

FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1981 Jeep CJ-7 Restoration Guide

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RESTORATION ESSENTIALS

1981 Jeep CJ-7

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

RestorationEssentials single-year guide · Model year 1981 only · CJ-7 (AMC era),
93.4-inch wheelbase

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1981 only. This guide does not cover other years except where differences from 1981 are explicitly noted.
- **Engine:** GM 151 cu in I4 'Iron Duke' — 82 hp at 4,000 rpm; 125 lb-ft at 2,600 rpm
- **Engine:** 258 cu in I6 — ~110 hp class, two-barrel
- **Engine:** 304 cu in V8 — 125 hp; 220 lb-ft (1980–81, range guide)
- **Transmission:** SR-4 / T-176 manuals; TF999 / TF904 automatics. After 1981 the T-4 and T-5 join (JeepTech) — they are not 1981 specification.
- **Transfer case:** Dana 300.
- **Axles:** Dana 30 front; AMC 20 rear. Track width: narrow-track at the start of the year, widening toward the end of the year (JP Magazine — see the corrections file on the 1981/1982 wide-track conflict).

1. Manufacturer history: Jeep

AMC's CJ-7 arrived for 1976 as the CJ for people who used doors: a 93.4-inch wheelbase against the CJ-5's 83.5, squared door openings, an available molded hardtop and steel doors, and — a first for the CJ line — an optional automatic transmission, made possible by the extra length. The frame's rear section stepped outward so springs and dampers sat closer to the wheels — the stability fix the CJ-5 never got. AMC built 379,299 CJ-7s over eleven model years. The CJ-7 is simultaneously the most restorable CJ (parts, knowledge, and numbers) and the most modified vehicle in this guide series — which makes documentation, not scarcity, the restorer's core skill.

2. Model history: where 1981 sits

The CJ-7 ran 1976–86 in three drivetrain eras: 1976–79 (Dana 20, heavy-duty manuals, Quadra-Trac), 1980–81 (Dana 300 arrives, SR-4 era, the 304's last years), and 1982–86 (wide-track axles, five-speed, four-cylinder base). Trim ran Renegade throughout, Golden Eagle in the V8 era, Laredo from 1980, Limited for 1982–83, and the numbered 1982 Jamboree. This guide covers one year only; the year-change register in Section 3 states exactly what this year changed, what it kept, and what it ended.

3. What is unique about the 1981 Jeep CJ-7

- The 17-character standardized VIN replaces the 13-character Jeep serial — the decoding system itself changes this year, and the two charts must never be mixed.
- Final year of the 304 V8: after 1981, factory CJ-7s are sixes and fours only (JeepTech). A '1982 304 CJ-7' is a repower, however it is presented.
- Door handles change: barn-door-style handles are replaced by lever (paddle) handles (JP Magazine) — a visible 1981 tell.
- Locking hubs change to the five-bolt Warn pattern used 1981–86 (JeepTech Dana 30 reference).
- Track width grows toward the end of the model year (JP Magazine) — measure the individual Jeep; see the register note.

Year-change register — 1981 vs. the year before:

- NEW: 17-character VIN system; lever door handles; five-bolt locking hubs.
- FINAL YEAR: 304 V8; 13-character serial ends (replaced, above).
- CHANGED LATE-YEAR: track width increase begins (JP Magazine dates the increase to late 1981; JeepTech dates wide-track axles to 1982 — the guide prints both and tells the restorer to measure).
- CARRIED OVER: Dana 300; Iron Duke base; SR-4 / T-176; TF automatics.

4. Technical restoration data — 1981 Jeep CJ-7

4.1 Specification table (1981)

Item	1981 specification
Transmission	SR-4 / T-176 manuals; TF999 / TF904 automatics. After 1981 the T-4 and T-5 join (JeepTech) — they are not 1981 specification.
Transfer case	Dana 300.
Axles	Dana 30 front; AMC 20 rear. Track width: narrow-track at the start of the year, widening toward the end of the year (JP Magazine — see the corrections file on the 1981/1982 wide-track conflict).
Brakes	Front discs standard (1979-on specification).
Trim / packages	Renegade; Laredo. The CJ-8 Scrambler joins the CJ family this year (context, not a CJ-7 change).
Production	Per-year production not stated in the sources consulted — none printed (run total 379,299).

Engines (1981):

Engine	Rating	Notes
GM 151 cu in I4 'Iron Duke'	82 hp at 4,000 rpm; 125 lb-ft at 2,600 rpm	Base engine.
258 cu in I6	~110 hp class, two-barrel	Volume engine.
304 cu in V8	125 hp; 220 lb-ft (1980–81, range guide)	FINAL year for the factory V8 in a CJ (JeepTech / JP Magazine).

4.2 VIN and serial decoding

From 1981 the standardized 17-character VIN applies, with the CJ-7 in the model position (87 in the AMC charts for the 93.4-inch cars) and its own engine-letter table (B = 151 four, C = 258 two-barrel, H = 304 in its last year, U = 150 four later — range-guide table). The decoder charts differ between the two serial systems — use the chart that matches the plate in front of you, and photograph the plate first.

4.3 Year-correct procedures and finishes (1981)

- Decode a 1981 with the 17-character chart only; the range guide's documented 1981 VIN (1JCBM87E7BT027130, a four-cylinder car) anchors the format.
- Axle width on a 1981 is a measurement, not a model-year assumption — narrow and wide cars both exist inside the year per the sources.
- **Torque:** factory values vary by fastener and year. Confirm torques against a Jeep shop manual (TSM) for 1981 before final assembly. This program's sources do not publish a verified 1981 torque table, so none is printed — a borrowed number would be worse than none.

4.4 Rust-prone areas — where to look first

Inspect in this order. Two structures, two inspections:

1. **Frame — steering-box mount and front horns** — check for the cracking the V8-era cars made famous.