

Hudsonotes

Column of Mechanical Miscellany
by George Schmidt
Mishicot, Wisc.

Confessions of a Professed Hudson Purist

By George Schmidt

A Hudson is a Hudson is a Hudson—as Gertrude Stein didn't say, but probably should have. Like her roses, these cars have an unmistakable character all their own, and most of us try to preserve this as well as we are able. Unlike some unfortunate Brand X's which may be restored to apparent originality for just one reason, to win trophies (whether this leaves them usable or not), our Hudsons need to be driven and used in order to be properly appreciated. Moreover, they are unusually well suited for such use, with no "modernization" needed, and generally little change of any kind.

An exception might be some features, mostly taken for granted in present-day traffic, which can be tidily supplied from the option list or the accessories offered in the car's own era—or example: turn signals, fog and backup lights (usually a matched pair of each), heater/defroster, AM radio with two speakers, windshield washer, a top cruising gear (overdrive, '40 - '57), slightly larger tires (and battery), optional wheels or wheel trim, oil and fuel filters, optional bumper guards, cigarette lighter (non-smokers use it for 6-volt plug-in accessories), deluxe steering wheel, outside rearview mirror, and so on.

For some mid-'30's models: a car clock (with replacement glovebox door if necessary), and a matched second taillight. For some models before '27 or so: front and rear bumpers, an accessory stop (brake) light; perhaps an add-on water pump (Essex), a temperature gauge (in radiator cap); possibly an engine thermostat (some were

made for insertion in upper radiator hose), and brighter replacement headlight bulbs (to fit original sockets). For some models still older: demountable tire rims, a German magneto (Bosch); perhaps even a rear seat or the folding top; or an engine starter (early accessory rope-pull, spring, etc.; or '12 acetylene gas; or electric '13 and up, if not standard equipment).

All of the above items and many others, if correctly chosen and in usable condition, can be added to Hudson-built vehicles with no loss of authenticity, and usually with a real gain in drive-ability. Many trim options and dress-up accessories of the car's period can also be added, if they can be found.

However, it is probable that almost every Hudson owner has occasionally gone beyond this to make some small additional changes to his car when these appeared to help solve problems of cost, availability, convenience, performance, or the like, whether they are historically correct or not. About the only undisputable statement which can be made about these changes is that opinion varies very widely among old-car owners (and Hudson owners particularly, since our club does no competitive judging) as to what is permissible and what is not, while still retaining a legitimate collector vehicle.

If an old car was successfully customized and/or "rodded" long ago, during the car's own youth, this may have a specialized historic interest of its own which should be preserved. (Would anyone today restore a winning Hornet racer of the '50's to showroom condition?) But aside from

such cases, I am convinced that the more nearly an old car can be maintained in the condition in which it was (or ideally could have been) delivered when new, the greater its historical value and its overall appeal.

Nevertheless I too have made a few non-stock changes in Hudsons I have owned, and hence have some "confessions" to offer, as mentioned in the title above. These represent a single person's experience, but other owners may wish to compare notes, and decide whether they agree about the various items or not. We'd also like to hear what owners think. Send a note to this writer (address inside back cover), or to the *White Triangle News* Editor, Jack Miller.

Clutch: Some models seem to need a slightly longer stroke than the pedal can provide for full release and full engagement, especially when the driven disc is new, or newly re-corked. On Hudsons before '48, the flat steel arm at one end of clutch cross shaft often had two or three holes, thus allowing some adjustment of throwout fork travel (and pedal stiffness). Stepdown models do not have this, so that sometimes it may be necessary to drill a second hole in the arm, about one inch down from the original hole, thus shortening the effective arm length when linkage is attached at new hole. (As always, recheck linkage adjustment of new cork clutch after about 100 miles of normal driving.)

Brakes: Though my present car has original-type riveted linings on all four wheels, I have used bonded linings in the past when they were available locally without much expense or delay;

and they are still here as emergency spares. I would suggest, however, that because of the current outlawing of asbestos in the brake linings, each Hudson owner try to keep one set of good asbestos linings (if they can still be found) in reserve against the day of need. It would be hideous to hear a Hudson or other classic vehicle squeaking at each stop sign like a typical late model with "modern" linings.

Engine heater: Does anyone know the exact year when plug-in electric engine pre-heaters first appeared? Used first on big Diesels and trucks, they did not become a familiar passenger-car item until the late 1950's - but I have one on my '50 Hudson. It is of the heater-hose or "percolator" type, and is an older model with plain 2-prong plug. When re-using an old unit with this type plug, it is well to check that there can be no leakage of 120-volt house current from either prong to ground (that is, to the metal body of heater or to the coolant inside). A shock from this source should not be fatal if one's feet are well insulated, but it is unpleasant. Older battery chargers, power tools, etc. with this type of plug should be similarly checked - and kept dry.

