

Sleeping Beauty

By George Schmidt

All of those stories about someone finding a desirable collector car hidden away in an old barn, where it had rested undisturbed for many years, never made much of an impression on me until about two years ago. In fall 1991, however, I was told about a 1950 Hudson Commodore 8 sedan near my home area which had indeed been stored in a farm machine shed for thirty years, and was now for sale. The original owner, now deceased, was a farmer and longtime Hudson mechanic/salesman/enthusiast (and father of a former school-mate). He had bought the car new, and had driven it until 1960, as the license plates showed. Although dustcovered and far from mint, this old Hudson was still in unusually solid condition, including the perimeter frame, and even the interior except where mice had chewed one hole in the headliner.

A deal was accordingly made, the tires were inflated, and friends helped in towing the car home. Work began to bring the vehicle back to life. Some useful parts were also found in the loft of the old building (a former granary). Fortunately raccoons do not eat Hudson distributors, valve tappets, etc. Original papers and a new spare camshaft gear (Borg-Warner Westinghouse fiber replacement type, #967-A) were found in the glovebox. There were no car keys, but these were made up at a local hardware store using the code numbers crayoned on top of the box. Cracked tires were replaced (the car would doubtless have preferred classic wide white-walls, but had to settle for bias-ply blackwalls).

Brake linings were nearly new (riveted type, with good asbestos

content), but of course all brake cylinders needed to be rebuilt, including the aluminum master. Bleeding included driving all odorous old fluid out of the lines. Bearings on all four wheels were packed (with heavy old-fashioned lithium grease) at the same time. It was a surprise to find that, after thirty years parked on a dirt floor, the brake cables, safety linkage, etc. were in good condition and required merely a few shots of penetrating oil.

With an oil change, and penetrating oil in the cylinders, the engine turned over without much protest. The water pump did not, and was replaced by a good used one. A new pump gasket was found, but was xerox copied before use, to provide an accurate paper pattern for future needs. The side water jacket cover leaked and was also replaced, and this permitted a cleanout of the water chamber, which contained a fair amount of chocolate-colored rusty sludge. A new hand-cut cork gasket was installed, and seven of the original cap-screws were replaced by special studs which could later hold Vacuumotive Clutch, Drive-Master, and extra long aircleaner if desired. Threads were generously coated with permatex sealer. At one time, thin brass seal washers were available to help make these screws watertight, but I have not seen them for years (has anyone else in HET?).

Oil pump was removed and turned by hand; it pumped satisfactorily. Even the fuel pump worked, until it was clogged by rust and dirt from the tank, although both diaphragms were later replaced with better ones and the screen and check-valves cleaned out. Carburetor was O.K., except for choke and fast-

idle settings. This (1950) was Hudson's first year using the Carter WGD carburetor, with its bendable fast-idle adjustment hidden behind the choke thermostat. Ignition points were good, though the vacuum advance was broke and the coil due for replacement. Heater hoses broke when handled, but the other hoses were fairly usable.

Electrical problems were few. An extra-large 6-volt battery was installed, and Bendix drive parts were cleaned up, but starter, generator, and regulator all resumed their tasks without hesitation. Headlight units were changed to the brighter #6006 type. The headlight switch heated slightly from the increased load, so was replaced with one which had previously had its contacts cleaned and regreased. Dimmer switch was replaced by a better one (these can be lubricated by holding them upside down and squirting WD-40 or similar oil around cap edge). One of the headlights removed was the usual early #4030, but the other was apparently an in-between type. Has anyone else ever seen a #5040 sealed-beam 6-volt headlamp? Probably the major surprise, however, was the car clock, which started ticking instantly when a fuse was inserted.

Valves in engine were not burned, but three of them were badly stuck, requiring head removal to loosen them. When this was done and the head was cleaned and torqued back down (head gasket re-used, along with application of Copper Coat compound), the engine started with little further complaint. With 102,000 miles and no overdrive, however, the piston rings are noticeably tired, and blowby and oil consumption indicate that

an eventual engine rebuild is needed. Meanwhile the engine does run acceptably, and has taken the car an additional 5000 miles in two years.

There is not space here to list the dozens of detail items, from broken windwing gears to a leaky heater valve, which needed to be corrected in putting a long-idle vehicle back on the road. The job is far easier, of course, when one has a few roomfuls of accumulated Hudson parts - and also a few good friends. Special thanks are due Craig Nichols, Gale Kronforst, Jim Guex, Orville Voeks, Charles Bowman, and Jack Miller for all of their help which has made the project possible up to now.

Optional equipment on the car was not plentiful (heater, radio, turn signals), and so more than a dozen authentic optional items have been carefully added - fog and backup lights and matching switches, wheel beauty rings, oil and gasoline filters, trunk and underhood lights, electric gas cap, and others. The oil filter (Fram F-3), lacking original bracket for mounting on a Hudson 8, is placed for now on the right fender dust shield, along with a pair of flexible oil hoses. Since these splash-lubricated engines have very little oil pressure, the pinhole outlet in center post of filter has been drilled out to 1/8 inch size, and this works well, with better oil flow. Replacement cartridges (C-3) are easily found, though more often among farm/industrial parts these days.

The fuel filter, besides being an authentic type with glass bowl (Carter), is very necessary because of the rust and dirt in tank. Replaceable filter element (I have several) is porous porcelain or glass. Many Hudsons also used an AC fuel filter (similar, but with brown fibre element). Does anyone know which brand was factory-authorized? The back-up lights are

Auto Lamp 491's. These too were used on many Hudsons 1948-51, perhaps even more than Unity B's.

