



YPSILANTI AUTOMOTIVE HERITAGE MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

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President's Report

BY RON BLUHM

With our Hudson Essex Terraplane Historical Society partnership, the show room car in the National Hudson Motor Car Company Museum is changed annually. We are saddened to lose the beautiful 1929 Hudson that filled the show room during the last year, but delighted to have a 1955 Hudson Italia with us for the next year. The car is one of twenty-five built and one of twenty that survive. Our display is a rare opportunity to see this piece of automotive history. Read Jack Miller's memories on page four in this newsletter. A special thanks to Hedley Bennett for allowing his 1929 Hudson to be with us and to Al Schultz for showing his Italia for the next year.

Orphan Car Show day is the biggest day of the year for our museum. This year, the date is Sunday September 20th. Convertibles are the featured car for 2015. Since this body style is desired by collectors, we have received more featured car entries than usual. We are looking forward to the day.

We assumed the operation of Depot Town Cruise Nights a couple of year ago. Until this year, staging Cruise Nights had been a financial struggle. Thanks to sponsorships by the following local businesses, that problem was solved.

- Arbor Brewing Company
- Aubree's Pizzeria – Depot Town
- City Body
- Congdon's Ace Hardware
- Depot Town Alternative Health
- Depot Town Merchants Association
- Haab's Restaurant
- Lincoln Street Garage
- Maiz Mexican Cantina
- McLain & Winters
- Old Town Coin & Gold



1955 Hudson Italia

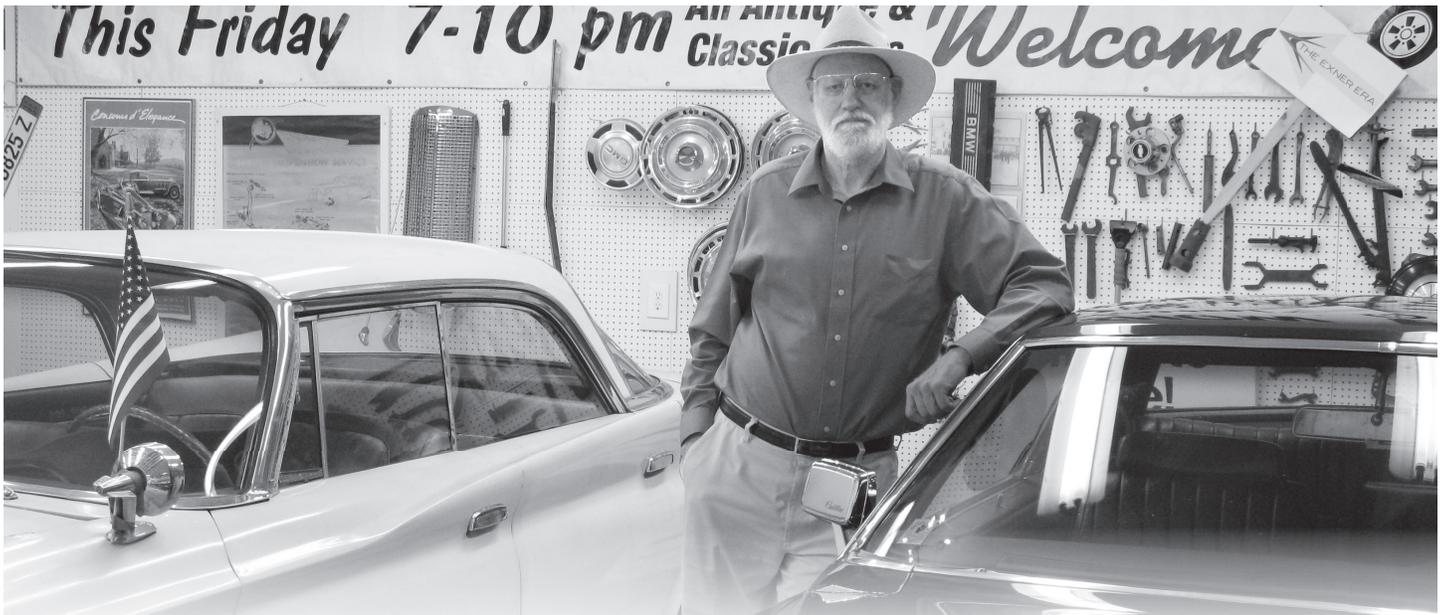
- Ollie's Café
- Sidetrack Bar & Grill
- Standard Printing
- Two Jerks Record Shop
- Ypsilanti Convention & Visitors Bureau
- YpsiPrint/Chrome Identity

We now have expenses covered and money extra to help the museum.

