

## Jeep® Wrangler takes a fling in the Highlands

Words: Andrew Charman Pictures: Pete Robain

I have him now, in the centre of the finder, and just need to take the shot. I muse on the magnificence of this beast, his dangerous-looking antlers shining in the spring sun, as my finger gently squeezes the trigger...

"That should be a good picture," Donald, my guide says, as I put down my camera with its long telephoto lens and take in the scenery. The moorland panorama stretches many miles, and I am enjoying it thanks to the all-terrain ability of the new Jeep Wrangler – Donald and I are standing in the back of it to get the shot.

Deer stalking forms a major part of the economy in the glens of central Scotland. While some actual hunting still goes on, as well as an annual cull that's necessary to regulate deer numbers and protect sheep-grazing land, these days most of those who join the 'deer safaris' do so merely to admire

the beasts from a distance and photograph the majestic animals.

But, deer-stalking safaris are not for the faint-hearted. There are 1000 or more deer – a mix of the regal red deer, which like the moorland, and the more familiar roe, which prefer the woods – and they graze across 200 square kilometres. They are afraid of humans and finding them can involve a full day's trek through beautiful yet bleak terrain in weather that changes dramatically with little warning.

"We get four seasons in a day here," says Donald with a grin.

There is an easier and far drier alternative to walking – using the Wrangler. The new model may be clothed in the most stylish shell yet, but it's still a Jeep and there's no question about the all-terrain ability of Jeep's original 4x4. Many miles of heavily-rutted mud, stiff gradients and deep watersplashes en route

to our location have proven no challenge at all to the Wrangler's off-road package, which is even better than before. Not only are the mechanics improved, the Sahara and Unlimited versions boast a two-speed transfer case and Brake Lock Differentials while the top Rubicon model adds electric front and rear axle lockers. The basics have been enhanced too – larger wheels and tyres, a higher ground clearance and improved approach and departure angles ensure this really is a go-anywhere vehicle.

More surprising is Donald's revelation that it's easier to get close to the deer in the Wrangler. "When stalking a deer on foot, keeping hidden and silent is vital," he explains. "The deer associate people with the sound of a shot – to them we are danger. If they catch sight of you, or sniff your scent, they will run a long way. But they don't associate a vehicle





Andrew Charman (right) and Andy Reed from Highland Adventure Safaris scan the hillside for elusive red and roe deer

with humans. They think it strange, but become used to it and, as long as you don't step out, you can get really close to them."

The Wrangler's new Freedom Top™ roof makes it the perfect deer-stalking vehicle. This composite three-piece unit has separate left- and right-front passenger roof panels that can be removed and stored in the vehicle, together with a rear section that can also be removed. This latest Wrangler is also the first to be offered with four doors. Combined with other features, such as the tough rear floor that's perfect for standing on, the Wrangler can become a mobile grandstand for viewing the deer and following them easily, wherever they decide to go in this vast wilderness.

Of course, deer are not the only animals to spot in central Scotland – the moorland is teeming with wildlife. One of my favourites is the mountain hare, which turns white in winter to match its surroundings. It's possible to spot them white-coated in late spring on the highest peaks, which still bear traces of snow.

Many people come to see the area's magnificent birds. It's possible to spot grouse, ptarmigan, increasing numbers of osprey and, of course, the swooping golden eagle. In fact, you're far more likely to see spectacular wildlife than other people, which is remarkable

## The Wrangler's new Freedom Top™ roof makes it the perfect deer-stalking vehicle... it has three separate panels that can be removed and stored inside



because this wilderness lies only 90 minutes from the busy city of Glasgow.

On the journey to the moorland, driving along a combination of motorways and twisty B roads, I had made another surprising discovery. One of the new Wrangler's most significant improvements is in its on-road prowess.

The Wrangler might be a direct descendent of that original Jeep from more than 65 years ago, but it has moved with the times. Chassis revisions, including a much stiffer frame combined with softer front springs, provide smooth progress on the tarmac. And it's swift too, whether you opt for the 2.8-litre diesel engine or the Rubicon's 3.8-litre petrol unit.

I admit that the Wrangler's improved road manners that elevate it to true everyday family car status do not surprise me – they're a sign of the times. But a vehicle that the Red deer approve of, well that is a surprise...

Thanks to Highland Adventure Safaris, [www.highlandadventuresafaris.co.uk](http://www.highlandadventuresafaris.co.uk)