

HUDSON'S FAMILIAR brake handle, ratchets, and rod were used right along with the new dual safety braking system in 1936; and they continued practically unchanged till 1951, when the ratchet mechanism finally was redesigned. Handles were painted or plated, depending on model.

It seems that the commonest trouble with this arrangement has been the breaking of one or both ratchet lock springs, so that brake will not stay engaged. These lock springs are stiff wire loops, more or less U- or W-shaped; and since they bear directly upon the ratchet rod (there are no pawls), they eventually wear out and break at the center. Fortunately the brake will hold so long as there is one unbroken... but it is wise to check them every few months of normal use, and also to keep the assembly well oiled.

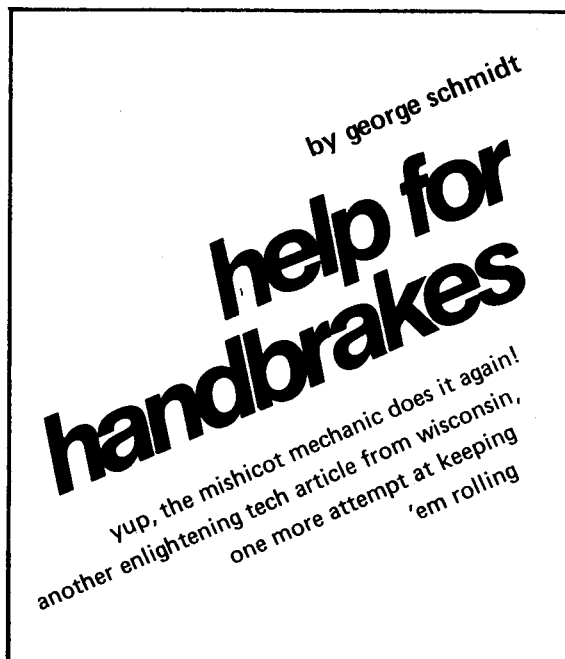
Hopefully most Hudsonuts still have one or two re-usable spares in reserve. Used springs are seldom perfect (unless from a car which had handbrake inoperative for most of its life!), but they will serve for a time, especially if installed with unworn side to ratchet rod. Sometimes a few NOS springs also are found. Chances are, however, that this is another item (stepdown part #300625) which someone in the HET Club will eventually have to reproduce. Luckily it is a simple part... though for safety reasons, the wire will need to be of original-or-better specification.

WHEN HANDBRAKE CABLE sticks, it usually is soon made even worse by having a kink bent into its exposed upper end, near handle. Sometimes the kink can be straightened out merely with pliers, but sometimes cable end must be disconnected to allow proper straightening.

In either case, be sure at the same time to lubricate cable well from both ends (thin oil), and to check and oil brake linkage parts underneath car. Check especially the handbrake return spring (hooked to tab on car floor). In some cases it may even be well to use two springs at this point, side by side, especially if they are old.

Likewise, the two rear brake cables, where they emerge from their sheaths (at car frame) must be oiled periodically, since if neglected they can occasionally cause a locked rear brake.

However, another frequent cause of cable kinks at firewall is a misaligned ratchet rod. Check it by viewing cable carefully from the side, under dash (brake released). Often, due to normal wear plus downward stabilizer-spring pressure, the lower end of rod may be as much as 1/4" out of line. A revised underdash bracket design in mid-1949, with cable slightly longer and the stabilizers traveling in a slot rather than against flat lower surface, greatly reduced this problem but did not eliminate it.



With either bracket, the most practical correction (unless cast housing for rod is hopelessly worn) is to loosen the three bolts which hold the cast housing in place, and insert washers on the two front bolts so that front of housing will be spaced slightly downward. Retighten bolts, being sure that both ratchet lock springs are still properly centered, and then recheck alignment of ratchet rod end with cable hole in firewall. In extreme cases, more washers may need to be added in front. Or if preferred, a neater spacer can be made using one or two flat metal oblong pieces, with two bolt holes drilled 1.375" apart, in place of the washers.

LOCATION OF the Hudson brake handle, for some drivers, may seem a bit high or hidden beneath dash, especially on the early stepdowns [48-mid. '49] — particularly as it is also set quite far forward on these. However, it can easily be adjusted either a half or a whole inch lower, if desired. Remove the two bolts which hold complete bracket [not just cast housing] to lower dashboard edge, and find some longer ones of the same size and grade. Now take either 2 or 4 spacers about 1/2" thick x 1" diameter, like those used under the front seat tracks [part #123405], and place these on the bolts between bracket and dash. Be sure to add heavy flat washers for strength

at both the top and bottom end of each bolt, plus lockwashers. Tighten carefully [and recheck cable alignment]. Spacers, bolt heads, etc. can be touched up with black low-luster paint. Many drivers will find both the brake and the hood-release handles to be more accessible this way.