If you have been a *Friend* of the museum, you will get a renewal letter during the anniversary of your membership. If you are not a *Friend*, consider using the form in this newsletter to sign up. With the support of many through our *Friends* program, the small donation multiplied by many has become a significant portion of our management money. Thanks to everybody for your support.

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Coming to Ypsilanti – Part II

BY BOB ELTON

Bob came to Ypsilanti in the mid 1960s to work as a coop student at our General Motors Hydra-Matic Transmission plant, later GM Power Train. The first half of his story is in our previous issue.

As a coop student, I worked in a lot of different areas of the plant. One of the most interesting was plant layout. One side of the building had a mezzanine, almost a mile long. The offices of plant layout were in the mezzanine, with a big set of windows that looked out over the plant. Plant layout was responsible for locating all the machinery for efficient manufacturing and designing all the related equipment like conveyors, assembly aids, overhead transfer lines, and traffic patterns for forklift trucks. They were also responsible for designing the routes for truck traffic into and around the plant. The main tool they had was a giant scale model of the plant, about 80 feet long. In this model, they had scale models of every piece of equipment. Because the plant was constantly being expanded or changed, there were always new models being added and old ones removed. There were guidelines for the amount of space around any kind of machine, how sharply the conveyors could bend, and a host of other considerations. I spent a full 6 weeks making models of machines, putting them here and there in the master model, and trying to figure out how to make the conveyor systems work. This was all before computers, of course, and the 3D aspect of using a model, as opposed to drawings, made the process a lot faster and more accurate than other plants.

I only realized how effective this was years later when I was involved in a similar activity in a different plant. I often commandeered a bicycle and rode around the plant on lunch hours, or whenever I could get away, just to see what was going on.

Early on, I could hear loud banging noises somewhere in the plant. I rode towards the noise, and eventually came to the stamping presses. The shell of the torque convertor was made from steel almost a quarter inch thick, and it took one of the biggest presses GM had to stamp out these shells. The press was actually taller than the building, so a cupola was added to the roof to accommodate the press. This press had a multistage die, with 3 stages. Flat metal went into the press, and fully formed shells for the torque convertor came out the other end. Of course, there was still a lot of welding and finishing that had to go on, including the addition of all the vanes inside each half of the torque convertor. Nearby was the welding station where the torque convertors were welded together, a first for Hydra-Matic.

Torque convertors have a stator between the 2 halves of the convertor. Dynaflow transmissions had stators with variable pitch blades, so the first THM 400s also had variable pitch stators, at least in the Buick and Cadillac versions. These little blades were made of magnesium.



BUICK IN CHINA

BY MATT LEE



The shavings from making these parts were kept in barrels full of kerosene. This kept oxygen away from the bare magnesium to prevent fires.

Not too far away, they were still making fluid couplings as service parts for older Hydra-Matics. The vanes in these couplings had to be brazed in place, so they were passed through a furnace. The heat of the furnace caused little copper wires to melt and braze the fins to the housings.

At the far end of the plant was the final assembly area. This was a clean area, sealed off from the rest of the plant and slightly pressurized. They were serious about keeping out the dirt and dust from the completed transmission. This was the best place in the plant to work, since it was always cool and clean, no matter the season. One of the interesting stations in final assembly was the final inspection. Hydra-Matic was the first to actually test the transmission under operating conditions. Every THM 400 was hooked up to an engine and run through the gears and checked for function and for leaks. That really ensured that a quality transmission left the plant.