Rocker trim: The chromed molding at bottom edge of rocker panels on most '51 Hudsons is heavier, with a triangular cross-section, than the plain, slightly convex style used for 1948-50. On my '51 C6 the two short rear-most pieces (behind fender skirts) were missing; and not having NOS or used replacements, I checked the scrap pile at a local bodyshop and found a bent Toyota molding of about the same cross-section and with similarly pointed ends. I cut off the two ends and mounted them on the '51. Unfortunately a younger friend who has often helped with my cars discovered this, and I was subjected to an unmerciful ribbing and even

near-blackmail, as he threatened to report this to the Club and get me permanently thrown out of the HET, for putting Japanese parts on a Hudson! No telling what inspired this attitude in him, unless perhaps it was what I said when I found an American pleated-paper oil filter (instead of original wool felt) on his British Triumph Spitfire.

Heater nipples: The pipe-threaded metal nipples which hold a heater hose at the engine head, and usually at the water pump, on most Hudsons are actually a trifle short for an extra-substantial grip on the hose. The same friend was also somewhat shocked when he saw that I was using nipples which were a bit longer, and slightly angled...from a Ford.

Turn signals: The original switch handle on '48-'53 Hudsons is adequate for use with the smaller (17") steering wheels, but is too short for comfort with the larger deluxe (18") wheels, especially today when signals are used for lane changes as well as for turns. Thread for knob is 8-32 size, and I've made an inconspicuous handle extension about 3/4" long from a threaded brass tube (old long-style spark plug tip) and an 8-32 stud. On one car I also installed a 4-way flasher switch, wired using plug-in bullet terminals under dash (no cutting of original harness). Switch and knob were like the ones for fog-plus-tail lights on my cars—a Hudson headlight switch blocked internally so that only the "off" and "park" positions are used. But Auto Lamp also made an add-on 4-way switch which had a red plastic knob (with pilot bulb) styled to match the ivory heater switches used on many Hudsons. Feed wire to switch should be #14-gauge, and include a 14-ampere fuse in metal holder (unless wired through circuit breaker), and a spare 3-prong headlight socket to hold the extra flasher (which

can be usual Tung-Sol #P-229-D).

Parking light sockets were rusted and needed to be replaced. On 1950 full-size Hudsons the steel socket is permanently crimped into a cast pot-metal plate; and since original NOS socket assemblies were unlikely to be found for this car, I very carefully removed the steel portion, leaving a 3/4" hole in the casting, and then checked at parts stores to see what "universal" type replacement sockets were available to fit. The ones selected are from Dorman Products, #6433-033. This style is for double-contact bulbs such as #1154, and has a collar and snap-in prongs to fit a 3/4" hole. It also has a boot to keep out road splash, and an extra third wire for use as a ground. This extra wire is not original for older cars, but does give better reliability than grounding at socket edge prongs alone.

Parking, signal, and ground leads have all been extended (using good pieces of old braid-insulated wire) to reach the terminals on radiator cradle, and the splices and wires are double-bound in black tape except at their upper ends. Terminals at wire ends are crimp-on type, but fitted with rubber (not plastic) sleeves. A purist might also wish to use black heat-shrink tubing in place of the tape for a more nearly original appearance. Black plastic rubber sealant, or non-hardening body putty, can be used around edge of new socket to waterproof the lamp assembly, and (as on modern cars) light grease can be used inside the socket.

Foglights: Since these too sometimes give grounding trouble, a similar ground wire has been added from inside each fog lamp shell up to radiator cradle. Foglight wires (#14 gauge) are encased in braided loom where they are visible outside car, but no doubt black

shrink tubing, or thinwall rubber tubing of proper size, could have been used here as well. To avoid drilling bumper or fenders, these foglights are mounted on Unity's offset aluminum lamp arms, and those are bolted to the lower splash pan (which is reinforced with extra metal underneath).

Muffler: There may be no exact match these days for the original 1948-50 Hudson muffler (cylindrical, under trunk, with welded-on short tailpipe, and with built-in resonator chamber at front), but some owners probably have found fairly satisfactory substitutes (please let us know). A truck muffler, #593 from AP Corp., was used on mid-'50's Ford pickups and other vehicles, and if still available will also fit these Hudsons. Inlet and outlet were both 2" size (used with added tailpipe 7-9 inches long), and it gave adequate quieting with not much back pressure. Currently on my '50 C8, however, I am using a Silentone #5524—an unfamiliar brand, but size, shape, inlet, and outlet are the same (with short tailpipe again added), and it appears to be extra-quiet. It's also labeled "Heavy Duty," although I do not know whether it would be sufficiently unrestricted for use with a hot Hornet or the like.

Aircleaner: Most of these on Hudsons were made by AC. I have an optional oilbath-type one, horizontal, with oil reservoir and extra-long neck, to be installed along with Vacuum Clutch; but for now the car has its original unit, shorter, and designed with exposed steel mesh which was intended to be oil-wetted regularly for effective filtering. Sad to say, this mesh on Hudsons and other cars apparently was very seldom oiled by anyone—with predictable results in engine wear and deposits. Also, these units tended to drip untidily if kept

adequately oiled. One partial help is to use oil somewhat heavier than originally specified—at least #50-grade, and even #70 or #90 gear oil might be used, especially in summer.

