

Hudsonotes

Column of Mechanical Miscellany
by George Schmidt
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Hudson — With Extras

(16th of a series)

HUDSONS ARE exciting cars even in their most basic and unadorned form, it is true; but an appropriate selection of options and accessories from the car's own era can nevertheless add much to historical interest, and to practical usefulness as well. In most cases this will include both unusual and commonplace items, from the Hudson factory listing and probably also from the aftermarket.

BEFORE REFRIGERATED-TYPE air conditioning became a commonplace automotive accessory, a number of attempts were made to cool car interiors by other methods. Some were simple: placing a pan of ice cubes on floor beneath cowl vent, for example; or turning an accessory defroster fan around to help cool passengers. Norm Lepper, Ohio, suggests disconnecting the two defroster hoses on a Hudson stepdown, and removing two screws so that the defroster elbows can be pointed downward to give better floor-area ventilation (his father sometimes did this in summer).

A few other methods, home-made or commercial, were designed to cool by means of water evaporation. This last could be very effective under hot dry desert conditions, though it was of less value under conditions of damp or humid heat.

At least one type of water-evaporative car cooler was manufactured and sold as an aftermarket accessory during the early 1950's. This was the "Kool-Aire" (from Bonzer-Western Corp., Los Angeles), and it was designed to be mounted in one window of the car, usually passenger-side. This model did not rely solely on car movement for air circulation, but had a built-in 6-volt motor and fan, to be connected to the cigarette-lighter socket on dash. Jim Zimmerman, Wisconsin, has one of these Kool-Aire units, which he displayed on his 1949 Hudson at the 1987



Central Regional Meet. We would like to hear from any other member who has one of these, or any other type of water-evaporative cooler for his car. How well does it work?

Refrigerated air conditioning for cars was introduced as a factory option on the 1938 Packard. It was workable but cumbersome, with some components needing to be placed in the trunk. Also, these early versions had no electric clutch built into the drive pulley, so that the compressor ran at all times (belt could be removed in winter).

The more compact modern type of refrigerated air conditioning, with all components underhood or in cowl, was pioneered by Nash-Kelvinator in the early 1950's, and so was available as a Hudson (American Motors) option during 1955-1957. Other makers soon changed to this more compact format as well, and during the 1960's there were also nearly a dozen brands of aftermarket add-on air-conditioning equipment avail-

able to fit most U.S. cars, for dealer or shop installation. Brackets were provided for mounting compressor on engine, and condenser ahead of car's radiator. The cooling unit and fan usually fitted in a slender case underdash. Although these add-on systems were popular for a time, this writer has not heard of any that were offered in 6-volt versions for older cars.

A few of the add-on systems even included a small refrigerated compartment for food and drink. This has also been a feature of some expensive custom-built installations. In earlier years, however, the only option available for this purpose was an insulated ice chest or bottle.

Hudson, in fact, listed the "Thermaster" portable refrigerator and 8-hour bottle as authorized dealer accessories for 1948-54, although these appear to be rare items today. Several aftermarket brands were also available. At present many travelers find that the most practical type of ice chest is one simply molded of styrofoam plastic. Although the plastic foam does not have great strength, it is lightweight, inexpensive, and has good insulating ability. These foam chests can be had in many sizes.

EXTERNAL SUNVISORS for windshields (see July/August 1981 WTN) are an accessory of the 1946-1954 period. Unlike the smaller "ventshades" for side windows, which have staged a comeback on some present-day vehicles, and unlike the interior "Venetian sunshades" for rear windows, which also had a longer vogue (available on Hudsons as

