

# Hudsonotes

Column of Mechanical Miscellany  
By George Schmidt

## GUESTS WELCOMED

GUEST COLUMNISTS for Hudsonotes this month are several HET members who have written us (as requested in December) to tell of their experiences with special equipment such as trailer hitches on Hudson-built vehicles. Here are their reports.

William Fitzgerald of Riverside, Washington sent us a photo of his '52 Hornet hitched to a small Boler camp trailer (a Canadian early-'70's model). Trailer is pulled using a hitch ball bolted through the flat center portion of the Hudson rear bumper, as described in December '94 WTN. This plain bumper-mounted hitch has served well, but as Bill points out: "Some bumpers have a reinforcing bar added in this area". I have seen some with a bar underneath the bumper, bolted through that same hole at center, but extending a few inches to the rear, with the ball at the rear-most end. This moves the hitch off the

bumper chrome, and away from the license plate. [It also helps avoid denting bumper on sharp turns.]

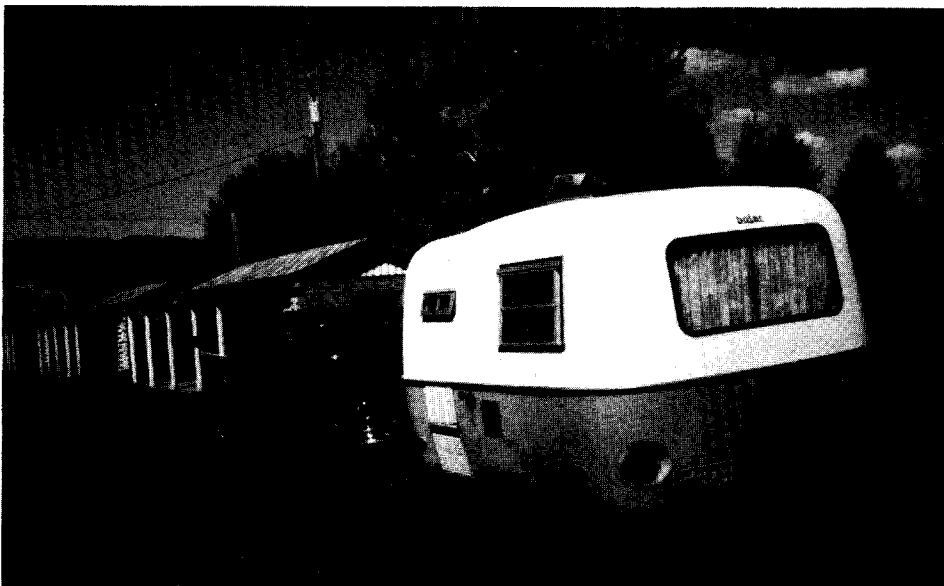
"In my fleet, too, is a '51 Pace-maker with a trailer hitch that looks homemade. It is a plate 3 or 4 inches wide running rearward under the bumper. [Center of bumper is plain, as on '48-49 models.] A vertical piece goes up the bumper face, externally, and is held by a bolt; and another vertical piece goes up just ahead of the rear frame crossmember and is held by another bolt and a washer plate.

"I also have a '51 Hornet with a removable heavier-duty 'load leveler' type hitch. It has a 'receiver' socket to hold the bar that carries the trailer hitch ball, and it appears to be specially made. This hitch has a long 3" by  $\frac{1}{4}$ " steel plate bolted through the trunk floor riser where it is vertical, ahead of the fuel tank. Behind the fuel tank is a long  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " angle iron which is bolted through the car's frame rail at each side. Below the tank is a 1" by 3" bar running front to back, with receiver socket at its rear end. This bar is suspended from the two bolted-on cross-pieces by two front and two rear

lengths of  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " by  $\frac{1}{4}$ " flat steel stock running at an angle. There is also a brace bolted to the center of car's rear frame crossmember, and another to bottom of rear bumper. It appears that by removing just nine bolts—four from trunk riser plate, two from angle iron at frame rails, and three from bumper and rear frame crossmember, the whole assembly could be dropped to the ground. This would also be the only way to remove the fuel tank!

"The rear end of receiver box is about even with the rear bumper, and about 1" below it. The bar carrying the trailer hitch ball is held in the receiver by the familiar side-to-side pin. Interesting, however, is that this receiver socket is 3" wide by 2" high, rather than the square 2" by 2" size which is most familiar today. But by adding side spacers, I use a standard 2" square hitch piece to pull my trailer. I also use long-armed fender-mounted 'trailer' type rear-view mirrors on my Hudson when pulling a trailer. In addition, this '51 Hornet came equipped with a control for electric trailer brakes, 6-volt type. I don't know who made this car's hitch, nor whether it was built for any specific trailer, but I don't think it was an option from Hudson!"

