

THE FOUR LIVES OF A HUDSON PICKUP

BY TOM MILLER

IN the 1940's my father, Thomas Elijah Miller, had a small contracting business in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. After World War II ended and his business increased, he decided to order a new truck. He had a 1936 Chevrolet panel truck that was very tired, but he was a dedicated Hudson Man.

So in 1946 he ordered a new Hudson Big Boy pickup from our local dealership, Boone's Hudson Sales and Service in Falls Church, Virginia. With new vehicles -- and especially pickups -- being scarce right after the war, this small dealership didn't get a truck to sell until 1947. The dealer, M. T. Boone, owned a 1941 Hudson pickup that didn't have many miles on it, as it was used mainly to haul ice to his storage at the dealership. It only had minor dings, but the boards in the bed were warping from constantly being wet. Mr. Boone wanted my dad to buy his '41 truck so that Mr. Boone could keep the new '47. But my dad held out for the '47 and he bought it, trading in our family 1941 Commodore Eight four-door sedan.

So from 1947 to 1950, --when Dad purchased a new four-door eight Super Eight sedan -- a 1935 Terraplane was our short-distance vehicle, and the pickup was the work truck through the week and our weekend trip vehicle. With a little weight in the bed it rode as nicely as a car, and with its long wheelbase, better than the majority of cars built in the 1940's.

Dad built a camper-type bed cover out of marine plywood so his tools and fittings for his work would stay

dry and safe. This "cap", plus his tools, weighed a thousand pounds. When you add to this the bags of cement, lengths of pipe and a heavy wooden ladder on the roof, you can imagine the terrific stress on that truck. It never broke a spring, though Dad split about half a dozen rear



The '47 pickup (center) sporting its home-built "cap" during its "contractor days", circa 1950. The new 1950 Super 8 sedan is at left, and the Miller family's everyday car -- a '42 Traveler six -- is at right.

wheels! But that little six never faltered or failed.

Fast-forward to 1954. Dad sold his business, bought a 140-acre farm in West Virginia and moved the family and the '47 pickup there. The cap was removed from the truck and a cattle rack was built for it. Yes, we had hogs, chickens and cattle, raised fields of tomatoes which we hauled to the caning factory. The '47 was now a full-fledged farm truck.

Dad didn't sell the farm, but after several years of farming

Tom Miller poses with the '47 during the second phase of its long career, on the Miller family farm in West Virginia.

In last July's edition we told you about Tom Miller of Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, and his lifetime passion for Hudsons. Now, in his own words, Tom continues the story with a look at a particular Hudson pickup truck that his father purchased, and the four roles in which it served the Miller family over the years.

he purchased property on Route 522 south of Berkeley Springs and built a Mobilgas station.

Now the '47 changed caps again (or actually became cap-less), and began to be a service truck for the gas station. Dad passed away unexpectedly from a heart attack in 1962, and I purchased the truck from his estate.

By that time the little six-cylinder engine had 92,000 miles on it and ran flawlessly. With a lift for use at the service station from 1954 to 1962, dad had maintained the engine diligently, removing the pan, cleaning out the sludge (no oil filter), and tightening up the babbitt bearings. Other than using a little oil it was ready for many more miles, but I had other ideas. While other young men my age (I was 23) talked about 327, 409, 383 engines, I had a vision of 308 six-cylinder. Out came the 212 cu. In., replaced by a stock single carb 308. And then it was time for drag race after drag race. The low-speed original rear-end gearing was good to 70 mph but at that speed the motor's





The '47 pickup, pictured during its "service station" days, had begun to acquire some classy touches such as front fender trim and fender skirts!)

r.p.m.s were peaking. So I installed 7X modified 308 engine (per Jack

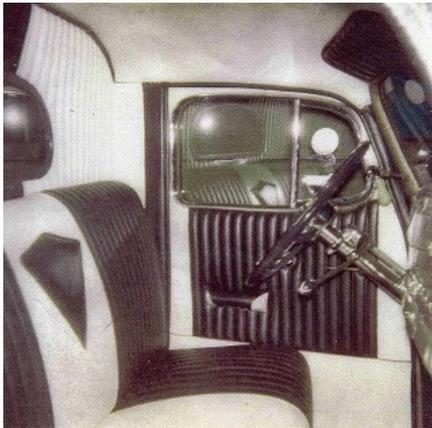
Clifford), bored, ported, etc., along with overdrive transmission and a later rear end. With 7X manifold from Tommy Sutton's warehouse of parts, it ran and sounded great! Days were spent with service station duties, but when the sun set it was "race night" almost every night.

