

Winter Reflections

HUDSONOTES

By George Schmidt

WHAT'S THE BEST time of year to have your car repaired?

In many areas there is a comparative slack period (aside from winter emergency work) at repair shops from approximately Christmas till Easter (or year's end till spring tax time). Hence there may be more time then for special work—including work on antique models, if they can be kept off salted slushy surfaces. Bear in mind that some components—heaters & defrosters, starting systems, automatic chokes, etc.—require cold subfreezing weather to be tested properly.



Tires, particularly tubeless bias-ply type, need to be well-inflated in the cold or they may possibly loosen and leak at the rim, because of stiffening. Rubber weatherstrip, too, may stiffen somewhat, leading to a poor fit (or excessive door slamming). Use of a silicone product on the weatherstrip is helpful, and can also prevent doors and trunks from freezing shut, but since it may cause problems with future repainting unless totally removed with a special solvent, some owners may prefer to use the traditional Door-Ease wax stick for the purpose instead. Note also that old weatherstrip sometimes loses much of its sealing ability even though it still feels "rubbery" to the touch.

Electric engine heaters became popular in the years after World War II-

first mainly for big trucks and heavy equipment, and later for other engines as well. They are still very helpful for easy non-destructive starting of old cars in cold weather. Best are the types which do not apply heat to the engine directly, but only to the coolant liquid. If there is any possibility of a slight head-gasket leak, methoxy propanol (Dowtherm, etc.)—or plain old alcohol—antifreezes are safer than the glycol types, although the alcohol probably should not be used with some electric heaters, nor with a high-temperature engine thermostat. The optional pressure-type radiator cap (about 3 or 4 lb.) is also suggested, especially with alcohol, provided there are no leaks.

An alcohol-type thermostat opened

at about 140°, which did not provide much heat from the car heater. Standard Hudson thermostats opened at about 155°. Use of "hot" 180° or 192° thermostats is probably unwise in an old car, but I've had good results with a 177° (bypass-style) one. Units were made by Thomson, Robertshaw/Fulton, and others.

A stop-leak product such as Bar's-Leaks can be used along with water or antifreeze solutions. On an old car some owners may use it primarily as Insurance, though an excessive amount can help to clog small pas-

Hudson Dealer in Dover,
New Hampshire, 1917.



From the Carl Weber collection

although I have not seen any recent specifications for them. We'd like to know what experiences members have had both with straight-grade and with multigrade oils in Hudson engines. Please write.

An added problem, of course, is that modern high-detergency oils can cause disaster if they suddenly loosen all of the solid contaminants which have accumulated inside an old engine over the years.

DOES ANYONE still carry tire chains in his Hudson trunk? They are not fun to install—especially under skirted rear fenders—but they can make the car manageable under otherwise hopeless emergency conditions of ice or snow—or mud—and of course they are completely authentic. Usually the traditional open-link style is quite adequate, although on glare ice the reinforced type (with welded claw on each link) may be preferable, especially now since the somewhat irresponsible outlawing of carbide tire studs in most states a few years ago.

For extended storage, chains should be coated with light non-detergent oil, and laid out on papers to drain thoroughly. They can then be put away in a heavy cloth bag. With them there should be a pair of spring-wire “chain installers” (these really do help); and to reduce wear and noise—and help spare those wide whitewalls—there should also be an elastic or coiled-spring “chain tightener” for each wheel.

Open-link chains should be installed with the more-worn side (if any) toward the tire. If wear is significant, it is wise to carry a few open “chain repair” links, (which will close when run over). Do not allow a broken cross-chain to beat on wheel housing or car body.

Chains should be long enough to allow buckling them on even over mud-&-snow treads when necessary (this is equal to an extra tire size or two). Most

sages, or place a thin insulating coat where it is not wanted.

AN ADDED ADVANTAGE OF electric engine heaters is that they can permit use of fairly heavy straight-grade oils (usually SAE #20 or #30) in the crankcase year-around even in cold climates. It appears that these oils, if high-quality, can give an old engine (which was designed for them) somewhat better protection in hard use than can most multigrades, such as SAE #10W-30. The straight-grade SAE #10 or #10W oils originally recommended

for cold-weather use, of course, could give only limited protection when the engines were hot and under heavy load.

Early multigrade engine oils came out in the 1950's during the last few years of Hudson production, but the “viscosity index improvers” in them were notorious for short life, often reducing #10W-30 oil to plain #10 grade within only a few hundred miles of driving. Apparently the long ropy molecules of these compounds were being mechanically sheared into shorter pieces. Present-day multigrade oils have been improved in this respect,

of the typical rhythmic pounding from tire chains can be eliminated by rebuilding them: for example, if the pair originally has 16 cross-chains each, all spaced with 3 side-chain links between, change them to have some with 2 links between, and some with 3, in completely irregular order, and allowing 17 cross-chains on one wheel and 18 on the other (without changing length). The result will be merely a generalized rumble at all speeds. A pair of tire-chain pliers is useful when removing and replacing cross-chains. It can also be used to remove lead weights from wheels.

