



# HUDSON

## PROGRESSIVE INDEPENDENT

By Bill Corey

**T**HIS is a story about the upstart who upset the applectart, about a company that dared to be different in an era when half the population, hypnotized by the mass advertising barrage of The Great Czars of Motordom, trots docilely downtown to buy overhead valve automobiles.

Today that company's daring is beginning to pay off among growing numbers of independent thinking people. They are being "Hornetized," driving the phenomenal Flathead Six.

Why do these stubborn Dutchmen persist in building a car with an engine the experts call obsolete? Certainly, authority and "expert opinion" are on the side of the OHV clan, but canned opinion doesn't win races. The facts are there—the Fabulous Flathead continues to mop up in stock car competition and this much maligned motorcar is highly esteemed by leading automotive engineers, editors, and racing drivers. Furthermore, their affection goes a long way back. Nearly 40 years ago, the Hudson Motor Car Co. staggered the industry with the announcement of the first high-speed production engine. To say that this caught the boys in Detroit napping is an understatement. It blew the roof off every engineering department in Motor City!

The two secrets of the first Super-Six were a counter-balanced crankshaft, which enabled it to rev at speeds the plodders couldn't touch, and an unheard of compression ratio of 5 to 1. Such goings-on smacked of witchcraft to car buyers of 1916, but the rugged 76 HP engine defied convention and smashed stock car records by the dozen! To top that off, Hudson made a 24 hour speed and endurance run at nearly 76 mph, and traveled 2½ hours at 104 mph. That's hot for a 1916 stocker when you recall that this was the year the Indianapolis 500 was won at only 85 mph by a racing car! Hudson's 24 hour record stood for fifteen years, by the way. It was finally broken by a Marmon Sixteen (16 cyl., 491 cu. in.) at 76.4 mph. It took the industry a decade and a half and double the cubic inches to turn the trick.

In the Terrible Twenties, Hudson cars were the favorite

of bootleggers and sportsmen alike, with *the* reputation for performance. However, the shrewd, market-wise Dutchmen exploded another bombshell—an entirely new car, the "F Head" Essex Four. Offering Hudson performance at a new low price, it was an instant success. Hotter than any competition, they outran the best of the day. At the same time, Hudson came out with a closed car at open car prices. The combination of the new engine and new body style was a winner. To keep up with the demand, the factory was forced to double its floor space and triple production facilities.

The famous coach body was but the first of millions, but in 1924, much to the mystification of Hudson fans, the "F Head" four engine was superseded by a new European type six, small bore, long stroke, high revving. Although something of a flop as the years wore on because it tended to come unraveled, this Sewing Machine Six was good enough to carry Hudson-Essex to third spot in sales in 1929. Only Ford and Chevrolet sold more cars in the United States that year!

Meanwhile, the quest for improved performance brought forth another new engine in the Hudson line. In 1927 the "F Head" design was revived. Power went up mightily, but due to a faux pas in cylinder head research so did fuel consumption. The condition was later corrected, but many believe that the "gas hog" reputation of the Hudson, combined with the rod-scattering tendencies of the Essex, caused sales to hit the skids. The factory must have thought so too, for in 1930 a small displacement eight cylinder Hudson was announced, along with a beefed-up splash oiling system for both series. Call them stubborn, or what you will, Hudson engineers remain sold on the "Duo-flo" splash oiling system to this day, even though public demand has forced them to a full pressure system. They must have some brothers at GM, too—the 1953 Chevrolet "150" still stands by a modified splash system!

During the early '30s feeble attempts were made to brighten up a tarnished reputation, but the Golden Era had passed.

### Experts label the flat head engine obsolete — yet Hudson's flat head continues to win — Why?

Depression-bound and with a clammy fist clenched around his thin purse, Joe Public wasn't buying performance.

Those who recall 1932 will remember that the automotive industry, in an effort to pull out of the depression by its bootstraps, labored like a lion—and brought forth a lion! It was a vintage year and Hudson's 1932 models were definitely outstanding.

That summer saw the introduction of the first Terraplane, probably the most sensational performer to ever hit the American road.

