

# HUDSONOTES

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## *Trunks--and Tires to Spare*

THE SPARE TIRE, if not two or more, was an essential element in early motoring, even though often an awkward one to carry. I have not seen any picture showing a spare on Hudson's original 1909-10 Model 20 roadster, but John Conde in *The Cars That Hudson Built* pictures the 1910 Model 21, a touring car, with spare tire strapped part-way across the right front-door opening—not a very convenient placement, even though there were no front doors until the late-'10 "Fore-Door." On the '11 Model 33 "Torpedo," too, the tire mounting appears to disable the right (driver's) front door.

Earliest Hudson in the book to display the conventional rear-mounted spare is the 1912 "Mile-A-Minute" Roadster. Tire is neatly set at a rakish angle behind the big optional oval fuel tank, and both '11 and '12 models here feature demountable rims. The '13 Model 37 roadster, too, has its two raked spares at rear. But the 1913 and '14 Model 54's (Sixes) retain the side-mounted spares, though the '14 models have it relocated to clear the front door. Apparently it remained there (on some models) as late as 1922. Other models had the spare at rear. Side-mounted spares reappeared on 1928 (custom) and '29 (production) Hudsons, now with a front fender well to hold them.

However, many spares remained rear-mounted. During the 1920's accessory spare-tire covers had become popular, usually made of waterproof cloth, and often bearing car or dealer insignia. Covers were thus a forerunner (sometimes a rather garish one) of the familiar chrome or *decalcomania* dealer markings on trunk lids. Many of the tire covers were made by the Gates Company (of hose and fanbelt fame), with lettering for the owner's town and state also offered as a custom touch. In the 1930's, decorative metal spare-tire covers became fashionable, and cars retaining optional side-mounted spare tires often carried them in matched pairs, mainly for appearance. Since the second spare was rarely needed, some cars—notably Britain's American-named Lagonda V-12 adapted one dummy tire shell for other uses, such as a handy tool storage kit. However, the side-mounted shell was difficult to fit into later fender styles, and so practically disappeared with World War II. Hudson discontinued sidemounts after 1938.

NOT THAT EVERYONE liked the spare exposed at rear. Theft was relatively easy, and one sarcastic critic of the Chrysler Airflows (1934-37) said that the rear tire shell added to these streamlined bodies looked about like a washtub on

somebody's back porch. Certainly it was not ideal aerodynamically.

Besides, Hudson in 1934 had pioneered the modern method of spare-tire storage, a concealed compartment at rear, with ample space for the tire and tools. It was soon widely copied. A few Brand X's, in fact, including Packard, had offered a built-in rear compartment even before '34, but not for the tire, which remained side-mounted.

Shortly after this, many cars, including Hudson for '38, offered an optional domed trunk lid which fitted the standard rear opening, but provided extra carrying space while also giving the car a not unattractive "bustle-back" appearance.

Hudson and Terraplane for 1935, however, instead offered "trunk model" cars which had a rear compartment extension permanently attached either with piping or "fender welt" at the body seams (late '34 & early '35), or else with the metal faired and leaded in place (late '35). The lid with twin locks was at the top, and storage space extended forward into the car body. The spare tire could be stowed here, out of sight, for maximum cargo space—it could still be side-mounted.

A folder at the Club Library pictures these special trunk models, but production of them was probably limited, and hence we were especially interested to see one in a recent for-sale photo—a '35 Terraplane 2-door from Donald Wall, Indiana (September/October '98 *WTN*, p. 47). Are there any more of these in our Club at present? The standard 1934-35 Hudsons and Terraplanes (coach and sedan models) had a smaller rear compartment, for the tire or limited cargo, with a lid which fitted flush with rear line of car body (no hump), and opened in the conventional manner. Possibly our Club has more of these standard models.

Many cars of various makes continued to offer this humpless rear-end styling (though with some additional compartment space provided), under names such as "concealed trunk," "fleetline," or later, "fastback," until 1950 or so—but several of them also had "trunk sedan" or "notch-back" bodies available as an alternative. Hudson's "stepdown" sedans, 1948-54, were somewhat of a compromise between the two styles. The fast-back shape was retained on a few European cars in the '50's (Pegaso; Volkswagen), and it made a U.S. comeback in the '60's (AMC's Marlin, Plymouth's Barracuda etc.); but since then the

notched rear silhouette has mostly prevailed, except for the many squared-off "hatchback" models.

