

Road Test

HUDSON HORNET

BY ART NICHOLAS

WHAT does Hudson have to offer in its Hornet model for '54? This is an important question to the stock car racing fan as well as the average motorist.

The reputation of the company, for decades, has been solidly built by record-smashing automobiles. In fact, of all Detroit manufacturers, Hudson is the one which openly has been the most competition-minded for the longest period. And, it should be unnecessary to add, with the greatest success both on the track and the measured straightaway. Some of the marks its cars have set as far back as the late twenties and throughout the thirties still stand.

Recent performance of the Hornet in stock car competition is almost too well-known to repeat. Let's simply say that it has been the car to beat in all NASCAR and AAA stock car events. The times when it has not collected the checkered flag have been exceedingly rare.

This was a car that the MOTOR LIFE road crew tested with respect. The particular model of the Hornet chosen carried all the refinements skilled Hudson engineers have made to date, including Super-Induction, Twin H-Power, power steering and power brakes.

ACCELERATION

In comparison with the huge ohv V-8 engines that are becoming the rule in the big-car field, the Hornet's output of 170 hp is almost modest. However, the dependable L-head shows up best in the lower ranges where its good torque is most effective. This can be noted in the 0-30 mph figure, which was an exceptional 4.2 seconds. Tests made from a standing start to 45 and 60 mph were not quite so remarkable but will stand up favorably against those earned by any U.S. stock car on the market today.

TOP SPEED

Full throttle runs through the measured quarter-mile, half-mile and mile were made with an 11 mph sidewind. Nevertheless, in this department, the Hornet showed the greatest improvement in performance over 1953. The average time was 106.54 mph, although on one quick trip through the traps the Hornet was clocked at 108.43 mph. The tests were made, incidentally, at the favorable altitude of 430 feet above sea level.

MILEAGE

Equipped with Dual-Range Hydra-Matic, the Hornet's gasoline consumption was metered at 17.1 mpg at a steady 30 mph down to 14.2 mpg at a steady 60. The overall average for the entire test period, which included 1,011 miles of mountains, flat highway and city traffic, was 15.5 mpg.

ENGINE

The Hornet can be obtained with a variety of options in its engine. Among the recent improvements made are Twin H-Power (dual carburetion) and Super Induction (refinements in the valve layout for better breathing and a hotter cam). These are the chief reasons for the Hornet's increased performance. Other basic good points are inherent in the design which was introduced early in the postwar period. Although its sound

could be toned down and the oil dip stick located a bit more conveniently, the overall arrangement in the forward compartment is good, as an inline engine can be expected to be, despite the loading of power-operated accessories.

TRANSMISSION

The Hornet tested was equipped with the familiar and popular Hydra-Matic. This, however, will not be true of most other '54 Hornets. Company engineers told the road crew that later models in the year will carry the Borg-Warner unit, an item which they opined would improve the performance characteristics of the car. The switch probably has something to do with the fire last summer at the Hydra-Matic plant, although other factors undoubtedly influenced Hudson's decision.

HANDLING

This is the department that causes the Hornet to be rated extremely high by the test drivers, perhaps even more than the performance. The oft-advertised "step-down" design of the frame does make a great contribution to the over-the-road control of the car. Corners, which many other cars would take with excessive body sway, are a pushover for the Hudson. To further experiment with this feature, drivers took the car over an exceedingly difficult paved mountain road. Sharp curves on up and down grades were no problem and almost a pleasure. The stability of the car and the new power steering are a perfect team.

A special note should be added here about Hudson's power steering. Test drivers, frankly, are not too happy about the innovation—on most cars. All power steering devices are helpful on slow corners, in traffic, and while parking, but leave something to be desired at speed on the open road. Not so with Hudson's. It has plenty of feel and is just easy enough to take the work out of driving and retain the fun. During the speed runs at more than 100 mph with a sidewind, the car handled easily and held to the road exceptionally well.