Aftermarket items from the car's own period include chrome gas door guard (Richlite, made for Hudsons), handbrake warning light (Eklind), and outside mirror (Montgomery Ward). Mirror is clamp-on type (no drilling), so can be easily removed if Hudson Spotlight/mirror is installed later.

Instructions for Hudson/Trico windshield washer usually recommend placing jar and pump on right fender dust shield, but there is not much extra space on Eights at that point, and so I have the jar mounted on left fender shield instead. On 1950-54's this does require moving the voltage regulator a few inches rearward (re-use one screw hole and drill two new ones for it), but there is still enough space on left side for automatic battery filler, Drive-Master, and perhaps a headlight relay. One gadget borrowed from a '54 Hornet also fits the Eight perfectly: a small metal pointer which bolts on one edge of the timing window at flywheel, and makes accurate ignition timing much easier, especially if one must view the timing marks from somewhat of an angle.

What's next? Probably vacuum clutch control and a rear radio speaker. Speaker installation (using grille to match front one) will not be quite as difficult as shown in the 1948 instruction sheet, which specifies drilling about 24 holes in the metal rear shelf. On 1950 models (2 and 4 door sedans only), the factory finally thought of pre-stamping a 6x9 inch oval speaker hole in the metal shelf. Also . . . don't tell anyone, but I may not be using an original 3-position Hudson speaker switch. There is an old fader control here, now with Hudson trim ring and knob, but actually liberated from an Airflyte (Bathtub) Nash many

years ago. Maximum fader resistance is 10 ohms, which is right for balancing two 4-ohm speakers (mono sound).

This cars clutch was found in a thoroughly stuck condition, but several ounces of lacquer thinner freed it in a few days; and with a dose of fresh Hudsonite fluid, it served well for two years of driving. This past August, however, it began to slip badly, as if the corks were worn out. Indeed they were - they all fell out of the disc when it was removed from car. Pressure surfaces were O.K. Fortunately an extended search of my untidy premises turned up a good used cork disc and everything else needed for the repair job (except clutch fluid, which Jack supplied). Also, since the transmission had to be removed, there seemed little point in reinstalling the plain 3-speed box, and so an overdrive gearbox was installed in its place - not a lightweight operation, but much needed on this car. Car's original bellhousing, throwout fork, etc. were retained, since they had been working smoothly, but throwout bearing seals and rear rubber engine mount were replaced. Then came the shorter driveshaft (a good time to check U-joints and rubber cushion studs too); solenoid, governor, relay, switches, wire harness, longer speedometer cable, lock-out cable and knob, spring-type accelerator bellcrank, and a few other necessary pieces including good rubber pads (lubed with Door-Ease wax), and a cleaned and re-oiled felt collar, for the clutch cross shaft. Kickdown switch replaced pedal stop under accelerator, and a slightly thicker spacer was epoxied to back of pedal.

It was decided to check the new clutch for smooth engagement before reinstalling floor panel, with brakes locked, and throttle and clutch pedal operated by hand. It was smooth,

but the heavy engine politely lifted its left front leg - a reminder that Hudsons and other cars sometimes break their left front engine mounts because of torque reaction. One more part to replace, using a good front rubber mount from parts car.

Overdrive cut-in speed, at about the specified 18 m.p.h., may be slightly low for most general driving, but since the governor pinion gear used here is already the one with most teeth (18), any higher cut-in speed will require careful internal work on governor - drilling of weights, or more spring stiffness.

The most tedious part of the job, far more than clutch or overdrive, was the needed repair, sanding, and priming of the rusted front floor area, and then the replacement of waffled-cardboard and jute silencer material where it had deteriorated. These silencers are a bother, and may also retain moisture, but they are essential for sound absorption unless one prefers a school-bus or cattle-truck effect inside the car. The sponge-rubber seals on clutch and brake pedal stems, and especially the pleated rubber boot underneath accelerator pedal, are essential

for the same reason.

Any metal patches should be sanded and painted with rust-resisting primer on both sides, or they may often rust out faster than the car's original metal. For floor and similar repairs, undercoater can be used to cover the primer, to hold waffled pads in place, and often between metal layers (or use greases between layers), for a lasting job.

Clutch and overdrive checked out O.K. on the road, operating smoothly and easily. Trips, long and short, are far pleasanter for both the driver and the car with the use of a good fourth gear. The second-overdrive ratio, too, is helpful in traffic with these wide ratio 3-speeds; and at the low end, the freewheeling feature effectively takes the place of synchromesh on first gear.

It is with much regret, however, that I have at last given up trying to drive a Hudson year-round, because of the continued irresponsible use of untreated salt on winter roads. These old cars offer great comfort and handling ability under winter conditions, and besides, some of the fun is gone from holiday events, winter concerts and shows, etc. when one can attend only in a prosaic Brand X,

whether it is a rust bucket or just one of today's claustrophobia-inducing runts. But preserving good Hudsons must come first, I know. They are not becoming more plentiful with the years.

Then too, spring and summer will soon be here again. Plans are already being made for the HET national and regional meets in 1994 and one or two subsequent years. These are great events for those who can afford them, and attendance should be larger. It is hoped that at least some of the sponsoring chapters can be persuaded to show consideration in their planning for the many club members (including this writer) who love Hudsons and like to meet the cars and their owners, but have no money for overpriced hotel rooms and meals and the like. Most sponsors try to provide a variety of activities, with "something for everyone," but even these are of little use unless they are affordable.

For now, best wishes of the season to Hudsonophiles everywhere - good Thanksgiving, a Merry Christmas, and good luck in 1994!