It was in the final assembly area that chains and sprockets were matched for the THM 425. I can remember watching a woman in a darkened booth looking at chains and sprockets with an optical comparator, and stamping the size code, A, B, or C, on the sprockets and putting a daub of paint on the chain.

The end of the building made a right turn, and had gigantic folding doors that reached from the floor to the ceiling, about 60 feet high. Originally they had been built to allow B24 bombers to leave the plant. By 1965, the large doors were fixed, and smaller doors cut into them to allow normal size trucks to enter and leave.

The first few years I lived in Ypsilanti, I stayed in rented rooms. The first place I lived was 333 Oak Street, with Mr. & Mrs. Gable. They were a nice older couple who, I think, wanted the company more than the rent. My memory is that I paid them \$7 a week.

Thirty years ago, the Chinese government wanted General Motors to build a thousand manual transmissions for the Buick automobile so that the government could have a large car available for official government use. Back then, China thought that the automatic transmission was too complicated for the typical repair man to fix. General Motors refused to tool up for a thousand unit run. Instead, they offered to train mechanics in the proper care and repair of an automatic transmission. China sent five repairmen and an interpreter to Hydra-Matic's training center in Ypsilanti. During a three week training session, they learned the theory, operation, and repair of Hydra-Matic transmissions.

In the photo are two of the Chinese mechanics, the language interrupter, a fellow from the corporate office, and three people who did the training. I was one of the trainers and am the big guy in the back.

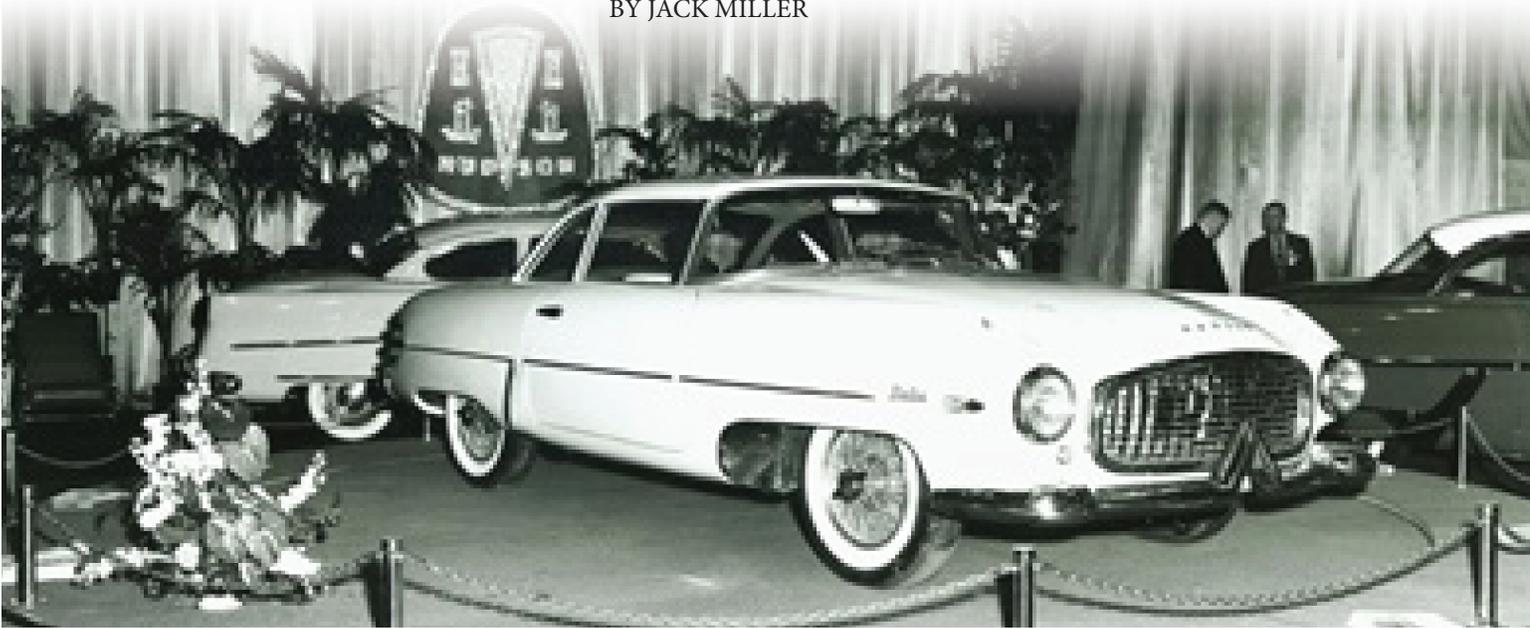
The training was a success and China bought 1,000 Buicks with automatic transmissions. Now, thirty years later, General Motors sells more Buicks in China than in the United States.

