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Heritage Design Meets Modern-Day Quality Technology with the 2006 Jeep® Commander

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The 2006 Jeep® Commander is classic in its design and innovative in the technology and processes used to achieve Chrysler Group's quality standards. With easily more than 100 engineers specifically dedicated to the vehicle's development, there was no lack of attention to detail to ensure the highest possible quality with this latest chapter in Jeep heritage.

Extensive testing was conducted on Commander in the pre-production mode. Nearly 500 hours of wind noise and aerodynamic evaluations, as well as many other related performance tests, were conducted in the Chrysler Group's \$37.5-million state-of-the-art aerodynamic and acoustic test facility.

"Quality has to match the expectation of any customer and that expectation is rightfully high," said Stephen Walukas, Vice President – Corporate Quality. "Chrysler Group is dedicated – with the full support of senior management – to providing the highest quality at every level of production, and that includes reacting to any issues in the field that may occur. The processes and testing technology in place today are allowing us to meet and surpass customer satisfaction."

The 2006 Jeep Commander was designed and engineered under the Chrysler Development System (CDS), the comprehensive, coordinated and disciplined product creation process that improves quality and speed-to-market while reducing costs and encouraging practical innovation in new products. Emphasized on CDS are the systems' engineering, design and up-front planning to avoid time-consuming and costly trial and error or changes during the latter phases of the product development cycle. With CDS, all product and process planning is completed and fully integrated before production tooling begins.

The proof is in the results. Chrysler Group has seen a 40 percent improvement in expense per unit sold (EPUS) from the 2001 model year through the end of the 2004 model year. In external metrics, Chrysler Group's, Chrysler, Jeep and Dodge brands continue to make dramatic, year-over-year improvements.

Taking Command of Quality Gates

The Jeep Commander engineers have made the vehicle one of the highest quality vehicles to be launched recently by the company. The Commander is one of the first vehicles at the Chrysler Group to pass through all 12 necessary levels of the Quality Gates process.

The Quality Gates process was adopted after the merger of Daimler-Benz and Chrysler Corporation in 1998. Prior to the merger, Chrysler utilized the Chrysler Development System to ensure quality – starting with the vehicle's sketch stage in Design, on through concept and prototypes, to testing and, ultimately, to final production at the plant.

However, the merger also allowed the important inclusion of the Quality Gates process, a system that requires a 12-step checks-and-balance review by senior management of the project at critical stages of development.

"The Quality Gates are a direct example of an exchange of best practices we had with our merger," Walukas said. "Quality Gates enhanced CDS and made the entire process more robust. The result is technology in testing and validation that gave us the speed to stop a project when we saw even a potential issue, to fix it right the first time and still get to market with the highest possible quality."

In addition, numerous extreme thermal road trips were conducted in locations such as Phoenix, Arizona and Southern California, which were chosen for their extreme heat conditions. Similarly, cold-condition road trips were conducted in places from Wisconsin to Canada. As a result, more than three million customer-equivalent miles were logged by the engineering team on just the first level of the developed test vehicles.

"Reliability and durability are attributes any customer can appreciate," Walukas said. "But, in a Jeep vehicle, the bar for what the vehicle is supposed to deliver is set higher. It's expected, and essential, to deliver on the unmatched promise of Jeep."

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