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A Grand Ride For The Great Divide - 2008 Jeep Grand Cherokee Overland

Posted in [Project Vehicles](#) on August 1, 2011

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[Douglas McColloch](#)

Photographers: Sean P. Holman

One of the most common gripes we hear among grizzled old-timers involves late-model IFS rigs: “You can’t lift ’em, they’re too damn complicated, and nobody makes parts for them anyway.” Enter Russ Livingston, a veteran wheeler with decades of experience on the fabled high-altitude trails of Colorado’s San Juan range, and his 2008 Grand Cherokee Overland, dubbed the “Black Bear Edition” in honor of the legendary Ouray-to-Telluride shelf road that served as the inspiration for his buildup. Livingston, who’s been wrenching and torching on Jeeps since his youth, parlayed his fabrication skills a few years ago into founding his own company: 4xGuard, a manufacturer of trick body-armor components for late-model Jeep WKs and Commander XKs. Livingston’s Grand is a tastefully rendered yet super-functional example of a late-model IFS four-wheel drive that’s been treated to many trick modifications that improve traction, elevation, and overall trailability without having to bust the budget on a lot of complex customizing.



So yes, when it comes to late-model Grands and Commanders, you can lift 'em, and people do make parts for them. You might not quite be able to stuff a set of 44s beneath a WK, but as the Black Bear Edition proves, even if you can't always get what you want, you just might find you get what you really need.

The most noticeable of the many 4xGuard upgrades on Livingston's WK is the Matrix brush guard. A bolt-on modular grille-guard system that comes in four basic configurations, it features outboard light-mounting tabs so the KC driving lights shown here won't impede airflow to the radiator, and optional lower mounting points can accommodate massive D-ring shackles. Another version of the bumper (pictured) allows for mounting a portable winch using a 2-inch front receiver hitch that ties into the frame and crossmember using a "rail-to-rail" backing plate secured with eight Grade-8 bolts. In other words, this thing is solid—and its integration with the Jeep's existing bumper and front fascia is seamless in execution.



For those moments when forward progress cease, a portable Smittybilt XRC8 Comp Series 8,000-pound winch, equipped with synthetic line and housed in an owner-fabbed cradle, can be plugged into the Matrix front receiver hitch. While lugging a 64-pound winch back and forth from vehicle to receiver may seem like a hassle to some, the virtue of this setup is that the winch is only mounted when it's actually needed, which keeps the front suspension and cooling components happy, and the Jeep's approach angle optimized, the other 99 percent of the time.



One of the nicer things that Daimler bequeathed to Chrysler during their often-turbulent partnership was the Mercedes-sourced 3.0L turbodiesel V-6 that resides under the hood of Livingston's WK. The common-rail, piezo-injected engine produces its peak 376 lb-ft of torque to power the stock W5J400 five-speed automatic at a very-trail-friendly 1,600 rpm, and the Bully Dog Rapid Power module at left can add up to 40 additional lb-ft. if needed. To keep things quiet under the hood, the plastic engine shroud houses a layer of sound-deadening material. Note also the hookup cable for the portable Smittybilt winch.



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While this is a really nice-looking rig, all of its upgrades were made with function first in mind, and this side view shows a few more purpose-added improvements: The 4xGuard 10-gauge steel plate side guards protect the

WK's rocker panels; a Fire Stik CB antenna (in a custom 4xGuard antenna mount) keeps Livingston in touch with his trailmates; the Aires Automotive rear taillight grilles protect against stray branches; and the Rola Vortex luggage rack houses two forward-facing KC rectangular long-range lights in predrilled mounting locations.



The Superlift front suspension system retains the factory coilovers and leaves the upper control arms in their stock location, achieving some four inches of lift via the addition of extended coil towers, drop brackets for the front diff and lower control arms, and bigger, replacement steering knuckles to compensate for the increase in arm spacing. It's a clean installation, and it allows room in the wheelwells for 295/70R17 (33.2-inch) Nitto Trail Grappler M/Ts mounted on 17x8.5 AEV Pintler alloy rims.



The rear suspension achieves four inches of lift via longer-than-stock coil springs, drop brackets for the upper and lower link arms, and a single Bilstein 5160 remote-reservoir shock at each corner dampens the ride. The WK's electronic stability control is not affected by the lift, thanks to an AEV-sourced plug-in geometry recalibration module that relays the proper level of steering input to the ECU, and which automatically recalibrates the speedometer to account for larger tires.



The 4xGuard front-end guard is made from 7-gauge plate steel and provides protection for vulnerable front suspension and cooling components.



The rear guard protects the WK's plastic rear fascia and exposed receiver hitch from rock attacks while additionally incorporating mounting points for a pair of D-ring shackles. Note the presence of the 4xGuard diff guard, which is bent and welded from 1/4-inch zinc-plated steel and designed specifically for Jeep WK/XK (Commander) differentials.



Grand Cherokees, like all Jeeps, come fairly well skidplated from the factory, but the catalytic converter is a potential weak link as it's critically exposed to rocks, logs and other nasty things. This bolt-on 4xGuard belly guard shields the cat against hostile forces on the trail, providing an added measure of protection for the exhaust system when the WK is crawling over sharp and menacing rock ledges. It looks good, too.



The Details

General

Owner/Hometown: Russ Livingston, Arvada, CO

Vehicle/Model: 2008 Jeep Grand Cherokee Overland

Estimated value: N/A

Engine

Type: 3.0L Mercedes turbodiesel V-6

Aspiration: Common-rail piezo injection, Bully Dog performance module

Max output, hp/torque, lb-ft: 250/416 (est.)

Drivetrain

Transmission: W5J400 5-spd automatic

Transfer case: NV245 (Quadra-Drive II)

Suspension

Front: Factory coilovers/control arms; 4-in Superlift coil towers, drop brackets, knuckles, sway bar links

Rear: 4-in Superlift coils, dropped link arms; Bilstein shocks

Axles/Differentials

Front: C-200-F 7.9-in IFS, OE electronic limited-slip

Rear: C-213-0R 8.3-in solid axle, OE electronic limited-slip

Ring and pinion: 3.73:1

Wheels/Tires

Wheels: 17x8.5 AEV Pintler alloy

Tires: 295/70R17 Nitto Trail Grappler M/T

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