The power brakes, as an item of control, are difficult to classify. They are there, but more pedal pressure is needed than with other types. Whether this is good or bad depends upon the individual. The important difference is that slightest movement of the foot does not produce the sudden, tire-burning halt. The driver still has to do the braking.

RIDE

The same factors which give the Hudson favorable handling characteristics contribute to its good ride. Like any heavy car, it is smooth and bounce free. In addition, there is much less rolling and pitching. Driver and passengers ride low in the car and feel it.

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GENERAL SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE & MODEL: 1954 four-door Hudson Hornet
ENGINE: six-cylinder inline L-head
HORSEPOWER: 170 @ 3,800 rpm
DISPLACEMENT: 308 cubic inches or 5,055 cubic centimeters
COMPRESSION RATIO: 7.5 to 1
BORE & STROKE: 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$
MAXIMUM TORQUE: 278 ft.-lbs. @ 2600 rpm
TRANSMISSION: Hydra-Matic
REAR AXLE RATIO: 3.58 (with standard transmission, 4.09; with overdrive, 4.55)
WHEELBASE: 124 inches
TREAD: 58 $\frac{1}{2}$ front, 55 $\frac{3}{8}$ rear
OVERALL LENGTH: 208 $\frac{3}{32}$
OVERALL WIDTH: 77.6 inches
OVERALL HEIGHT: 60.37 inches
ELECTRICAL SYSTEM: six volt
TIRES: 7.10 x 15
FUEL CAPACITY: 20 gallons
TEST WEIGHT: 3,970 lbs.
POWER/WEIGHT RATIO: 21
STEERING—
Turns, Lock-to-Lock: 5 $\frac{1}{2}$
Turning Circle: 32 feet, 6 inches

PRICES

(The figures quoted are the advertised delivered retail list prices as suggested by the factory. They include Federal taxes, recommended delivery and handling charges. They do not cover transportation costs, state or local taxes, optional equipment or any other charges that may be made by a dealer.)

FOUR-DOOR: \$2,768.86

CLUB COUPE: \$2,741.99

HARDTOP: \$2,987.75

CONVERTIBLE: \$3,287.70

ACCESSORIES—

Automatic Transmission: \$178.03

Overdrive: \$110

Power Steering: \$177

Power Brakes: \$48

Radio: six-tube, \$68; eight-tube, \$100

Heater: \$75

Directional Signals: \$22

White Sidewalls: \$48 extra per set

Wire Wheels: \$290.25 chrome, \$123.63 painted for set of five

TEST CONDITIONS

WEATHER: clear

TEMPERATURE: 84 degrees

WIND: 11 mph, right angles

ALTITUDE: 430 feet above sea level

MILEAGE AT START: 3,960

MILES COVERED: 1,011

GASOLINE: 91 octane

OIL: 30 weight

EQUIPMENT: electric fifth wheel, electric speedometer, electric odometer, Fuel-flow meter, Perforometer, calibrated clocks

