

Hudsonotes

Column of Mechanical Miscellany
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UPHOLSTERY

AND TRIM REPAIRS

(Part 5 of body-repair series)

SEAT CUSHIONS can sometimes be repaired very successfully using matching fabric from a parts car. The material on rear seats is often reusable, particularly if it has been seat-covered for much of its life. The first step is to "skin" cushions by turning them over carefully removing hog rings, also removing any wire (but not cord) reinforcements from hems. Upholstery buttons must be unhooked and removed (these too are often salvageable from rear seat, although their retaining tapes may need to be changed in length).

Cloth upholstery is usually the easiest to repair at home since, unlike leather or imitation leather, it does not retain needle holes, and so can be basted or stitched more than once if necessary for a good fit. If done well, the finished repair will look neither "patched" nor brand-new, but should be nearly indistinguishable from original upholstery in good condition.

When Hudson leather (or simulated leather) upholstery needs repair, it is often because the stitching has failed, while the material may still be in good condition. This too can be repaired at home, but it is a tedious job since the re-sewing should be done by hand, following the original needle holes as closely as possible. Machine stitching is best avoided here, since it will puncture many additional holes, resulting in a weak (and usually unattractive) repair.

STUDY THE design of the upholstery, and of the fabric itself, to help decide on the best method of repair. Usually it is impossible to insert a patch section in a panel without leaving unsightly seams; but if the fabric is of a distinctly ribbed or corded weave, this can sometimes be done with fair success. Match two pieces of cloth carefully as to the pattern of ribs, colored stripes, etc., and stitch them accurately together, using sewing machine, at a groove or line between ribs (this may require several tries, first basting with large stitches).

Then press flat, and sew the complete repaired panel back in place.

The above method is not for smooth or ribless fabrics, such as wool broadcloth; but usually these smooth materials are used in a pattern of narrower vertical panels or pleats, and it is possible to replace one or more of these narrow panels complete (from seam to seam) for an extremely inconspicuous repair. A very slight difference in fading, nap, etc. between original and replacement pieces will usually disappear in time.

Hold upholstery cloth up to a strong light to find spots which look O.K. but are somewhat thin and weakened. They can often be reinforced from underneath using iron-on repair fabric (preferably the knit-cotton type, as this is slightly elastic). To help prevent edge lines of patch from showing through upholstery material, the patch edges should be trimmed with pinking shears. Sometimes, to help hold the reinforcement in place, a few rows of inconspicuous fine machine stitching can be added, carefully following stripes or ribs in material. Check match of thread color first by stitching on a scrap of identical material.

Muslin edge strips on cushion cover (some with cord in hem) must be in good condition, since these hold upholstery hog rings. Repair as necessary (or replace from parts cushion). Finally, reassemble the cushion and cover. New hog rings and a pair of hog ring pliers can make the job easier, although other pliers can also be used. At a few points where a hog ring does not seem to hold cover just right, a loop of wire (usually iron "stove pipe" wire) may be used instead. If necessary, a loop of wire can also be used to pull the tape of each upholstery button back through cushion into place, but a suitable large-size needle or awl works better for this. Hook tapes back in place, using wire loops or original hooks, and check buttons for uniform height.

If a part of the cushion, particularly at driver's seat, appears sagged or flattened out of shape, it should be built up with additional stuffing as needed (as was often done by used-car detailers). At the same time, check condition of seat springs, looking for possible broken coils, damaged small cross-springs, squeaky spots (use spray lubricant or a few drops of oil), diagonal brace wires which have come loose from their clips on upper frame of spring

(these may punch through stuffing and cushion cover if not corrected), and the like. In some instances repairs can be made using parts from a spare rear-seat spring. Minor rust or any sharp edges around bottom of spring frame should probably be wrapped with tape to prevent staining or tearing of cover fabric.

HUDSON IN 1939 (in cooperation with Goodyear) pioneered the use of foam rubber in automotive seat cushions, and this feature was continued thereafter as an option (also standard on front seats of some models). Each cushion so constructed had an identifying tag sewn into one seam.



Improved Airfoam Seat Cushions...firm, but unbelievably soft and cool, because this amazing material "breathes" through countless interconnecting air cells as your body moves up and down.

However, unlike most Brand X builders today, Hudson did not attempt to use rubber or other foam as a substitute for properly constructed seat springs. Deep full-coil springs were still used on all models, and the "Airfoam" pads were installed over these, replacing part of the usual cotton stuffing. The resulting seats were neither cheap nor especially compact, but they were - and are - unequalled for comfort, as can still be noted particularly when taking a long trip in one of these cars, and then changing over to a present-day Brand X vehicle. On stepdowns, a production change from first to second type spring units for front seatbacks c. mid - '49 (note part-number tag on coils) had little effect on comfort or interchangeability, except that right and left units on a 2-door model should match, and first-type springs were perhaps a trifle softer. Both types were used either with or without foam rubber.