Several brands of tire chains have been available, but the best-remembered one is Weed (from American Chain Co.). Weed also was one of several brands of accessory bumpers made to fit Hudson and most other cars before the years (mid-'20's) when bumpers became standard equipment. Weed bumpers were typically double-bar at the center and single-bar at each end, sometimes with decorative bolts to match the car make.

In the era of smooth tire treads, chains were often used even in non-freezing rain, and in fact were a legal requirement in some areas. Fortunately wheels were more accessible in those days.

Chains may be useful even on a few late-model vehicles when the going is particularly bad, although I have no idea what this might do to the "wheel sensor" devices found with some antilock-type brakes.

WHILE GATHERING these materials for one more column, I realized that the Y.G.B.K. (You Gotta Be Kidding) Award for this year should again be given to owners who are convinced that a Hudson in good original or restored condition is somehow inadequate or unsafe for today's traffic conditions. Even though I've never driven on a California freeway, I can assure you from past driving experience (some of

which I'd rather not brag about) that these cars, especially stepdowns and even some earlier ones, if properly maintained, can still take care of themselves (and you) extremely well on any road—and with no need whatever for non-Hudson engines, substitute brakes, inauthentic tires...or add-on armor plating.

It is true that some of the smaller Hudson engines, and/or lack of overdrive gearing, may impose a somewhat more conservative driving style. It's also true that wrong brake linings, especially if seldom checked or adjusted, are likely to get you into trouble—as are nearly-bald tires in wet weather, or wrong or worn-out shock absorbers, or faulty lights.

When checking underneath car for any possible deep rusting of brake or fuel lines, look particularly at all points where lines are clipped to frame. Sometimes too a dab of grease or heavy oil at these points is a useful preventive. Rear brake cables, including their outer sheaths, safety lever, and clevises, should also be oiled. And it may perhaps be wise, once a year or so, after a warm-up drive, to stomp the brake pedal as hard as for any-panic stop, in your own yard at 0 MPH, to see whether anything lets go.

IF YOU INSIST upon swapping engines, the Hornet is usually the most appropriate replacement (and it is usually a drop-in fit). Overdrive adds much to drivability, and does not compromise authenticity on most models. The modern air-type shock absorbers may be wonderful devices, and some late-model vehicles would be in a bad way without these; but Hudsons do not really need them, if good original-type hydraulic units are available.

Hudson stepdown models used two shock-absorber brands—by Monroe Auto Equipment Co. (sometimes labeled "MAECO"), and by Delco (GM). Both were available in standard and two heavier-duty versions. We are cau-

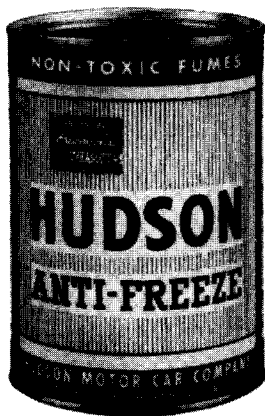
tioned against mixing brands on right and left sides; and of course mixing standard and heavy-duty units on a single car is risky. Beware particularly of heavy-duty shocks used in front along with standard or lighter ones at rear—this may cause the nose to plow on turns.

Earlier Hudson shock absorbers 1940-47 were of the same two brands, each available in several grades of stiffness, but most were of the "teardown" or internally-repairable (and refillable) variety. Only a few (mostly 1947) were of the later permanently-sealed type. All of these direct-acting hydraulic snubbers were known as "airplane type" because of their use on landing gear. Can anyone tell us when they were first used on Hudsons? Previous hydraulic shock absorbers usually had a large short cylinder with pivoting arm at center, much like those seen on heavy-duty door closers. Before that, the snubbers (if any) were often simply large adjustable friction hinges, or had the spring leaves designed for extra friction.

I'VE BEEN in no physical condition to attend many old-car shows this year, but did manage to visit the one here at Mishicot, Wisconsin in July. Many of the cars present were fine vehicles but not extremely old, with only a few from before the modern muscle car era; and as usual the Big Three predominated. I saw several β 'Vettes, two Model A's, a Roadrunner, a few rods, an AMC Marlin, a Studebaker, several pickup trucks, and so on. There was a Hudson too (Pacemaker convertible), but I didn't see it since it left before I arrived at about 2 p.m.

THANK YOU to all readers who have written in. Best wishes to everyone for a happy Thanksgiving and Christmas season!

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