Bill adds that John D. Smith of Killarney, Manitoba, Canada has attended club meets with a camp trailer towed by one of his 1929 Hudsons [hitch construction not described]. Bill also relates that a friend, moving from the Seattle area to Denver, Colorado in the early 1960's, made several trips with a fair-sized utility trailer pulled by his '52 Hudson Hornet, using a plain bumper-mounted hitch ball. We can assume that the Hornet's rear perimeter frame, bumper mountings, etc. were in solid unruined condition.



Arriving at the 1993 "Yellowstone Challenge" 1952 Hornet hardtop pulling Boler camp trailer.

HUDSON-BUILT products were very popular in some rural areas for many years. Sturdy, comfortable, and distinctive, the cars were well adapted to country conditions (including rough roads); and usually another factor was the presence of a dealer attuned to local needs. This was true here in Wisconsin and elsewhere. *WTN* in past issues has featured articles about some of the best-remembered high-volume big-city Hudson dealerships, and it is hoped that in future issues a few of the most successful (though lower-volume) rural or small-town Hudson dealerships can also be given their due. Here, as in many other matters, we shall need to depend upon readers for their recollections and information (and also pictures, if possible). We're sure some good stories are out there.

For a Westerner's viewpoint on this subject, we have a very interesting letter from David Shatto of Canby, Oregon. He writes:

"Your article about 'Trailer Hitches' caught my eye, since I lived in the 1930's and was a farmer. Our family bought a new 1934 Terraplane sedan with optional extra trunk and right-front fenderwell. The first week we had it, my dad had a trailer hitch installed. As you mentioned, in those days the family car often was also a pickup, truck, and tractor. The hitch was installed by a local blacksmith and was built to fit this particular car. A steel bar was made to fit and bolt onto the spring-steel brackets on which the rear bumper was mounted. This bar extended down below and somewhat ahead of the bumper. The type of accessory trunk that was on this model made this arrangement possible, and it was very convenient as well as very strong. A coat of aluminum paint made it look like a factory job. I have seen a

lot of added hitches, and most of them were too weak, and/or they protruded enough to damage other vehicles, besides tearing your pants leg and scraping your shin bone.

"The Terraplane was all we had till about 1942, when we got a pickup truck. The car hauled everything—berries, nuts, feed, hay, gravel, livestock, machinery, wood, household furniture, etc. The Terraplane couldn't be beat: the power, the clutch, the gear ratios—everything was just right. My dad traded it at last for a new 1950 Hudson Pace-maker. No trailer hitch."

ANOTHER TERRAPLANE trailer tale comes to us from Park Waldrop of Greensboro, North Carolina, who found the trailer article in the November/December *WTN* especially timely, since the issue arrived while his mother, 88, was visiting him; and it certainly triggered some memories. In Fort Wayne, Indiana, during the early 1950's, a unique optional non-denominational weekday religious education program for elementary-school children was begun. Classes were held in large 33-foot classroom trailers which were moved from school to school as needed. Since Park's mother was one of the pioneer teachers for this program, she was also responsible during two years for towing one of these trailers to the appropriate school each morning. The family's first Hudson-built vehicle, a '37 Terraplane, was the tow car.

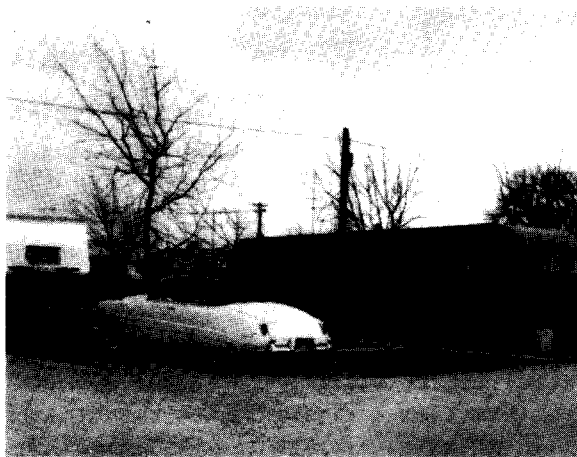
"So the Terraplane got equipped with a heavy hitch and helper springs [hitch design not specified], and Mom became a 'big rig' driver, every morning backing up to the big trailer, hooking up, towing it, and then parking it at a school for the day," Park relates. "As she thought back to those times, she could hardly imagine that she'd

been willing even to try this, much less do it regularly for two school years, through rain, snow, ice, and you-name-it. I am trying to cajole Mom into writing a piece for *WTN* about her trailering experiences with that Terraplane."

