name. In 1964, the Dauntless V6 was introduced. It was a design borrowed from Buick. In 1970, the Jeep brand was sold to American Motors Com-

pany. In 1971, the fuel tank of the CJ-5 was relocated from under the driver's seat to the rear chassis area. In 1972, the AMC 304 V8 became available which necessitated the wheelbase to be stretched 3 inches and the hood and fenders were stretched 5 inches. In 1976, the CJ-5 chassis went from an open channel design to the boxed channel front design. The windshield was raked more for aerodynamics and the body became sleeker and more rounded. Between 1954 and 1983 over 603,000 CJ-5s were produced.

In 1955, the CJ-6 was introduced. The CJ-6 was a 20" stretched version of the CJ-5. The CJ-6 was never popular in the United States, so only a little over 50,000 units were made before it was phased out in 1975. In later years, demand has increased for this vehicle, now considered a rarity.



Starting in 1976, the CJ-7 was released to the public. It was 10 inch longer version of the CJ-5 with noticeably larger door openings without the reverse curve openings of the CJ-5. It featured a wider rear chassis section and rear suspension set wider on the axles for better stability. The CJ-7 offered for the first time an optional fiberglass hardtop and factory steel doors. Between 1976 and 1986 over 379,000 were produced.

From 1981 to 1986, the CJ-8 was produced. It was a stretched version of the CJ-7. It is commonly referred to as the "Scrambler" based on an appearance package available at the time. There were approximately 27,000 produced.

1987 saw the purchase of the Jeep brand by Chrysler. It also saw the introduction of the new Wrangler branded vehicle. Similar in many