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Matt is a YAHM and Detroit Public Library Automotive History Collection board member.

Hudson Italia - First Public Showing

BY JACK MILLER



During August of 1953, Hudson dealers were invited to Detroit's Masonic Temple for the 1954 Hudson National Dealer Preview of Hudson's 1954 line of cars. The dealer preview for the 1954 models was held before the Hudson Motor Car Company showed the cars to the public at the gigantic 1953 Michigan State Fair which was held annually in Detroit starting the week before the Labor Day holiday. What a lucky kid I was; 14 years old and dressed in a suit and tie and attending the 1954 Hudson National Dealer Preview with my father and brother-in-law.

The Masonic Temple is a giant convention facility with a 4000 seat auditorium and three ballrooms which opened into one huge area for very large displays. The meeting started at 9:30 a.m. with Hudson officials including A.E. Barit, Hudson President; N.K. Vanderzee, V.P. of Sales; George Browder, V.P. of Advertising; and various other heads of the Car Distribution, Accessory and Merchandising departments who described plans for the 1954 Hudson car line.

After opening remarks by A. E. Barit and N.K. Vanderzee, George Browder who served as Hudson's official "Cheerleader" took over the meeting and presented the 1954 Hudson product line. George Browder could sell refrigerators to residents of the Arctic Circle. Browder's message to the Hudson dealers was "*While vacationing in Northern Michigan, he and his family stopped at a 'Mom and Pop' Roadside Grocery Store with one gas pump in front of the store to purchase gasoline and snacks for the family. Upon entering the store he saw sitting on the sales counter a new four drawer National Cash Register,*

a device that this Mom and Pop store would not have unless a salesman went there and sold it to them." George Browder's message to the Hudson Dealers was "You have to get out and around to sell the merchandise." An N.C.R. salesman took the time to visit this Mom and Pop Roadside store.

Dealers were given miniature baseball bats inscribed with "*Let's all go to Bat for Hudson in 1954.*"

Several different models of the 1954 Hudson line were presented on the auditorium stage and described by various officials with A. E. Barit hinting at a surprise during the afternoon session. At 12:30 p.m., dealers were directed to the Masonic Temple banquet room for lunch. During the meeting and at lunch, Hudson had an orchestra playing. After lunch, dealers were directed to the display area to view the entire 1954 Hudson line of Hornets, Wasps, and Jets. Hudson officials were on the show floor to answer questions and dealers could get in the cars and open the hoods and trunks. The latest accessory displays were placed around in the display area for dealers to view and purchase for their own showrooms.

At 2:30 p.m., with a giant "Drum Roll" from the orchestra, N. K. Vanderzee directed everyone's attention to the area surrounded by ceiling to floor gold drapes that when fully opened up revealed the **Italia**.

I was curious as to why the drapes were blowing about and not revealing anything. The **Italia** had just been driven over from Hudson Engineering on Connor Avenue and was being brought inside the Masonic Temple off the alley and placed on the display floor. The **Italia** was surrounded by chrome stanchions and rails to protect the car.

Later information indicated that the *Italia* was driven by Frank Spring, Hudson's VP of Design from Milan, Italy to Cherbourg, France and put on a ship for New York, then driven to Detroit, arriving a day before the National Dealer Preview, just in time to be cleaned up and moved to the Masonic Temple for display at the 1954 National Dealer Introduction.

At the unveiling of the *Italia*, N.K. Vanderzee told dealers that future plans called for putting the car in production and each dealer would receive ordering information as plans were completed.