"Now you can understand why I just laugh when somebody talks about these Terraplanes having fragile gearboxes or clutches—we never had a clutch or transmission problem with the '37 in spite of its being subjected to Mom's trailer pulling by day and my drag racing and other abuse of it at night!"

A later Waldrop trailer story somewhat resembles a Lucille Ball/Desi Arnaz film script. "In 1957-58 my wife and I, newly married, had our own 'fun' trailering experiences—we pulled a 36-foot mobile home a couple of thousand miles with our '51 Hornet convertible. The hitch was a unique design: essentially a long 'bar' extension of the trailer tongue, which ended at a large steel plate that was fastened with two large U-bolts under the car's rear axle housing [sketch is enclosed]. I can't remember the brand name, but it was well-advertised in 'mobile home living' magazines of the time. [Does anyone else in HET recall this style of hitch, or its name?]

"I chose it mainly because of the bolt-on design. I was trading cars pretty often then, and figured that this would save the cost and hassle of switching a conventional welded-on hitch from car to car. And since the load was placed directly on the car's rear axle, there was no strain on the frame or body (ideal for a convertible), and no helper springs were needed. Although this design wasn't a load-equalizing type, the long effective tongue length helped to reduce the trailer load on the towing vehicle. (Even so, the load was still pretty high, and



*Photo sent by Park Waldrop, showing his 1951 Hudson convertible and the 33-foot trailer which it towed.*

*Lincoln, Nebraska  
Spring 1957*

the strain once bent the rear axle housing on a later tow vehicle, a '55 Chrysler.)

"The biggest drawback I found in driving this rig was a greater-than-normal susceptibility to swaying back and forth, whether initiated by a wind gust or by a sudden steering input. The geometry of the hitch and axle was such that the side thrust of the trailer in one direction would 'steer' the car's rear end in the other direction. It took constant attention to keep the thing in a straight line.

"We had just bought the trailer before leaving Jacksonville, Florida for Lincoln, Nebraska—in January! A few miles into Georgia we were stopped by the highway patrol, since one was not allowed to pull an 'oversized' vehicle there on weekends or at night. The local Justice of the Peace was a kindly fellow who gave some consideration to my being a young Air Force enlisted man on an 'official' move, and only gave me a suspended fine. But he told me to park the trailer until Monday. Also, before hitting the road again, I took some advice I'd heard but hadn't yet implemented, preparing a sign for the trailer's back window, to state: 'U.S. Military in transit under orders.' This was said to be effective in avoiding being stopped by the police, and it worked like a charm for that trip and for three later moves."

His story continues with run-

ning out of gas on a country road (due to the greater fuel consumption when towing), the sudden uncoupling of the trailer in a parking lot (due to slipped U-bolts—the hitch manufacturer issued a revised part some months later), a failed driveshaft universal joint (which was the Hudson's only mechanical problem), and freezing rain followed by heavy snow in Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska—notably on several long steep hills. Tire chains helped for part of the way, but failed and broke while ascending one steep winding hill which had a sharp drop-off on the left side of the road. . . .

"Later trips with the mobile home were much less exciting, thank goodness," Park concludes. "And the Hudson proved itself a decent tow vehicle—certainly one of the more attractive ones around!"

WTN EDITOR Jack Miller points out that factory-made trailer hitches to fit 1948-54 Hudson stepdowns and many other cars were available for years from Draw-Tite (still a familiar brand name). Usually these were "Class 1" (bumper-mounted, not load-leveling), but were a rather generous Class 1 in terms of strength.

Jack also mentions the small trailers which are still available today, and which, though modern-built, are carefully styled for a "period" (c. 1940) streamlined appearance. They are some-

times seen at old-car meets, towed by an appropriate vehicle. Brand names may include Mullins (evidently a reproduction) and Mac-Bilt (several models).

Another distinctive shape, familiar for years, is that of the Airstream travel trailer. Its styling, deeply rounded at both front and rear, was designed both to avoid the usual box shape and to provide functional streamlining. Air resistance was low, and it was said that these trailers could be towed at speeds up to 100 M.P.H. without loss of stability (in fact, one auto-magazine writer successfully tried it). No doubt the compound-curved shape also aided strength and rigidity.