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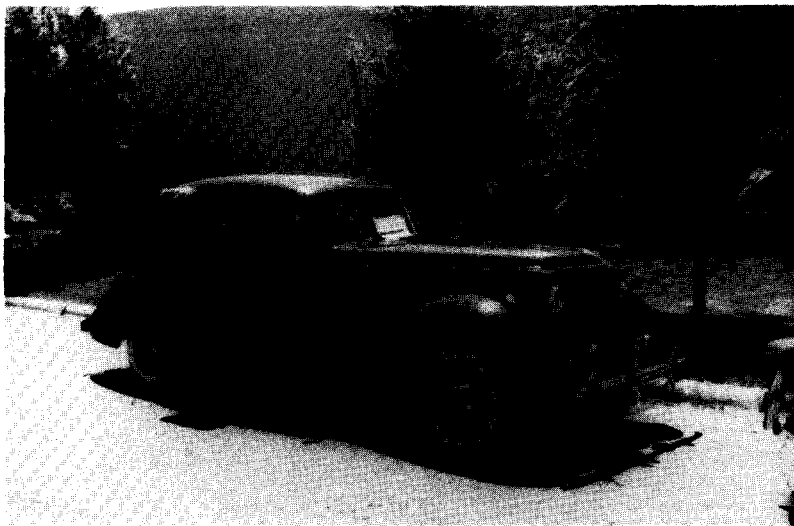
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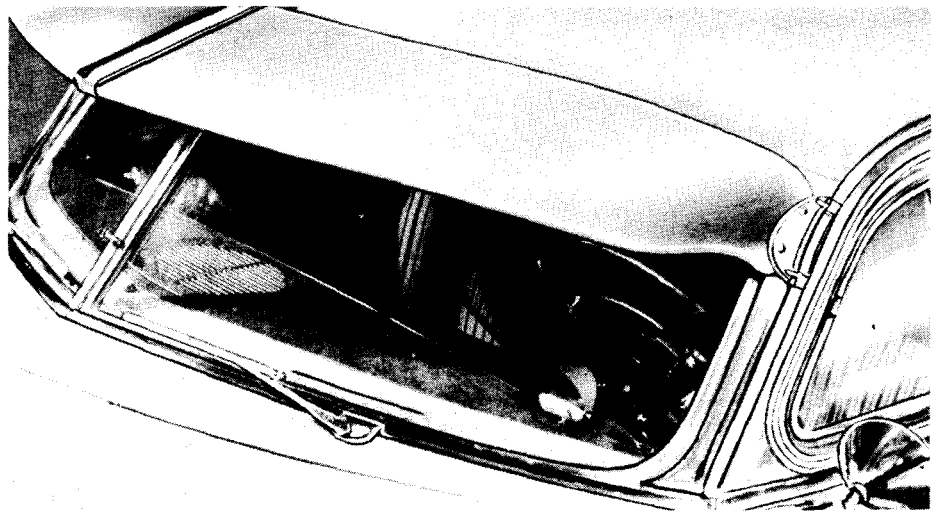
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early as 1940), the exterior add-on front visors had a relatively brief popularity. During the early 1950's Hudson promoted these visors as a dress-up item which dealers could use as an aid in selling late-model used cars (picture, May/June 1987 *WTN*); but by the late 1950's, few accessories were likely to be more quickly removed from a used car by the new purchaser. Today this item is apparently back in favor with some old-car restorers.

Undeniably, the large front visor helped to shield both the windshield glass and the occupants' eyes. It also helped to shield the car interior when parked in direct sunshine, and was certainly more practicable for that purpose than the wildly printed cardboard screens (placed temporarily inside windshield) which are a current fad. However, the visor generally left something to be desired from the standpoints of aerodynamics and overall proportions.

Hudson parts books for 1940-1947 do not list an exterior visor as an authorized item for Hudsons, although aftermarket versions could doubtless be found which would fit these models. For Hudsons through most of the stepdown era, 1948 and up, the factory—authorized version was called "Karvisor," and was made with right and left metal panels joined at center, with a chrome molding and a brace to the center windshield post at that point. Outside surfaces needed to be painted by the selling dealer with body lacquer in color to match car; inside surfaces were left with the original dull-green primer finish. This visor was made with an inch or two of slotted adjustment for height and slope.



Later a rigid one-piece visor made of dark translucent plastic, without center brace, was also available for these cars. This design was necessary for the 1954 models, which have no center windshield post; but it would fit earlier stepdown Hudsons as well.

Among aftermarket visors offered to fit these cars, one interesting type had two narrow louvers (of dark plastic, nearly opaque black), instead of the usual single wider one. This gave it a somewhat less heavy appearance, and probably also caused less air drag. Called the Dual-Panel "Dual-Vize," it was made for Hudson and other cars by the Enicar Manufacturing Co., Racine, Wisconsin.

WHAT IS A "traffic light finder?" It's a small accessory for U.S. cars, apparently dating from the 1930's to the mid-1950's, which mounted on top of dash or clamped to the steering column. In appearance it generally resembled an ordinary triangular reflective prism (transparent but not silvered) which had

been bent into a curved rainbow shape. It was intended to reflect traffic signals and similar lights which might otherwise escape the driver's attention.

