Hudsonotes

Column of Mechanical Miscellany
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WITH SCOPE FOR DISCUSSION

TRAILER HITCHES have been in general use on U.S. cars and trucks since long before World War II. Some have been homemade, and many others have been aftermarket products designed to fit specific vehicles. Factory parts books, however, indicate that this fact was politely ignored as much as possible by car manufacturers, including Hudson, at least until very recently (perhaps partly for liability reasons). On some cars the neat and safe installation of a trailer hitch requires much extra work and hardware, but on others such as most 1950-54 Hudsons which have center portion of rear bumper deeply indented to hold license plate, it is fairly simple — the hole for trailer ball stud can be drilled at rear center of the horizontal "shelf" area just below license plate, and then through the reinforcement plate underneath.

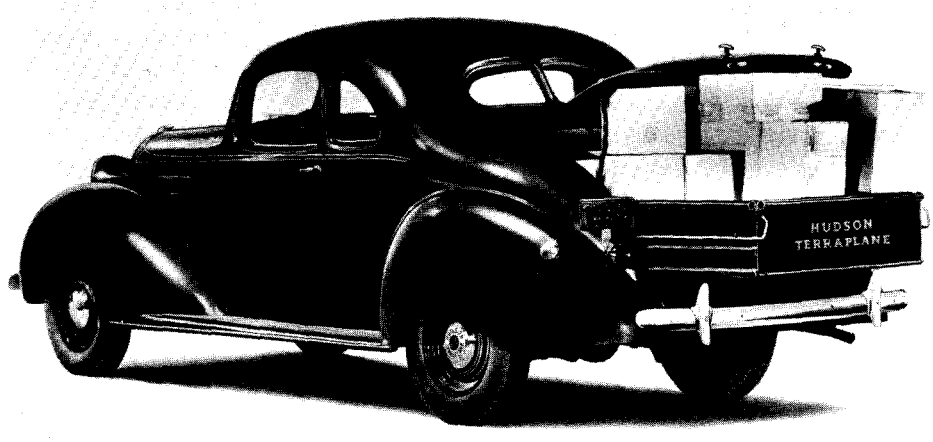
Used only for light-duty trailer service, this arrangement seems to have worked well over the years unless rear perimeter frame of car was seriously weakened by rust. Two of my Hudsons, in fact, came with ball installed at this point. The hole need not be unsightly; on my '50 it is filled at present using a large chrome-headed bolt, short bushing, washers, and nut (well-greased for easy removal). For light-duty trailering with many earlier Hudsons and Terraplanes which have fairly plain bar bumpers, a simple clamp-on accessory trailer hitch could doubtless be used, although various homemade boltons were probably more common.

We'd like to know more about trailer towing with collector-model cars, either now or when they were newer. We hope that readers will write us with their stories, comments, or suggestions on the subject. Does anyone know the approximate year when ball-type hitches first began replacing plain pin-type wagon hitches for auto trailers? And can anyone tell us whether there is a safe and practical way to install a heavy-duty trailer hitch (perhaps load-leveling type) on Hudson stepdown and other models? Were any aftermarket trailer hitches made especially to fit Hudsons? We'd also like to see any appropriate pictures you can send, especially if with a Hudson-built vehicle as the tow car. We'll print a few if possible, and photos will be returned.

FEW EARLY TRAILERS were glamorous, it is true. Often they consisted of little more than an older salvaged front auto axle and wheels, and perhaps springs, attached to a plain wooden box, along with a front tongue and possibly a few inexpensive reflectors. For many farmers and others, during the 1930's particularly, this was essential as an affordable substitute for a pickup truck — and even at its plainest, it was generally less dismal than an older car which had the trunk lid (or most of the rear body) removed for insertion of a crude pickup box.

Terraplane's (and Hudson's) answer to this hauling need, of course, was the famous optional slide-out truck box which installed neatly in the trunk. It was an ingenious feature which in better times might have had a better sales success. Are there any of these "coupe pickup" models surviving in the HET Club today?

Many early boat trailers, too, were home or locally built using a salvaged old-car axle and wheels. Longtime fishing or boating enthusiasts in the Club may be able to tell us more. Often an old trailer continued in use until it was no longer practicable to find obsolete-size tires to fit its wheels. As on a car, periodic grease packing of the wheel bearings was (and is) essential.



