

CHICAGO AUTO SHOW

Variety of Chrysler, Dodge, Fiat, Jeep, Toyota models on test drive course

Kyle Stanevich
STAFF WRITER

Nowhere else in Chicago do you get the opportunity to test-drive Jeeps off road or burn out in a Charger, except the Chicago Auto Show. Many companies construct extreme driving condition tracks inside the McCormick Place, giving people the opportunity to experience what it would be like to go off-roading. While these tracks are fun to go on, there are two downsides, the extremely long waits to get on, and the salesman driving the car. This year there were many companies showing off their cars: Dodge, Fiat, Chrysler, Jeep, and Toyota, each with their unique spin on the test-drive. Back in 2005, Jeep built the first test track in the auto show. After many modifications, their track is now a complex system designed to show off all the off-roading

capabilities of the entire lineup of Jeep vehicles. The main attraction is the steep hill that will put the riders at a vantage point way above the rest of the show. They also simulate bumpy driving terrain by driving over logs, large rocks, and uneven terrain designed to stretch the suspension of the car to its limit. Years ago, Toyota introduced their own test drive with the Prius. However, this year they changed things up and showed off their SUVs and trucks. They took the Jeep track design and modified it to fit their needs. The ride starts with a seesaw, using gravity to tilt the track down and drive off. Unfortunately, this was not a free moving piece, but instead controlled with pistons and motors, but equally as fun. Next, there is a large dirt hill, similar to, but not quite as tall or steep as the Jeep hill. The ride concludes with a water hazard to drive

through. At the opening days of the auto show, this worked out great, providing a good simulation of the truck at a boat launch or shallow stream crossing, but as the week went on the water became a problem, turning into a big mud puddle. Toyota, mostly known for their small vehicles, introduced this in marketing focus with this display. Hopefully, their track will improve in years to come to better show off what their trucks are capable of. The final indoor test drive track at the Auto Show is a group display with the Dodge Charger, Fiat 500, and Chrysler 300. This is no off-roading track like the other two, but instead a street simulation that includes a tight corner, weaving road, noise isolation test, and an acceleration and breaking straightaway. While the Charger and Chrysler are enjoyable cars on this track, especially in the acceleration test, the Fiat did not fair too

well. The car is cramped, the noise isolation is not that great, and the acceleration is terrible. A person could probably get better acceleration on a bicycle. The salesman tried his best to explain the advantages of the car, but there was nothing amazing about it except its size making it easy to park. These test drives are an interesting marketing approach utilized by many car companies at the auto show, but they do not give the rider the chance to really experience the car. For the full effect, go to a dealership and take a car for a spin, that way you do not have a salesman blabbering away the entire time and can actually drive the car in a real world scenario. Plus, there is not an hour-long wait to ride in a car for all but a few minutes. Jeep and Toyota are doing this right, by bringing an off-roading experience to a city where there is none, and putting a unique spin on an indoor auto show.