SPEED TEST SURFACE: asphalt

SPEED COURSE: surveyed quarter-mile, half-mile, and mile

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION IN SECONDS—

Standing Quarter-mile: 18.5

0-30 mph: 4.2

0-45 mph: 8.9

0-60 mph: 12.2

TOP SPEED—

Fastest One-Way Run: 108.43 mph

Slowest One-Way Run: 104.61 mph

Average of Six Runs: 106.54 mph

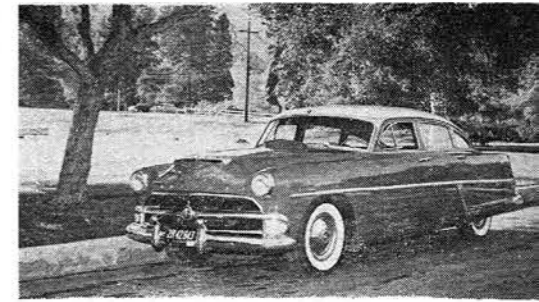
FUEL CONSUMPTION—

Steady 30 mph: 17.1 mpg

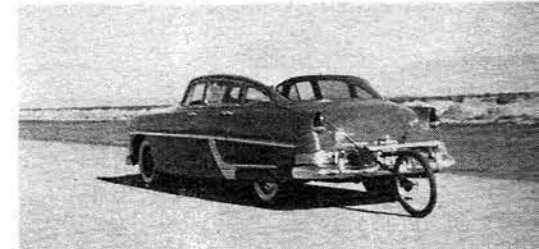
Steady 45 mph: 16.3 mpg

Steady 60 mph: 14.2 mpg

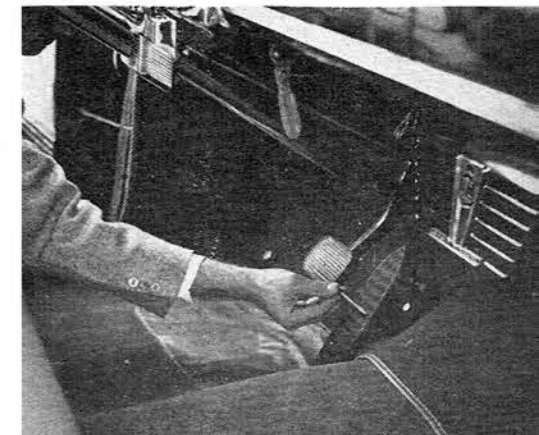
Total Test Mileage: 1,011 miles @ 15.5 mpg



Hudson appearance has been brought up to date with sweeping fender line at rear and new contour of the hood



Careful checks with accurate electric fifth wheel showed the Hornet still packs plenty of performance and remains a potent stock car racing threat



Member of the road test crew illustrates the small amount of foot travel necessary between the Hornet's accelerator and brake pedals, a highly desirable feature

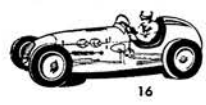
Massive chromed bumpers hug the Hudson Hornet body closely and eliminate the traditional location of the gravel pan



Photos by Ralph Poole

of press time. No changes likely, and soup-up possibilities here are a bit dim.

WILLYS 6—No '54 announcement as of press time. No changes likely. This engine offers some souping possibilities, but she's a problem because the intake manifold is cast as part of the head. About all you can do for dual carburetion is to cut right through into the manifold, braze on plates to seal off the water jacket, and mount your carbs on an outside plate that is fastened with screws. From here, the usual head mill (not over .050 in this case), porting, and reground cam is in order. And since the stock exhaust valves are much smaller than need be, late Ford exhaust valves are often fitted. Over 130 hp is in sight with some smart work.



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HUDSON ROAD TEST

(Continued from page 47)

EXTERIOR

In body styling, the most obvious change on the Hudson is in the rear fender line, which has been raised and lengthened to give the car a longer, more streamlined look. The comment of the MOTOR LIFE staff photographer, who has put countless cars on film, was interesting: "It sure looks sexy," he said.

Contour of the hood, which could stand strengthening, has been rounded. Other modifications are chiefly in trim and grille decorative touches.

INTERIOR

Entry into the Hudson Hornet is easy, with doors opening at an 80-degree angle. Alterations in the interior for the '54 are few. There still are numerous lights for the convenience of passengers: two in back, two in front and one overhead. The back of the front seat continues to carry the almost extinct robe rope. Arm rests, both front and rear, are not located in the most comfortable positions. It's interesting to note that, despite the low location of the floorboards between the frame, the tunnel for the driveshaft is an insignificant hump.

The Hornet probably has the distinction of having the flashiest steering wheel insignia in the business. As for the dash, instrument grouping is good, although reflections are numerous. Top of the dash, however, has a good non-reflecting surface for greater eye ease.

GENERAL

It's easy to say a great many good things about the Hudson Hornet. The most important of these are the performance and handling qualities, which have been adequately commented upon. But another vital characteristic is its ruggedness, a factor that has been conclusively demonstrated in dirt track competition. The road crew discovered this, too, for few cars emerge from the violent maneuvers the test drivers use in top condition. When the Hornet was returned to the factory, it still was in perfect tune.

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