1938 Hudson Terraplane Utility Coupe

WITH TRAFFIC these days, a set of lights for the trailer — turn-signal, brake, and tail (perhaps with small decorative clearance lamps added to the tail circuit) — would be a very prudent addition even if not demanded by state law. The styling of many add-on trailer lights has not changed much over the years, and it should be easy to find some with a suitable "period" look for an old-style trailer. They should fit both 6 and 12-volt bulbs (small clearance lamps included), and if 6-volt bulbs are installed, the trailer's connector plug should be clearly marked "6V." If braided loom is available, it can be used to cover unsightly modern wiring.

For the connector plug on car, in order to avoid the all-too-common butchery of car's original wiring harness, branch connectors can often be assembled, and inserted at a junction such as the terminal block found in many Hudson trunks. Be sure that a ground wire is also included — the trailer hitch alone is not a reliable ground, especially for 6 volts. When wiring the two connector plugs, it is best to follow usual modern color-coding: yellow left signal, dark-green or bluish right signal (opposite from most Hudsons!), along with the brown or reddish tail and the white ground. Note that the plug which has only the single ground prong exposed is the one to be installed on the car — and its cable should be fastened so that a hard pull cannot harm the car's wiring. Also, one does not drill a visible hole for this cable, nor pinch it with the trunk lid. If the car (like many Hudsons) has a clean-out hole at rear center of trunk floor, the plug and cable can be passed through this hole when in use.

But since nearly all trailer lights use the same bulb filaments for both turn-signals and brakes, some interesting wiring complications can result when these are used along with a car that has separate bulbs for turn-signal and brake lights. This includes 1948-51 Hudsons and countless late model 12-volt Brand X's. About the only practicable answer in these cases is a small modern solid-state "black box" device installed along with trailer-connector wiring in trunk. Although made for 12 volts, these devices should also work well on 6 volts if ampere load is moderate. Pricey when first introduced, they can perhaps be found occasionally at a discount today.

PROPER ELECTRIC WIRING is essential when installing a trailer connector, overdrive, radio, foglights, or any other electrical accessory — on a collector car or on a late model. Here are some suggestions:

Wiring for 6 volts needs to be somewhat heavier than for 12 or 24 volts, in order to transmit the same amount of power without added loss. Only stranded (never solid) copper wire is used, and a wire end is never wrapped directly around a bolt or binding post without use of a proper terminal lug. It is better, too, to avoid the use of "Scotchlock" and similar type wire connectors, especially for old wire and 6 volts. Although I have no bias against "Scotch" products generally, my experience has been that these connectors seldom hold the wire tightly enough for reliable long-term contact — and if they do, then they are almost sure eventually to break some (or all) of the copper strands. Even a plain tightly-twisted splice is far more reliable, if it is long enough (say 3 inches for #16-gauge stranded wire).

Much preferable are properly crimped-on wire connectors and terminals (or traditional hot-soldered ones, if the owner is especially purist, or moisture problems are anticipated). All wire ends for splicing, crimping, or soldering must be clean and shiny. Clean the strands with extra-fine steel wool if necessary.

Good-quality crimp-type terminals are made of a tinned soft copper which grips the strands quite well. For better moisture resistance, place a touch of heavy grease on the strands before crimping; then crimp with extra care so that greased wires cannot slip out. Use a correct crimping tool (not an ordinary pair of pliers). For added security, if opening in terminal is large enough, use a sufficient length of stripped wire (about ½") so that some or all of the strands can be doubled snugly back upon themselves before they are inserted and crimped.

Most crimped or soldered terminals need a protective insulating sleeve, but for best appearance on older cars this should be of black rubber thin-wall tubing rather than colored plastic. Fasten sleeve with weatherstrip cement if necessary. To insulate wire splices neatly and without tape tangles, plastic tubing can be used, preferably black heat-shrink type. A small flame can be used with this (candle or match), but do not overheat and melt the tubing. One more reliable method is to seal tubing onto the splice with rubber cement and then dip the entire splice briefly into boiling water.

Fuse protection (generally using metal in-line holders) is important for all electrical accessories on an old car, unless they can be conveniently wired through a circuit-breaker. Suggested ampere sizes, at 6 volts, include 20 for foglights, 14-15 for backup lights (pair), 9-10 for spotlight (single), 7½ - 10 for Vacumotive Clutch (without Drive-Master), 30 for overdrive, and 7½ - 14 for underhood/glovebox/trunk lights.

If old wire insulation is badly

faded, it can often be recolored for identification and better appearance by careful use of a felt-point pen. Remove oil film and dirt first with lacquer thinner and a clean rag.

OIL FILTERS on cars of the past several decades are simply taken for granted as standard equipment, but during Hudson's time, from about the early 1930's on up, the filter was an option, usually a "service" one for installation by the dealer. Even with the aftermarket oil-filter kits which also were available, it is safe to say that far fewer than half of the Hudsons and other cars during most of those years were filter-equipped. Many owners, even including some large fleet operators, did not consider the filter necessary or cost-effective.