But it was in the period from 1932 to 1952 that Hudson went all-out in its selling job. Starting with the Terraplane Eight, Hudson since has broken more stock car records and written more advertising "Performance Copy" than all other manufacturers combined. Consider too, that while it has taken 20 years for their gamble to pay off, it has taken the rest of the industry the same period to break the '35 Hudson standing mile record! (1953 Dodge, by a paltry 4.2 mph.)

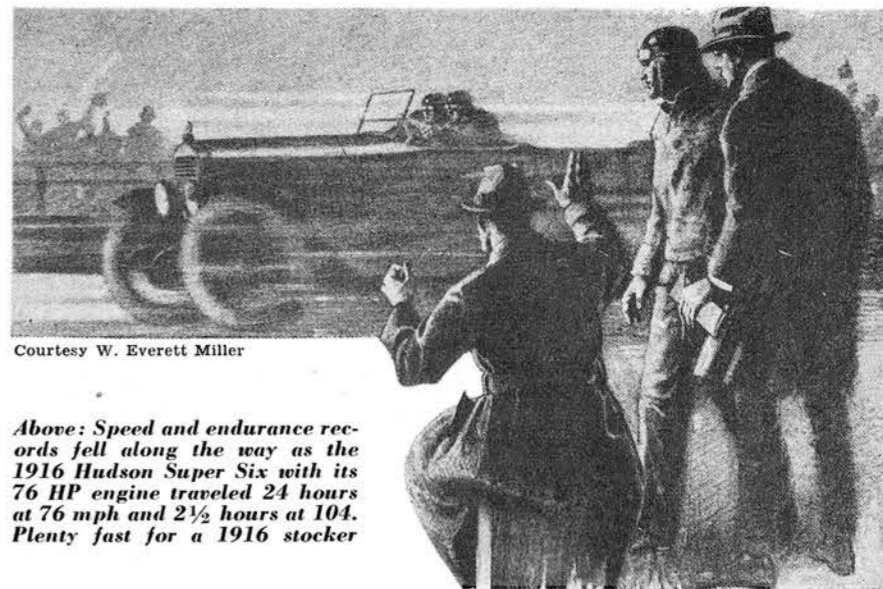
Yet, 99% of Hudson's 150 records still stand. One that even Jaguar hasn't been able to break is the 12 day, 20,000 mile record at an average speed of over 70 mph. And with a 183 cu. in. flathead six, to boot! Try that on your family car.

Do you recall the Hudson ads of 1935? That was the year of the "Ruggedness Runs" and "The Big Challenge." Cars were turned over to rural route mail carriers and test drivers throughout the nation with terse instructions to "tear 'em up" in a series of 24 hour-a-day, 30 day runs. Results were published, good or bad. "The Big Challenge" was even more startling. In full page newspaper ads throughout the land, Hudson dealers invited all competition to come in for a performance showdown. But few accepted the challenge and those who did were usually badly beaten.

But while low sales seemed to indicate that the general public pretty much disregarded facts about performance, hot rod boys in the U.S. and Europe were beginning to perk up their ears.

Reid Railton, one of England's great engineers and designer of the world's fastest car, started modifying Hudsons in 1933, fitting them with special bodies and working over engine and suspension for British trials work. Called the "Railton," the cars met with great success and when one was road-tested by the staid, conservative "Autocar" magazine, it was described as being "10 years ahead of its time." The car used a very slightly modified Hudson 254 cu. in. engine and was

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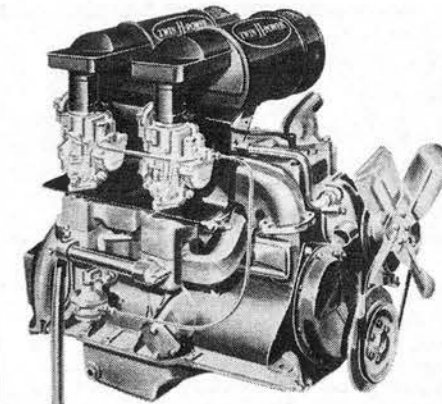
Courtesy W. Everett Miller

Above: Speed and endurance records fell along the way as the 1916 Hudson Super Six with its 76 HP engine traveled 24 hours at 76 mph and 2½ hours at 104. Plenty fast for a 1916 stocker