Because a large external visor could make high-standing traffic signals harder to see, the light finder was especially recommended for use on a car with visor, and it seems that in some instances the finder was sold along with the visor, in a combined kit. Although this writer has not seen a listing of the traffic light finder in a Hudson parts book, it evidently was included for a time in the early 1950's, since one original box shows a Hudson part number: HA 220544, for "Traffic Light Viewer." Also, this accessory was offered on some Brand X's (notably

Pontiac); and it was available too as an aftermarket item, with one version, the "Rain-Bo" Prismatic Reflector, being shown in car magazines as late as 1953.

Jim Zimmermann has one of these viewers on his '49 Hudson, and has also kept the original box and instruction sheet. This sheet includes a paper template showing exactly where a hole should be drilled in top of Hudson dash, at one side, to install the device. Norm Lepper, however, notes that some Hudsons with imitation-leather topped dash, c. 1951-53, have a small hole pre-drilled in metal at this point, underneath cloth, for easier installation. The viewer was to be aligned with its lens set at a right angle to glass on car.

Has any other reader one of these devices on his car, and is it of any help when driving in traffic? This accessory was also seen on a few cars of the 1930's, usually attached to steering column. Are any of these prewar examples still in existence?

On most cars the add-on switch for automatic backup-light control can be fitted either at the transmission, or if more convenient, at one shift lever at base of steering column. This writer has had good results on his '54 Super Wasp with the Yankee #1109 Mechanical Switch (Yankee Metal Products Co., Connecticut), found at an accessory store. The switch appears to be a heavy-duty type doubtless intended mainly for operating either lights or an audible backup warning on trucks. Switch arm is about 5" long and made of stiff coil-spring material; and needed to be lengthened to 7½" by driving a short steel rod into end of coil.

Switch body is mounted on left inner fender dust shield so that the spring arm rests on the low/reverse gearshift lever (the lower one) at bottom end of steering column. Since switch bracket and arm are not adjustable, an added angle bracket had to be made to hold switch in the correct position to turn "on" each time lower lever is raised to shift into reverse gear. To prevent switch arm from slipping off shift lever, a small hook was made and used in place of usual flat washer at rubber grommet on lever. The switch is wired to the "accessory" terminal of ignition switch through a 14-ampere in-line fuse and holder. The two backup lights, added by a previous owner, are '54 Hornet style.

Thanks again to Norm Lepper and Jim Zimmerman; also to Charles Liskow at the H-E-T Club Library, for information in this column. Thanks too to other readers who have sent me information which will be used in future columns.

WITH THE 1988 H-E-T national and regional meets behind us, and with early plans already being made for the 1989 events, this is an appropriate time to consider what can be done to make these club events more affordable for a larger number of H-E-T members in the future. It is true that for some of our members, the absurd \$50 hotel-room and \$17 banquet charges are of no real concern — and we certainly do not envy these members their prosperous state. It is true too that a well-preserved or well-restored Hudson (of any year) is more than a match for any of the current-model nonentities likely to be found in our most pretentious hotel or motel parking lots these days. However, many of us are certainly no match for the

excessive room, banquet, and other meet costs of recent years. One would like to see national and regional club meets planned with the financial status of most of the members in mind.

A check through the center pages of most *WTN* issues for the past several years will show that for every sponsoring chapter which has made a special effort to keep meet costs down (admittedly not an easy task these days), there are three or more whose response to the cost problem apparently has been only: "If you can't afford it, don't participate."

Perhaps that is the ultimate answer. Some of us have been happy to work for the H-E-T Club for years on a volunteer basis, without charge, whether in writing for the *WTN*, or the other capacities; but it appears that such efforts are gradually

becoming more and more out of place in the club at present. Certainly there is not much point in such volunteer efforts unless costs in other areas, particularly at meets, can be kept under control.

The stated purpose of the Club is to preserve (and enjoy) the cars built by Hudson. Nothing is specified about supporting and preserving the "high end" of the hotel and restaurant industry. Members who wish to do that are entirely welcome to do so on their own. For Club-sponsored meets, however, I feel that host chapters need to "shop around" a bit more when making plans, so that meet costs can be brought down to a level which will make these events not only better attended, but also more representative of the entire H-E-T Club membership.