Then too, a few mechanics and owners believed that oil filters could be actually harmful, perhaps by helping to cause oil starvation under some conditions. An interesting letter received early this year from Lester Roth, of Montana, who is a mechanic and also one of our club's Tourist Emergency Help volunteers, tells about the cars which his father once owned: 1937 and 1940 Hudsons, 1937 Terraplane, and 1941 Hudson. All were 6-cylinder, splash-lubricated, and were driven hard; but only the last one, bought after World War II, had an oil filter. It was also the only one of these ever to burn out an engine bearing — four times, in fact, at the #4 rod in each case. After the fourth burnout a new crankshaft was installed, and a Hudson dealer mechanic suggested that the oil filter would drain while the car was parked; and then upon restarting, the oil pump would need to refill the filter before it could feed any oil to the rear half of the engine. Ben Roth accordingly removed the filter, and indeed had no more bearing trouble with the car.

Winter temperatures and winter driving conditions contaminate engine oil with carbon, acids, water and gasoline dilution. This causes harmful abrasives, sludge and corrosives.

The installation of a filter or the replacement of a filter cartridge keeps oil clean. As a result, upkeep costs are reduced, engine life is longer, oil consumption is lower, and performace is better.

But it is difficult to see a clear cause-and-effect relationship here. One wonders whether the '41, though in beautiful condition, perhaps had one defective crank journal when purchased. Your columnist has owned three Hudsons with splash-lubricated straight-8's — all well-worn, all driven hard, and all with a Fram oil filter added — and despite problems (to be entirely frank) such as oil consumption, burned valves and seats, and one broken piston, there have been no bearing failures to date. It appears to me that if the filter does drain partially (as it may if containing trapped air, especially just after cartridge replacement), the drainage will flow directly into the rear half of the oil dipper tray. But — as with any later Brand X which has a "copycat" oil warning light — one does not put any load on the engine, after starting it, until the light goes out to indicate normal oiling.

I have heard the late Bernard Siegfried, longtime Hudson engineer, criticize oil filters on splasher engines, but simply because of their extremely slow action which is caused by the very low oil pressure. On the other hand, they eventually do trap contaminants, judging by the condition of the cartridge, and the pasty sludge found at bottom of the canister, after extended mileage.

So now it is up to our readers who have driven splash-lubricated Hudsons equipped with oil filters — or not equipped with them. Please send us your observations, and we'll report later. Include brand name of filter (Fram, Michiana, or other) if possible.

IN MID-AUGUST I attended the annual Kiwanis Club old-car show at nearby Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Among the many interesting vehicles present, from trucks to sports cars, were four Hudsons: two Twin-H Hornets, my '50 Commodore, and a beautiful '21 Super Six 7-passenger touring car owned by Harold and Leila Weyer of Manitowoc.

Probably the features one notices first on this car are the polished wood steering wheel, the two folding jump seats, the handsome paint job (blue with black fenders), the twin side-mounted spare tires — and the car's sheer size. Underhood, one finds a very large and tall 6-cylinder Hudson engine, a vacuum feed tank for fuel (no ersatz elec-

tric fuel pump here!), elaborate manifolding — intake on left side, with a Schebler updraft carburetor (no aircleaner), and exhaust on right side, with a small crossover pipe above engine to provide intake heat. Also on the right side, one notices the big starter-generator combination unit, with a shaft and flex coupling going forward to the side-mounted water pump and the large oil pump with ignition distributor built into its top.

The crankcase holds ten quarts of oil. A Moto-Meter temperature gauge is on the radiator cap, and a fuel gauge is on the gasoline tank at rear. Wheels are wood-spoke type with demountable rims, and a typical folding-style luggage carrier is clamped to one running board. Instead of grease fittings, wick-type oil cups are used on the steering linkage and other chassis parts. The car has no interior heater, but there is provision for one, with an opening in the firewall, and an extra air chamber cast in as part of the exhaust manifold. The original list price of this model reportedly was $2,200.

Harold tells us that the engine is in good original condition, and has not needed an overhaul or rebuilding job. It certainly still does run very well.

AND IN mid-September when most of this column was written, our area had a pronounced late-summer heat wave, making it harder to think about the coming holiday season. Nevertheless, I do wish all of our readers the very best for Thanksgiving, for Christmas, and for the new year ahead. We are planning to continue the present series of articles periodically in 1995, and, as always, we especially welcome reader suggestions and comments.