

Clip: 1 of 1



By SHALLY SETH MOHILE
shally.s@livemint.com
NEW DELHI

mint INTERVIEW

Fiat Chrysler Automobiles India Pvt. Ltd on Wednesday drove in Jeep's Grand Cherokee and Wrangler Unlimited to the Indian market at the ongoing Auto Expo. The vehicles by the legendary 75-year-old premium brand, known for its off-road lineage, will go on sale in India in a few months.

In 2015, Fiat India Automobiles Pvt. Ltd, the joint manufacturing venture of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and Tata Motors Ltd, announced it will invest ₹3,000 crore to support the production of a new Jeep vehicle and is expected to begin production in 2017. In an interview, Jim Morrison, director, Jeep product marketing, talked about the company's plans for India and what the brand represents. Edited excerpts.

There's lot of excitement around Jeep in India but you also have a challenge in establishing the brand. How do you plan to

do that?

We are excited about entering the Indian market. The timing couldn't have been better. We just concluded the year 2015 with a record 1.2 million units. We have had four years of growth in India, without being in India. We would first be launching the Jeep Grand Cherokee and Wrangler to establish the brand and then next year would be the local production of a Jeep SUV.

We are going to build the Jeep brand in India with product and what it stands for, also help with the badge of honour trail (its a point system for hitting up trails and checking in, gaining points and getting the opportunity to share pictures) and tips help the customers demonstrate how the capabilities are different from the others.

Having an off-road trail and track will help demonstrate that. We understand Jeep is a generic name for SUVs in India, we want to clearly delineate what the generic term is and what Jeep repre-

GRAND CHEROKEE, WRANGLER WILL SET OFF JEEP'S RIDE IN INDIA; 2017 WILL SEE LOCAL PRODUCTION OF A JEEP SUV

sents. We have the aspiration to sell over two million units globally and the Indian market will be a substantial part of that growth for us.

Could you take us through the transformation which Jeep underwent since Chrysler became part of the Fiat Group?

I have only worked for Chrysler or Fiat in my entire career. The last five to six years under Chrysler has been an incredible journey. We really had to start establishing brand—first in America and then in other markets. All of it was supported by an investment in

products.

The biggest transformation was in 2006-07 when our previous owners had run us to the ground not allowing us to invest. But with Sergio (Sergio Marchionne) and the leadership of Mike Manley (chief executive, Jeep) we have been able to invest in the brand. With the investment we have been able to grow the brand.

Over the last six years, we have been able to establish Jeep as the number one SUV around the world. We have a loyal base of customers who doesn't allow us to stray far.

How critical will be the role of emerging markets in meeting the stated target of 2 million units by 2018?

A substantial part of growth will come from the emerging markets. I will not be able to break it down. We have grown over 200% since 2009.

We recently started local production of a few models in Italy and Brazil, which has resulted in a substantial jump in growth.

China has just come online with the local production of the Cherokee and

we have sold some 6,000 in units in the past month. I see a similar kind of opportunity here, in India.

How challenging is it to retain the DNA of the brand even as you try to make it more sophisticated and contemporary?

It's quite a challenge indeed and I spend half my time trying to achieve that. The Grand Cherokee was a very good off-road vehicle, but it didn't have the sophistication to be a competitive SUV. But the new generation we showed today is capable of on-road, off-road, race tracks. We have done it with a lot of sophisticated technology.

The four-wheel-drive system of the Cherokee allows you to transfer 100% of the torque to one wheel if you need to. However, it is sophistication and fuel economy which took it to the next level. We achieved that by adding sophistication by using a lot of leather on the dashboard, for instance.

The ride and handling feels like a car. Producing a vehicle that offers a combination of a sophisticated ride and handling and has capabilities of an off-roader is hard to achieve.