An alternative is to install the late-type bracket, ratchet rod, stabilizer spring, etc.; but this requires changing the cable as well.

On the other hand, the late-type cable, which is longer, can safely be used as a replacement with the early ratchet, rod, etc., if metal stiffening tube near top end of cable is carefully removed, and then any excess length taken up by using one or two standard "brake cable tighteners" on exposed portion of front cable underneath car.

UNLESS WELL lubricated, the brake ratchet assembly will not work smoothly. Grease helps somewhat, but it tends to be pushed aside into useless lumps. Oil is probably a bit better—until it drips onto floor mat. As a reasonably workable compromise, try a mixture of medium or heavy motor oil with about 20-40% of STP or a similar thickener. Lay a paper drip shield on floor and leave it there until following morning, also wiping any excess oil off the brake parts at that time. Repeat lightly at 1000-2000 miles (or when other incidental oiling is done).

This same oil mixture is also useful for door latches and strikes; for throttle, clutch, and gearshift linkages (plain or vacuum); and for the safety brake linkage assembly underneath car.

A good anti-drip oil retainer for brake handle can be made from two scrap oblongs of medium leather, 1½ x 2¼ inches. Slip these into center cavity of cast rod housing—one above ratchet rod; one below—and sew them together with a row of stitches down each side so that they must stay on ratchet rod. Leather can then be soaked with heavy oil, and it will help keep rod constantly lubricated. Ends of leather should touch each ratchet lock spring—not tightly enough to interfere, but enough to help quiet some of the usual ratchet noise.

ABSENT-MINDED people, such as this writer, occasionally attempt to drive away without releasing the handbrake. Although handbrake warning devices were offered on various Brand X's for years (a small red light on Chrysler, Buick, et al.; an optional tiny vacuum whistle on Nash), Hudson owners were considered to be above needing any such reminder... as shown by its absence on the extensive Hudson factory option lists. But apparently not all owners agreed. There were of course several aftermarket brake warning lights available; and the best-known one during the stepdown years, made by EKLIND, Chicago, still turns up on a surprising number of Hudsons (and other cars, including Ford). It was

well-made—and more than bright enough, with #63 bulb inside red plastic cap (often better replaced by 12V. #67, for half brightness). A piece of flex "picture" wire led from switch arm to cable end or rod stabilizer, and electric connection was through ignition switch.

The warning light is still a useful add-on for any postwar Hudson. It mounts near brake handle—usually at lower dash edge, though it will look better if set directly beside the handle. This is easily done by making a steel spacer strip (see preceding paragraphs), somewhat longer, about 3.5 inches, with three bolt holes 1.375" apart in a row. It will serve both to help align ratchet rod and to provide an ideal mounting spot at one side for the light.

Along with helping to save brake and clutch linings, this light (Eklind pat. 1944-5) is a good illustration of the classic-car rule that if a "non-standard" accessory belongs to the car's own time and vogue, so that it could have been (and often was) used on these models when they were new, then it is always acceptable.

ASSISTING the handbrake a bit by leaving transmission in gear (low or reverse) when parked on steep slope is still not a bad idea—especially uphill, as most brakes hold better forward than backward (owing to difference in primary/secondary linings). This works well with any stickshift model, HDM/OD or not. It can of course be used for downhill parking too—provided that the "freewheel" on overdrive & SMD models is first solidly locked out. Although system is designed to self-lock whenever shifted into reverse, it sometimes hesitates; thus the safest rule is to use hand cable ahead of time, check it by allowing car to move a bit further; then set handbrake.

SETTING the handbrake, with car on an extreme incline, may possibly call for both hands on the grip plus foot on brake pedal. However, if this becomes necessary even under ordinary conditions (and brake cables, linkage, etc. are OK), then rear brake shoes are overdue for adjustment—if not worn out. They, and the front ones as well, must first be correctly adjusted using brake tool on the "star" adjustment wheels, and then road tested for proper right/left balance (pedal braking only), preferably on a road surface which will easily show tire marks. When all are OK, test can be repeated (at lower speed) using handbrake; and this time any new imbalance may be corrected by adjusting one or both brake cables at clevises, under car. Note, however, that the brake shoes themselves must be adjusted first—and that if unequal braking continues despite all adjustment, there undoubtedly are mismatched, dirty (grease; brake fluid), or damaged linings on one side of the car. It's true that the natural stability of most Hudsons tends largely to mask these symptoms in ordinary driving; but this is hardly good reason to neglect them... unless you wish your Hudson suddenly to act like a typical Brand X in the event of a real emergency.