ORIGINALLY THE automotive "trunk" was literally that—an accessory chest or box carried at rear. Many early cars, especially coupes or roadsters such as Hudson's "Twenty," had ample rear frame space for an add-on chest—or an open pickup box (perhaps homemade)—or for the optional rear seat or oversize fuel tank if preferred. With this available space, trunks—whether separate chests or as part of the car body—were common on single-seat or two-door models long before they were much seen on touring cars or sedans. We haven't the exact initial year, but it was also earlier than the 1920 Hudson coupés (picture, November/December '96 *WTN*, p. 13).

Does any reader know? We'd also like to know when the rumble seat (using similar rear compartment lid) first appeared. By 1929, these seats were numerous enough that Hudson offered an optional small folding convertible top just for the rumble-seat passengers.

A more graceful but less practical 2-door body style in those years was the boat-tailed speedster, with a shape originally patterned after early-day racing cars. A few of these boat-tails had external trunk lids, but many did not, and often it was necessary to carry ballast or very heavy cargo in the tail to achieve proper rear traction. The Essex and Hudson boat-tails were among the best-known ones, but Packard and other luxury makes also offered this body style (stock or custom)—and on Ford the boat-tails were often constructed from aftermarket kits.

The rear-mounted chest was certainly more practical than the large side-mounted baskets or boxes also seen on some early cars. A toolbox, too, was often mounted on the running board of a trunkless early car. Even an accessory pet carrier or small kennel was made for running-board mounting; and while this does not seem a very comfortable location for man or beast, add-on "outrigger" seats (probably illegal today) were also made to fit on running boards. More commonly, to hold loose luggage, boxes, etc. on the running boards, "luggage carriers"—usually a folding-type fence with a clamp at each end—were familiar extras.

BY THE MID-1920's, however, the add-on aftermarket auto trunk (with supporting hardware) was big business for firms such as Taylor, Chicago. Trunks were available to blend with the rear body lines of Hudsons and most other cars, and were usually finished to match the car (or its top material). In these, some may see a predecessor of today's matched "caps" for pickup trucks. Some cars, including Essex, even had a separate trunk with the spare tire(s) mounted behind that. Some early car bodies featured a set of vertical wood or metal strips at rear—occasionally copied by later stylists, but originally used to prevent trunk or luggage from rubbing against the body paint.

HET Club Librarian John O'Halloran has sent me a photocopy of the 1929 Hudson-Essex accessory catalogue. It shows an optional trunk with black imitation leather covering and genuine leather straps, which "may be installed on the trunk rack of any standard Greater Hudson." Inside of trunk included two matching fitted suitcases, plus tool space at side. Accessory fitted luggage for rear or side mounting was offered for some luxury cars from 1912 or earlier until the streamline era, but this is the only example we have found listed for Hudson.

For Essex, the catalogue shows a metal trunk shaped to fit rear contour of the car body, with primer or black lacquer paint, or (on the deluxe version) matched body color paint plus leather handles. These trunks could be locked, and could be used along with a rear-mounted spare tire. A similar but larger painted steel trunk was available for the Hudson coach and standard-sedan.

For Hudsons with the spare tire carried in a front fender well, the 1929 catalogue offers an accessory metal cover which protects the tire while showing the wheel spokes, and also provides a solid base for the optional tire-mounted rear-view mirror. This mirror featured a ball swivel for easy adjustment, and when used without the metal cover, it required a strap or similar fastening. Tire-mounted mirrors were also popular on Brand X's, and are still found today in reproduction form.

THE LUGGAGE RACK at rear was another typical feature of the era. It was included on Hudson's top models for 1929, and later remained fashionable even on some cars which had built-in trunks. Used mainly for luggage or an extra trunk not permanently attached, the rack was usually a metal

grille which could be folded to a vertical position when not in use. Rear trunk racks or mountings in various forms continued popular still longer on some English and other foreign cars.

Much earlier, some luggage racks were found on car (or stagecoach) roofs, and much later, some of these reappeared on postwar station wagons, as both a visual and a useful item. Modern detachable-type rooftop luggage carriers, however made to clamp onto the metal drip rail at each side (sometimes with peril to the paint) apparently date from the mid-1950's and up. When fitting one of these to a 1936-54 Hudson, be sure that it is an older version with more arch or curvature than is usual at present, to clear the domed roof panels on these models.

Some cars of the teens and twenties, even inexpensive ones, also offered surprisingly generous carrying space between the front and rear seats. Except on "close-coupled" versions, there often was room even for optional folding rear jump seats, now seen only on much larger vehicles. Then too, Henry Ford's famous dictum for the Model T was that farmers should have enough room to carry their milk cans (commonly of 15½" diameter in those days) in this space. (Will a helpful reader please tell us the between-seats measurement on his early-'20ish Essex?)