Foam pads for seatbacks were quite soft, and those for lower or bench cushions were firmer. Most have proved quite durable over the years,

but they must remain covered to protect them from surface abrasion, and care must also be taken to avoid tearing them when an old cushion is being repaired. Tears can be mended using a light application of rubber trim or weatherstrip cement; and if necessary, even a patch of matching foam material can be inserted in this way; but cemented edges will usually be stiffened somewhat.

On some styles of Hudson upholstery with broadcloth in narrow panels (e.g., 1948 - 49 Commodore), a layer of muslin will be found sewn to the covering fabric, forming long pockets which hold individual foam pads in place. This type of upholstery is time-consuming to work on, since the muslin and rubber must be removed before any torn broadcloth panels can be replaced. Note, however, that the factory used mostly chain stitching, which can be easily removed. When reassembling cushion, the muslin can be stitched back in place or not, but care must be taken that each narrow foam pad is in its proper place, without overlapping or gaps.

One alternative method of assembly is merely to stitch two similar pieces of muslin together, forming pockets which will hold the foam strips. This method will make any future cushion repairs far easier, but all pockets in muslin must align exactly with seams in covering fabric.

The two curved seams at corners of a cushion are usually the only ones which require special care or tailoring skill when re-sewing. It is best to machine-baste them first, using large stitches (this is much easier in one direction than in the other), and to add normal-size stitches later. Note the reinforcing tape which is sewn underneath these seams on some models.

WHILE THE WOOL or other fabric covering is detached from cushion, it should perhaps also be sent out for dry cleaning. This can be done either before repairing (if matched repair material is sent along), or after sewing has been done.

This writer has also had surprisingly good results with careful machine washing of some of these old wool fabrics. Water should be just slightly warm (never hot), and a mild detergent or one of the special wool-wash products can be used. Best method (if machine will permit it) seems to be plenty of soaking with only brief

periods of washer operation in between; this helps to minimize shrinkage. Possibly a non-automatic machine is preferable, and a few of the old ones (gasoline-powered) can even be run slower than normal. Avoid excessive pressure from wringer, and excessive heat or whipping when drying. If possible, install cover on cushion while still somewhat damp, and allow it to dry thoroughly in position.

Washing (or to some extent, dry cleaning) does remove the compound originally applied to most of these fabrics at factory to help make them resistant to spots, stains, and dirt. Owners may wish to replace some of this protection using a spray product of the "Scotchgard" type. The product should be tried first on clean scrap pieces of matching material.

Although a large amount of matching upholstery fabric is seldom available for an old car, one good use for it is to make a seat cover for the front seat (or perhaps for lower cushion only). Properly tailored and installed (and with buttonholes for upholstery buttons), such a cover will be practically indistinguishable from original upholstery, but will protect the original during much hard use.

Ladies in our Club who have done some sewing and upholstery work will no doubt have a number of added practical suggestions on the subject. We are hoping to hear from them, and will report in a future issue.

WOOL CARPETING used in early Hudson stepdown models and some other cars of the time had an agreeable look and feel which synthetics have not been able to duplicate. Durability, however, could have been improved if the wool tufts had been a bit more tightly spaced, and if something better than the black asphalt-like compound on back of rug had been used to help hold them in place. The tufts were not knotted or stitched, and they sometimes have a distressing tendency to come loose, particularly when carpet requires a vigorous cleaning, and there are oil and grease spots to be removed. Most cleaning solvents may not harm the wool, but will soften the backing adhesive. See instructions for carpet and upholstery cleaning given in the Hudson Body Service Manual.

One helpful product, found at local carpet shops a few years ago, and perhaps still available in some areas, is called "Rug-Lok." This is a liquid

latex-like rubber mixture in an aerosol can, intended to be sprayed (with can held upside down) onto the backs of carpets and rugs. Its main purpose is to give small household scatter rugs a non-slip backing; but it is also a very effective binding (and sizing) agent which will help to hold wool carpet tufts in place from underneath, at the same time giving rug a slight added "body," without cracking or stiffness. Although back of rug must be clean and dry (and oil-free) before spraying, it is sometimes wisest to apply the Rug-Lok, and then let it harden for a few days, before turning rug over and attempting a thorough cleaning of the top surface. The product when dry is soap-and-water-proof, but of course other cleaning solvents must be applied sparingly and with caution.

Possibly readers can tell us of other rubber or latex products, either spray or brush-on type, which can be similarly used on backs of rugs. Please let us know about these, and also whether Rug-Lok or similar products are available in your area. Liquid material used for this purpose must penetrate backing somewhat without soaking through, and the coating must not become brittle. Test first on matching carpet scraps.

CARPET PADDING was not standard equipment on most Hudsons, but it is an excellent addition for extra softness, quiet, and carpet life. The jute type generally used underneath front rubber floor mats may be too bulky for rear carpets, but thinner material made of good-quality sponge rubber is ideal here - as it is for the narrow carpet strips found on either side of the front seat on most step-downs. Later models had the side pieces made of simulated-leather material instead.