Admittedly, too, both the oil-wetted and oilbath-type filters are messy devices to clean out when necessary (at least every 4000 miles—the factory recommendation was 2000); and in fact many shops charged as much for this service as for a brand-new replacement filter element on a newer car. However, anyone who drives a collector vehicle with a good engine, and with one of these oil-type filters which is dry or dirty (or missing), is inviting premature engine ruin. This should be kept in mind especially when driving past road projects with flying concrete dust, or the occasional dust cloud from a farm field or from a dirt road.

The oil-wetted (mesh) aircleaners were discontinued in the early 1950's with the introduction of dry pleated-paper air filters similar to those used today, although the oilbath (reservoir-type) units remained available somewhat longer. Many early pleated-paper filter elements were designed to fit older-style aircleaners, taking the place of the oil-wetted mesh or perhaps a foam-type element. On Hudsons the paper filters were probably most familiar as used in a pair on two horizontal AC aircleaners for Twin-H-Power (dual-carburetor) models. The replacement element for those is #2110 from NAPA (about 6" diameter), and I am also using one on my car at present since it is a very good retrofit to replace the 1948-53 Hudson steel-mesh type element, and no oiling is needed. (But the original mesh is put away, not discarded.)

Antenna: The standard radio antenna for all Hudson stepdown models with two-piece windshields was the raked

roof-mounted type with a swivel and inside control knob. This type of antenna, with a slender lead-in on the center windshield post, was not unusual in the late 1940's, being seen also on some GM models. Hudson's version had a two-piece staff, adjustable from 17 to 29 inches, which was adequate for most AM radio listening, and still is more than adequate for typical loudmouth local stations today. For hearing favorite distant stations, however (preferably while driving on roads comparatively free of nearby interference sources), a longer antenna is sometimes desirable.

Some Buicks had a four-section overhead staff adjustable from 14 and a half inches to 44 inches, and I "liberated" one of those at the junkyard long ago. Diameter of staff at bottom is a trifle larger than with the Hudson staff, so that the Hudson alloy base (a used spare one) needed to be bored out very slightly. Note that on most Hudson antennas, the 6-32 setscrew holding staff to base is special, requiring a tool much like an Allen wrench but with a tiny four-point spline instead of a hexagon. The hole in base, and also all antenna sections, should be clean, snug-fitting, and lightly oiled (WD-40, CRC 5-56, etc.) to avoid static crackles. The effect of the extra length for receiving weak stations, particularly those near lower end of the dial, can be surprising (with trimmer screw on radio re-adjusted slightly if necessary). One should remember also to turn the antenna downward where overhead clearance is limited, and fold it down flat against windshield post at car washes.

Bumper guards: A pair of large guards joined by an upper crossbar at center of front bumper was standard on 1948-49 Commodores, and was listed as "optional" for Supers, though apparently nearly all '49's had it, in

place of just two plain guards. On my '50 the two smaller plain center guards were not in best condition, so I replaced them with the guard/crossbar assembly. I'm not certain whether this option was also listed for 1950 (can anyone tell us?), but it fits perfectly.

Kleenex box: Chrome on front faceplate of my Hudson/Auto-Serv tissue dispenser was fire-damaged. It may perhaps be re-plated eventually, but for present use it has been carefully sanded, primed, and painted metallic tan (a good match for the tan leatherette used in 1950 Hudsons), using a spray can of Plasti-Kote touch-up lacquer in a discontinued late-model color, #GM 7147. Lettering is again red enamel, and rest of dispenser has been sanded and re-sprayed original satin black. It is mounted underneath the glovebox, with 3/4" wood spacing between.

Glovebox light: Hudson dashboards '51 and up provided a 9/16" hole for a push-button switch to control the light, but for models before that, the Hobbs combination glovebox/map light (with movable shade) included a small and rather unreliable mercury switch. Sorry. . . mine currently has a small added bracket and push-button switch instead.

Rear domelights: These were a likable feature on Hudson stepdowns, but were available on Commodore and Hornet models only, though the front domelight was standard on all, and all bodysHELLS included a pair of mounting ears, behind headliner, for the rear ones. In the past I have added rear domelights to a '49 Super and a '54 Super Wasp. Factory placement of the switch for these lights was the traditional one, on center body (B) pillar, on passenger side only. This does not make them usable from driver's side of car, and so on a number of

Hudsons I have installed a matching second switch on the driver-side pillar, with wires run underneath seats and connected in parallel with the original switch.

That's enough confessions for the present. Some Hudson experts in our club might possibly discover a few more small modifications of this general nature on my car, and I am not sure whether they would consider me a practical preservationist or merely a phony purist. They are welcome to come and look...and

in fact that may be the only way in which I'll ever meet other HET members, considering the absurd costs at club meets. But I am grateful for the many notes and letters received in past months from HET Club people, and I try to keep up with correspondence and also with these WTN articles. The present series is planned to appear in alternate WTN issues through the year, so I will wish everyone a happy and safe Memorial Day weekend. . .and pleasant cruising in the summer ahead.