Needless to say, the Hudson dealers in attendance at the preview went nuts over the *Italia*.

The *Italia* ended up with a dealer cost of \$4,800.00. Most Hudson dealers felt that they could not afford to order one as they could have two Hornet sedans / coupes or four Jets in their inventory for about the same investment. As a result Roy D. Chapin, Jr. was appointed sales manager for the *Italia* selling a large part of the inventory of 25 to California dealers. California was a great sports car territory.

Over these many years, I carefully preserved the original *Italia* Order form and envelope as it was mailed to my father's dealership. In my opinion, it has to be one of the rarest items of Hudson memorabilia to exist.

Recently, I passed it on to "Mr. & Mrs. *Italia*," Edward and Kaylene Souers.

Jack is YAHM's retired curator.

A Car Guy - Chuck Payne

BY CHARLOTTE PAYNE

Chuck Payne came to Michigan at age 15 in 1965 from his home in Virginia. After lying about his age, he went to work as a truck driver for Whittaker and Gooding on Cherry Hill Road. The drivers were also responsible for the maintenance of their trucks and because of the fact that the drivers were mostly under 21, there was a lot of horsing around with each other while building the roads. Chuck was a natural mechanic without any previous training and realized early on that only the best of tools were necessary to do the longest lasting repairs, hence Snap On was his favorite tool. Eventually, "the boys" got interested in stock car racing and for a few years every Saturday night

was spent at Flat Rock Speedway, the other six nights were spent rebuilding and fine tuning their cars. Many nights, I held parts in place while he wrenched and welded his wrecks back together. He did win several races. Chuck left Whittaker and Gooding and started working on cars in our garage. Hence, more Snap On products. His reputation for servicing cars grew so fast that we had to shut it down after 2 years, people would wait in line to have him fix their cars. Neither I nor Ypsi Township would let him park cars in the yard until he could get to them.

Chuck bought a classic car around 1975, it was his pride and joy. He traded it for a used riding lawn mower when we bought a house on two acres in 1977. He also rebuilt an 80s Trans Am. He painted it and applied the Fire Bird on the hood. He reneged on letting me have the car and sold it. He said he was afraid that if I had it to drive, I would end up as a hood ornament on a semi, since I loved and still love the muscle cars of our youth, and got so I could handle them the way they were designed to be driven.



He was then offered a job at Marsh Plating to keep their trucks on the road. He then taught himself to repair the companies hi-lo machines which required different tools. In about 1993, he was awarded a job with the Ypsilanti School District by Bob Oliver servicing the buses. He enjoyed working on the buses because he felt a responsibility of keeping the buses from being stranded with kids on them. As a result of downsizing, he retired in 2010.

Thanks to the museum for accepting his Snap On toy model cars I donated. They are some of the reward prizes that he accumulated from Snap On after reaching certain expense levels. Thank God he was reimbursed for most of the tools by the companies he worked for.

Chuck was a "Car Guy;" he owned interesting cars, raced cars, and was professionally employed servicing them. Chuck's story is similar to many stories generated during the last sixty or seventy years. Will electronics replace cars for the stories generated by our present and future generations?

Char's donated Snap-on tools are for sale in our museum gift shop.

Coming to Ypsilanti – Part II

Continued from page 3

It wasn't too long after I moved to Oak Street that I first dropped into Miller Motors. Not because I had a Hudson, but because there was a 1958 Chrysler 300D parked in front, the same color as my 58 Windsor. The 300D belonged to Jack Wiltse; I remember we had a nice talk about Chryslers. Jack Miller was a little miffed that I seemed to care more about the Chrysler than about the Hudsons he had around. Back then, Miller Motors was still a used car dealership and there were a lot of various used cars sitting around. It wasn't until about 1971 that I got the bug to get a Hudson. After that, I became much better acquainted with Jack Miller.