One reason for the change was that these side carpet strips are the pieces most often found deteriorated or worn out. If only the forward end of strip (at riser) is bad, one simple repair is to sew in a matching imitation-leather piece, about 5 x 5½ inches, at that end. Or, matched replacement carpet strips can sometimes be made from a parts-car rear rug which, however worn, usually has sufficient good material at the forward edge - complete with original twill carpet binding - for this purpose. These side strips particularly should be treated on back with "Rug-Lok" or a similar material for longer life and moisture resistance.

HUDSONOTES (cont.)

Although most of these Hudsons had "baseboard" trim (to cover the exposed inner sides of the "stepdown" frame) made of simulated leather, some early ones c. 1948 also used carpeting at that point. Here too, replacement strips (for the front, at least) can sometimes be made from a parts-car rug, but special care is needed to keep these strips fitted flat against frame metal. Rug-Lok or other carpet sizing may help.

On this same type of carpeting (early stepdown), if only a few wool tufts are missing, they can often be replaced by setting spare tufts into place with neutral-colored (gray or amber) trim or weatherstrip cement. Clip added tufts to correct height after cement is thoroughly dry.

RUBBER FLOOR MATS for the front-seat area appeared before 1930 (perhaps a reader can tell us the exact year on Hudsons), replacing the "battleship" linoleum and similar materials used earlier. Carpeting was already in use for the rear-seat area of many cars at the time, and it was often held neatly in place by snap fasteners - a practice also continued on some foreign cars until recently.



Rubber front mats in two styles were used on all Hudson stepdowns 1948 - 1950, with front carpeting first appearing on some models in 1951. First type mats had a somewhat pebbled grain molded-in (harmonizing especially with simulated-leather trim), and had "Monobilt" triangle emblem at center. Aluminum scuff plates (door sills) commonly found with these are

also the first type, of plain metal color with embossed ripple pattern. Second type rubber mats had a molded carpet grain (no emblem), to harmonize with rear rug; and for Pacemakers and most convertibles, rear rubber mats were also made in this style. The accompanying scuff plates were most often second type as well, of smooth aluminum with an etched design of triangles and "Hudson" name in black.

If old scuff plates are dull and dingy, they can be brightened by rubbing lengthwise with extra-fine (#0000) steel wool, care being taken to avoid damaging the black portions of design. For very bad spots, coarser wool may need to be used first. To prevent further corrosion from underneath, rub any damaged spots on underside with heavy grease before reinstalling. Note that these plates are not fitted quite level, but should slope slightly outward for proper water drainage. Most have fibre spacer material underneath (a few more plies can be added in spots where needed), but some cars '49 and up may have a pressed-steel support piece under plate instead. Outer edge of plate is sealed underneath with a small ribbon of soft body putty, and a thin black sponge-rubber seal is used at each end.

Both of the rubber floor mat styles were available in either gray or taupe/tan shades (depending on upholstery color), and both came with a heavy jute pad attached underneath. This pad is essential not only for softness and quiet, but also to prevent undue wear on the rubber material. Often the padding under both rear corners of an old mat is much deteriorated, and it is well to cut away about an 18 x 24-inch section of jute on each side, and insert replacement pieces. These pieces, however, need not be cemented to the rubber; if merely laid in place, they can be more easily removed for drying out when necessary.

While an old rubber mat may still have good wearing qualities, it usually tears very easily, and so must be handled with special care. Sometimes a tear can be mended by patching from underneath with a piece of strong non-elastic cloth (such as scrap denim), along with several coats of rubber trim cement preferably gray color. Usually edges of tear must be held in some way to prevent them from

separating before the cement has dried thoroughly.

Although pebbled or leather-grained mats are difficult to repair inconspicuously, the carpet-grained ones can often be mended with fair success. To replace a torn or worn-out portion at driver's feet, for example, cut it away, following lines of the carpet pattern as much as possible, and using pinking shears to produce somewhat ragged-appearing (not perfect saw-tooth) edges. Cut a matching replacement patch, at least several inches larger than the hole, from passenger side of a spare scrap mat. Place patch underneath hole, align carpet grain carefully; and fasten in place, using plenty of gray rubber trim cement.

AS PLANNED, this column was intended to conclude the present series about body, door, and trim repairs. However, space is about filled, and so a few additional suggestions about floor mats, armrests, visors, chrome moldings, etc. must be postponed until a future issue. Also coming soon: 1916 Hudson service instructions from original factory manual.

A CORRECTION FOR THE JAN/FEB COLUMN

"If a good 1948-49 replacement piece is hard to find, one may need to use a 1950 part, which is the same shape but without license lamp, and is somehow more often found UNbroken. Lamp hole can be hand-cut..." Probably the 1950 handle base stood up better (especially on sedans) because trunk lid metal at that point was a bit stronger, not being cut out for light socket insertion.