"INSIDE STORY" columnist Harry Kraus, however, has several interesting trailer horror stories to share (all of them fortunately non-Hudson, as I understand).

"Your mention of trailer hitches," he says, "recalls the young man down our street who made his own, and used a reinforcement behind the bumper; and when he started up in a hurry, left the trailer, the hitch, and the complete bumper and its reinforcement at the curbside.

"About electric wiring: I recall one friend who connected the lines to his house trailer with #19-gauge SOLID wire to assure adequate current to the lights. He couldn't understand why every few weeks he would lose another light. Eventually there came the dawn, and he changed to stranded wire. Then the trailer hitch failed at 60 M.P.H. on I-94 [no safety chains, apparently?], and the trailer violated all of the rules saying to keep off the median, and finally flipped. First, he called a wrecker, and then he called me to help him hunt for and gather up all of the items strewn for

about three-quarters of a mile.

"Your comment that periodic greasing is essential for trailer wheel bearings is especially appropriate here in St. Clair Shores, Michigan. We have, reportedly, the highest per-capita boat ownership of any town in the U.S.A. Because of the high cost of dockage, a great number of these boats are stored at home, and are hauled on trailers to the launching ramps. The trailers are backed into the water until the boats float off of them, and naturally the wheels are well under water, which will often fill the grease cavity around the bearings. Many of these are running without lubricant when the wheels freeze up, spinning boat and trailer all over the freeway. I see several of them and their black marks on the pavement each year."

YOUR HUDSONOTES columnist has never witnessed a bad trailer crash, but has had to rewire numerous trailer lights which had been sloppily done originally (poor splices, etc.), and then probably dunked in the lake too often. He has also grease-packed countless wheel bearings. Remember, when packing these bearings, that they need first to be washed clean in solvent and blow-dried, and then checked for any scarred balls, rollers, or races. For boat-trailer bearings and any others subjected to excessive moisture, the grease should preferably be a lithium-soap based (light-colored) type, since this is more water-resistant than the sodium-soap based (darker) types. Your conservative columnist also suggests using only a heavy fibrous old-fashioned grease intended for wheel bearings—not a thinner grease. Liquid oils are not suitable here, even though of course they are far better than nothing.

Be sure the outer grease cap (inner hubcap) is a snug water-

proof fit—perhaps even with a touch of sealer used around its edge if necessary. At inner face of wheel, the grease seal ring must usually be removed along with the inner bearing, which can be driven out using a long punch or drift (preferably brass). Check carefully the fit of this seal on the spindle. Often a new seal is installed with each grease packing job, but even this is nearly useless if the surface upon which it travels is rough or rusty. Surface can sometimes be improved using extra-fine sandpaper (but keep grit out of bearings). Also, to avoid needless battering of wheel bearings at speed, even trailer wheels should be fairly well balanced (say within  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce or so). Bear in mind that small-diameter wheels—as on many trailers and some modern toy cars—must spin at much higher R.P.M. for a given road speed than do larger-diameter wheels.

ANOTHER LETTER arrived, just at deadline time, from Kenneth "Rod" Hudson of Trenton, Florida, who has a factory-built aftermarket trailer hitch on his '51 Hudson Hornet Hollywood. He says in part: "I picked this hitch up many years ago at the annual Dunkirk, N.Y. flea market. We first used it on a '50 Hudson Super we had at the time. It did a fair amount of towing on the Super 6 and has done quite a bit more on the Hornet hardtop. It attaches with three bolts—a large one up into the perimeter frame, and two smaller bolts up through the bumper. I presume these two were meant to be chrome round-head carriage bolts, but of course the installation kit was lost by the time I got the hitch.

"It was made, I understand, to fit the 1952-54 Hudsons. I vaguely remember that it had to be altered slightly at the frame end to get the alignment right for '50-51. I believe the bumper

height changed for '52.

"We moved from western New York state to Florida about seven years ago, and towed another of our Hudsons down with the Hollywood. Later we were back in New York with the Hollywood, and towed a fair-sized boat to Florida on that trip."

SINCERE THANKS to Bill, David, Park, Rod, and Harry (and others who have written, to be published later) for their help. We are always very glad to hear from readers by mail, and I endeavor to answer all letters personally, although telephone calls (collect or otherwise) are not very practicable for me. As this appears in print, spring has already arrived, and many Hudsons, with or without trailers. . . not to mention the Easter Rabbit. . . are coming out of hibernation. Perhaps our long-eared friend can be persuaded to bring a few lubricants and other needed Hudson maintenance supplies along with the colored eggs this year.