Once word is passed that someone thinks they have a performance-type vehicle, there is always someone else out to prove they are faster. I never lost a quarter-mile race to anyone with less than a 400 cubic inch motor. In the process I ripped centers out of clutches and twisted main shafts in transmissions,

but that 308 took a thrashing and came back for more.

After several years of this, several children, and several more cars to redo, I retired the truck that had been used in contracting, farm, service station and drag racing enterprises. I had the interior re-done, stripped off all the old paint, applied many coats of lacquer and made a show truck of it. It is now in the possession of Mike Gajdek in New Jersey, a man who probably takes better care of it than I ever did!

On the day in 1947 that Dad drove away from M. T. Boone's dealership with his prize possession he would never have believed what a long and storied life his little truck would have!



In its final phase, the '47 became a drag racer (Hudson-powered!) and eventually a show truck. Tom had a custom upholstered interior installed (left), applied several coats of new paint, and attached lots of interior chrome plating. Its 7X 308 engine (with Clifford modifications) is shown at center. Tom even made two vinyl bed covers (right), one for utilitarian service station work, and the other for "show"! This is basically the truck now owned by CBC member Mike Gajdek. (All photos in this article are courtesy of Tom Miller)

M.T. Boone's Hudson Dealership

The dealership from which Tom Miller's father bought his new pickup truck was owned by Marshall T. Boone. It was located at 336 Washington Street in Falls Church, Virginia, where the Miller family lived. Boone had owned a service station at that address since the 1920's, built in the traditional style of the era, with a portico extending out over the gasoline pumps to ward off the rain. It's unclear if the Hudson dealership began immediately upon Boone's purchase of the property, but in any *(continued on next page)*

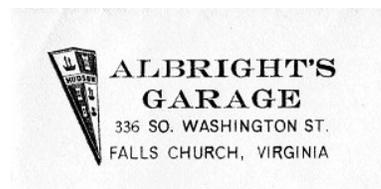


The Hudson dealership on Washington Street in 1946. The gas station with portico is in the background; the newer brick Hudson showroom is in the foreground. Boone's 1941 pickup can be seen at center right. The building furthest away is the ice house. (Photo courtesy of Charlie Albright and Mary Riley Styles Public Library Local History Collection, Falls Church.)

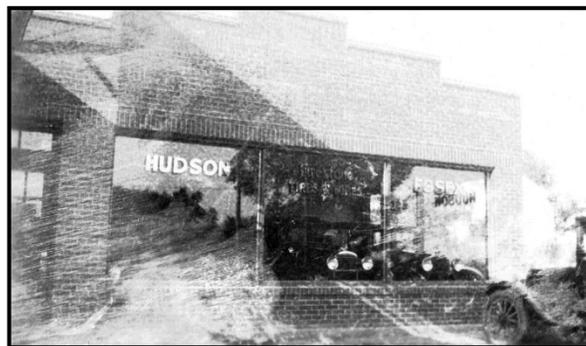
Boone (from previous page) event it was in full swing by the late 1920's. The showroom extended out one side of the gas station, its brick facade aligning with the front wall of the existing station. Boone also erected a new building for his ice business. As a boy, Tom Miller accompanied his father on visits to Boone's garage. It was there that he got to know young Charlie Albright. The two boys would play in the stream behind the garage. Charlie's father William operated an auto repair shop in the rear portion of Boone's building. He was given the use of the space in return for "warranty work" done for the Hudson dealership.

The Boone garage was a small operation, with only one or two employees besides Mr. Boone. One was a fellow named Charlie Blake who owned a farmhouse near then-rural Fairfax Circle. There he would store junked cars from the dealership.

Mr. Boone closed his dealership about 1951 and sold the building to the local taxicab company, which used it as their headquarters before moving across the street to a much larger building. He moved to Neersville, Va. (not far from Harpers Ferry) taking some Hudsons with him, and raised cattle. He died there on June 9, 1973 at the age of 82. Before his death, Mr. Boone donated part of his property to the local fire department. Next to the fire department is a small park called "Nell Boone Park". Nell Boone was Marshall's wife.



PHOTOS (clockwise from upper left): 1) The gas station was built in the 'twenties style, with portico and simulated rough stone building blocks. 2) William Albright traded "warranty work" for a place to run his auto repair shop. 3) The brick dealership building, shown in the late 1920's, was added to the gas station later. 4) Boone's facility, minus its portico, hides behind a modern façade nowadays. 5.) The same faux stone on the gas station's front wall (photo 1) occurs on the back wall of today's building, proving that it's one and the same building. PHOTO CREDITS: 1 & 3, Charlie Albright and Boone family; 2, Charlie Albright.



The Hudson-Aire is thanks Charles Albright for his help in researching this article, and for obtaining photos from various sources.