Below: Kurtis-Kraft sports car with stock Hudson Hornet engine. Bulge on right side of hood accommodates Twin-H Power dual carburetor set-up. Acceleration run was zero to 60 in 7.7 seconds. Kurtis chassis is similar to Indianapolis models

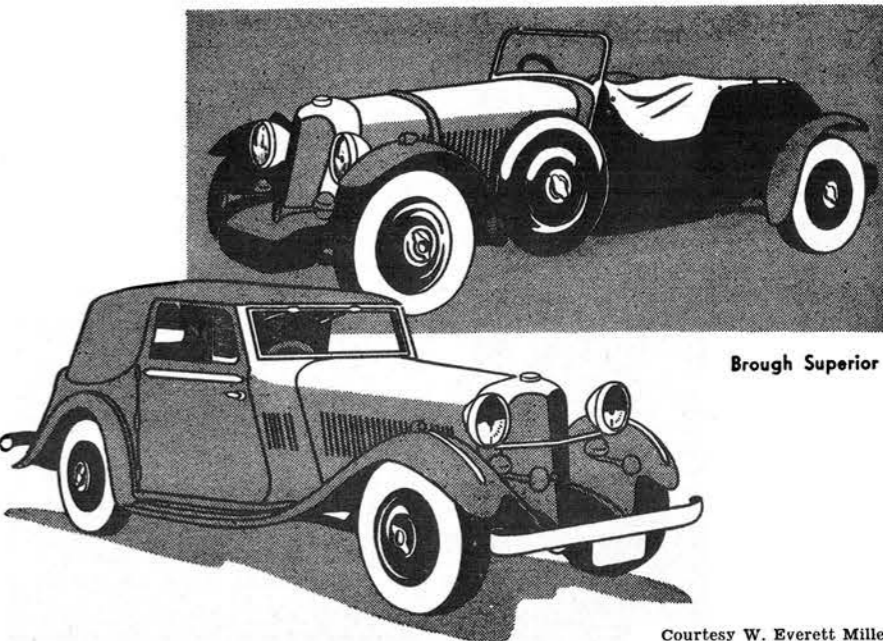


Bob Canaan Photo



Below: 1936 English Brough Superior used Hudson chassis with blown Hudson Six engine, did zero to 60 in 9.9 seconds

Above: Twin H-Power dual carburetor system, optional on Hudson engines, reportedly adds 5 miles per hour top speed



Brough Superior

Courtesy W. Everett Miller

## HUDSON

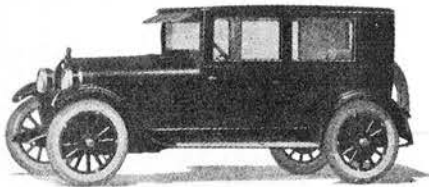
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fitted with a four passenger open body. Zero to 60 mph time was  $8\frac{1}{5}$  seconds, top speed 110 *actual* mph—on 70 octane gas. Not bad for 20 years ago. Few XK-120s or street roadsters can top that.

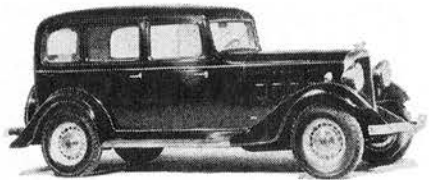
Soon after the Railton established its niche, a famous English motorcycle firm, Brough Superior, started building Hudson Specials. Using the 212 cu. in. six cylinder engine fitted with a blower and a lightened body this powerhouse could accelerate from 0 to 60 in  $7\frac{1}{5}$  seconds and had a top speed of well over 100 mph.

Production of both these cars was interrupted by World War II and after the war, Britain clamped import restrictions on this type of chassis. Needless to say, this kind of performance has kept them in demand even today and Railtons and Brough Superiors are collector's items.