Trying to keep an old Chrysler running meant that I also became familiar with the Chrysler dealer, Serbay, on Michigan Avenue. Eventually one of the mechanics took pity on me and loaned me special Chrysler tools to help me keep the Windsor running. I also got to know Sergeant, the parts guy. He had a pretty flexible interpretation of working hours. If you needed something in the afternoon and Sergeant wasn't around, you could always go over to the Alibi bar on Cross Street and find him there. For me, anyhow, he would often finish his beer, and come back to work. Eventually Sergeant retired. It was discovered that he had never returned to Chrysler any unsold or leftover, parts. The attic was a treasure trove of parts for old Chryslers. Not so much a treasure for the owners of the dealership.

Eventually I decided that GMI and coop work at Hydra-Matic wasn't for me. I moved to Ann Arbor, and took my automotive career in several more directions.

The car business has changed a lot since 1965. When I started at Hydra-Matic, there were 7 American car

companies. None of them was a branch of a foreign company. The closest thing most people saw to a foreign car was a Rambler built in Kenosha, Wisconsin or a Studebaker built in Canada.

Checker made their iconic cabs in Kalamazoo as well as a civilian version. Kaiser Jeep, who had once made cars in the very building that was now Hydra-Matic, made Jeeps in Toledo, and sold them all over the world. Some of those Jeeps even had Hydra-Matic transmissions. American Motors pumped out Ramblers and Ambassadors in Kenosha. Studebaker

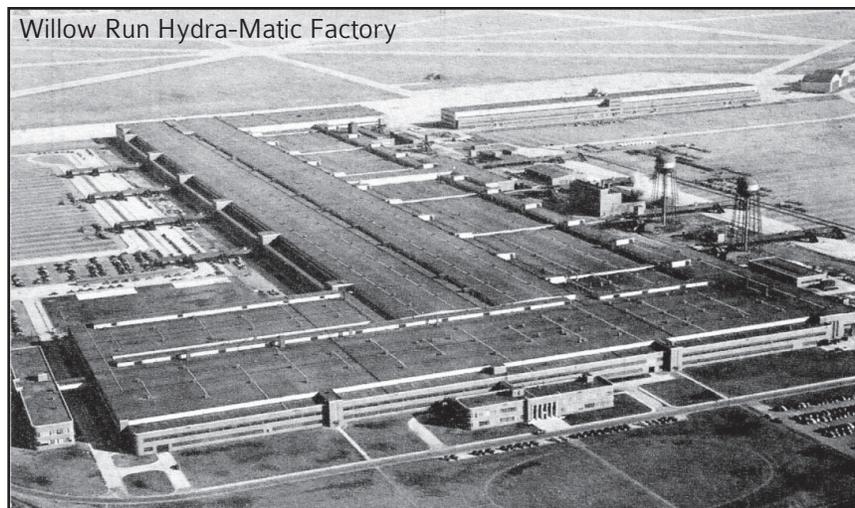
was still hanging on making cars in Canada

Now of course, they're all gone. Kaiser Jeep became part of American Motors, American Motors became part of Chrysler, Chrysler became part of Daimler Chrysler, then part of the 3 headed dog

Cerberus, and finally now a division of FIAT. Even the Chrysler name is gone from the corporate roster: the division is now FCA US LLC. Even the GM of those days is gone. It's now named Motors Liquidation. The current GM is a new company formed from the ashes of the bankruptcy.

Ford is the only car company from that time still in business.

Even the Hydra-Matic building, the building that once built B24 bombers that won the war in Europe, is disappearing. Only a small portion of it remains to form the nucleus of the Yankee Air museum.



Willow Run Hydra-Matic Factory

Bob is a museum "Friend," has donated historic items to our museum, and has volunteered in a variety of ways to support our museum.



**YPSILANTI AUTOMOTIVE
HERITAGE MUSEUM**

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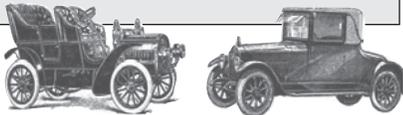
MUSEUM HOURS

Tuesday-Sunday
1:00 to 4:00 P.M.
Monday
Closed

Admission \$5.00 adults
Children 12 and under are free
when accompanied by an adult

CONTACT US

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