A LOCK FOR the rear-mounted spare tire was optional on the '29 Essex (with three styles available), and was standard on some Brand X's—e. g., Nash. The center hole of a rear-mounted tire and rim, if not hidden by a cloth cover, was sometimes used to mount accessory lights. A three-lamp add-on unit was available in the mid-'20's with the Hudson, Essex, or other car name, in versions for either license-plate or spare-tire mounting. It included a brake light, an auxiliary tail/license light, and a white backup light—the earliest backup light which we have found offered for Hudson-built cars. (Red brake lights as standard equipment date from about 1927, but several add-on styles were also available.)

Another accessory light available for spare-tire (or bumper) mounting at that time was a rear turn-signal unit featuring a red arrow for left turns and a blue arrow for right ones. In the 1930's Hudson offered one other turn-signal unit, for bumper mounting, with two flashing amber arrows, again apparently intended for rear use only.

Probably the most ingenious use of a rear-mounted spare tire (in trunk) appeared on a customized early-'50's Packard. The spare wheel was chain-driven and could be lowered to the pavement as a quick parking (and unparking) aid in tight quarters.

The exposed spare tire at rear was already obsolete on American cars in 1940-48 when Lincoln produced its Continental (basically Zephyr V-12) models which retained the tire in a rear-mounted shell. The styling of these cars, however, was soon recognized as classical—as it remains today—and ever since then, any spare tire similarly mounted on a later U.S. car is usually designated as “Continental.” This is despite the fact (I am told) that on the Continent of Europe, this rear tire mounting is commonly regarded as “American” equipment.

IN THE EARLY 1950's the Continental-type spare tire achieved a styling comeback on U.S. cars—as did wire-spoke wheels—both as factory and as aftermarket equipment. Alas, many of the Continental tires (and wire spokes) were phonies; but there also were many genuine ones, including Nash's and Rambler's. One advantage of this equipment, as ads pointed out, was more usable trunk space; but another, seldom mentioned, was cited by famed auto writer Tom McCahill, who noted that this amount of weight, hung so far behind the rear axle, much improved rear traction, especially on slippery upgrades. It was also handy at the rare times when two spares still were carried (both rear street tires while the mud-and-snow treads were in use, for instance)—not two strapped together as in the old days, of course; but one of them would use the original mounting in trunk.

Hudson stepdown models apparently had factory Continental tire equipment available in just one year, 1954 (later AMC Hudsons used the Nash-type Continental mounting. I vaguely recall that some aftermarket suppliers such as Foxcraft in the 1950's unfortunately seemed to list add-on Continental tire kits (both real and fake) for practically all U.S. cars except Hudson and perhaps Crosley.

However, the '54 Hudson kit has also been successfully retrofitted to earlier stepdown cars, with some adaptation—notably by David Sollon, Pennsylvania (our HET online whiz). Photos of his '51 convertible show a very sanitary (as customizers used to say) installation, lacking only backup lights as a possible finishing detail.

The lights, of course, are a matter of choice (preferably in a style to match fog-lights at front of car), but were an authentic add-on for these models, and can also help to fill in the added sheet-metal area at rear. As with nearly all genuine Continental-type tire mounts, extension support arms and a wide added gravel pan are needed to shift the rear bumper several inches farther back.

There are also three or more other Hudson stepdowns with similar Continental-type tire mounts in our club, David tells us. Club Library also reports that one custom 1955 auto-show Hudson was built with rear fenders extended to that the taillights were flush with the continental spare tire.

ON MANY stepdown models, especially the '48's or early '49's without trunk reinforcement plate or extra underfloor rib, the spare tire bolted in place can help to stiffen trunk floor and reduce resonance slightly. Note the fine-thread holddown bolt on these models (later ones were coarse-thread). Some spares are stored face-down to help protect the whitewall (accessory extension hose can be used to maintain inflation).

Certainly the spare tire, or more often several, were highly practical necessities in the early days (and again during World War II, when good tires were unavailable). In recent decades, however, it has been suggested that the extra tire fills more of a psychological than a practical need. This is probably true; and even despite the compact spares usually supplied with recent models, most of us, I think, feel better when a “real” extra tire and rim are carried along.

What other spare automotive items can you think of which might be even more useful to carry on trips, whether in your collector car or in your late model? We have a tentative list, and are also open to reader suggestions, for future publication here. Let us know what you think, or perhaps have learned through experience.

Also planned: more tech tips, and a second Hudsonotes Ten-Year Index (1988-1998). Meanwhile, a Happy Easter and good cruising to all!