Photos Courtesy of W. Everett Miller



**Above: 1924 Hudson-Essex Six. Car sold for \$975, boasted European type small bore, long stroke, high revving engine**

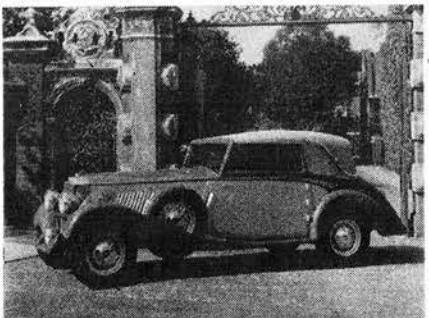


**Above: One of the most sensational performers to hit the American road, this 1933 Terraplane Eight, weight 2600 lbs.**



**Above: 1933 English Hudson-Terraplane was advertised as having won first in acceleration test at the Monte Carlo Rally**

**Below: English Railton for 1937 with modified Terraplane Eight engine and chassis gave startling 110 mph top speed**



In America, however, Hudsons never met with wide favor among hot-rodders. Neither did anything else, except Fords. There were a number of reasons for this. The engine was heavy for its horsepower potential. It cost more than a Ford and parts were more expensive. Casting design did not allow for large bore increases, and splash lubrication seemed to limit rpms to around 5000. None of the problems were insurmountable, but early hop-ups started with Fords, and the pattern seemed established.

There were a few exceptions. I can remember several Hudson eight engines in "A" frames that did quite well at the lakes. Your author built up several cars based on the '33 Terraplane Eight and although never in competition, they had their share of impromptu drags in the days when we were stupid enough to do such things on public highways. Never beaten, either. Even the Hudsons that ran at the Indianapolis 500 in 1931 and 1932 were nothing more than hop-up versions of standard engines. The 1931 car finished in the money, but in 1932 Al and Chet Miller were both forced to retire due to running out of oil. While they went, they were pretty warm jobs.

After the end of World War II it became evident that cars were becoming larger and heavier. Hudson was no exception. The eight cylinder model which had weighed 2600 pounds in 1933 had put on an extra 1000 pounds by 1947.

The handwriting was on the drafting board—a new engine must be born. The faithful 212 six, sired in 1924, and the eight, a chip off the old block, just didn't have the "inches" to keep up with the parade. Hudson began work on an entirely new 262 cu. in. flathead six. It costs millions to tool up for a new engine. Why did they ignore what they must have heard about the OHV V-8s? The answer is not difficult to learn. In the first place, plans had been brewing for years to design an entirely *new kind* of automobile, from the ground up. Reid Railton had been called in from England to act as a consultant in chassis design; Frank Spring was given a free hand with styling. The whole plant was turned inside out and entire buildings were wrecked and rebuilt to be able to manufacture this new type of car. Hudson had learned its lesson: Speed alone is not enough! This time they intended to gamble on style and safety and let the big boys work out the bugs in new engine designs. But their trump card was a fact most laymen don't realize (and therefore can't understand why Hornets always win.) That fact is the "L" head design has better low speed torque characteristics, better combustion control, and will tolerate compression ratios of at least 9 to 1, which is better than present day fuels will allow. Hudson believes that the high thermal efficiency of an "L" head, long stroke design is preferable to the low friction

advantages of the OHV square engine, particularly since passenger car revs with DR Hydramatic or overdrive seldom exceed 3000 rpm. Volumetric efficiency is of little importance at less than 4000 rpm so that flathead is as good as an OHV at these speeds.

Don't think for a moment that Hudson engineers are stupid enough to think that the *potential* output of their engine is as great as an OHV type. They have merely wagered and won on the premise that cars are driven by people, not theorists. Certainly, an Olds can make a Hudson blush if both are hopped up to the limit, but don't forget—*that's not the way they are installed in stock cars!*

When the "L" head type was decided upon, the engineers made sure it would be the most modern of its type. Full pressure lubrication, five oversize main bearings, full length water jacketing and numerous other engineering advances were incorporated with lavish care into this big six. It was a brute for punishment, and respected by all, for no other new engine in the last decade ever proved so bug-free. Along with the new step-down design, good looks and peerless roadability they had an engine which was a sparkling performer. Sales boomed—1948 was a great year for Hudson.

The following year saw the advent of the Olds 88, and although the Hudson six wasn't outclassed in performance, the potential in the 300 *plus* inches of the 88 meant that it soon could be. Hudson spies must have tipped off the boys in engineering, for the '48 engine was designed so that big bore increases could be made easily. The mid-recession of 1949 made another tack necessary and 1950 saw the introduction of the 232 cu. in. lower priced Pacemaker, a destocked version of the larger Commodore six. The Pacemaker engine, by the way, is used today in the new Hudson Wasp.

The big guns were held up for better times and the prosperity of 1951 saw the birth of the Hornet, a whopping big bored and stroked basic '48 block. Its 308 cu. in. assured terrific torque and horsepower, enough to wallop any '51 Rocket which might get in its way.

Soon men who make their living by racing stock cars discovered that the big engine, plus the superlative handling qualities bred into the Hornet by Reid Railton, added up to victory purses. Marshall Teague, for one, took a ride and bought the car on the spot! That was a wise investment, for in 1952 Teague and his Hornet became national stock car champions. Other drivers soon hopped on the Hornetwagon, to the point where wins have almost become a Hudson parade. When one make car can race all season in the tough *strictly stock* AAA circuit and win 12 out of 13 races, that's no fluke! Don't forget the 34 NASCAR victories that add to the record.

(Continued on page 66)

## HUDSON

(Continued from page 46)

Hudsons have been used for years by many police departments and State Highway Patrols throughout the United States and Hudson builds a "Police" or high altitude engine for their special use. It includes larger valves (2" intakes), altered porting, and a hotter cam, as well as a dual exhaust system. This is available to any purchaser.

Also available on the Hornet are a wide range of rear axle ratios and various high compression heads with ratios from

a low of 6.5 to a high of 9.2 to 1.

Wags have coined the name "Teague-mobile" for the Hornets driven and prepared by Marshall Teague, in an attempt to endow them with virtues not possessed by run-of-the-mill Hudsons. But if you care to question any cold-hearted AAA technical inspector, you'll find out that Marshall has never altered any Hudson specified part. He does, however, insist on perfection and goes to extreme lengths to hand fit and tune his engines. This is no more than any smart driver would do with *any* make of car. In the 1951 Mexican Road Race (you may re-

call that this was the year when no holds were barred in regard to modifications), Troy Ruttman remarked that Teague's Hornet was the only *stock* car in the race! In spite of losing 20 minutes by running out of gas, plus being plagued by fuel pump and overdrive trouble, Teague's was the fourth ranking American car to finish.

In the 186 mile Parral to Chihuahua leg, Teague's Hornet was third fastest, averaging 107.6 mph. It covered the distance a mere 42 seconds behind Ascari in his Italian Ferrari.


With such a reputation for performance, it was inevitable that someone would try a Hornet engine in a sports car. About a year ago, Joe Ricketts of Long Beach, Calif., commissioned Frank Kurtis to build such a car. Both Ricketts, who sponsored Johnny Parsons' car at Indianapolis, and Kurtis, who builds the majority of Indianapolis-type chassis, had been watching the growing sports car rage. Here was an opportunity to develop a new chassis to compete with the best from across the pond. It has been my pleasure to drive the Hudson-Kurtis extensively and I can say that I have never driven a finer handling car. Cornering is exceptional and the power and torque of the Hornet engine make this 2200 pound car a sensational performer. It is ideally suited for short, tight courses, but in my opinion, it suffers the same disadvantages as the Allard on long circuits.

The question often arises about top speed of the standard Hornet sedan. By standard, I mean a car that has no optional equipment whatsoever. Reliable tests have shown a consensus of 97 to 100 mph for a two-way timed average, 14½ seconds 0 to 60, and 19.5 seconds for the standing quarter. The Twin H option adds about five miles to top speed, knocks one second off the 0 to 60 time, and brings the standing quarter down to 19.25 seconds. With the full-house factory tuned engine the Hornet is good for an honest 115 mph two-way average and is capable of shading acceleration figures by a full second.

There are the facts. The Hudson is not the fastest or the best accelerating American car—yet it continues to win the stock car races. Why?

First, dependability—the Hudson hangs together, assuring the driver he'll finish the race. Second, power—where it counts, in the traffic range and lots of torque coming out of turns. Third, design, construction and roadability—the cars stick to the track as they stick to the road.

Drivers who do more than zoom a straight line or a quarter-mile have learned that "speed is not enough." To them, and to those thoughtful men who hop up engines and design new chassis because they love automobiles, there is an impressive lesson to be learned from the Fabulous Hornet.



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