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KING OF STING

HOW A FLATHEAD SIX SCHOOLED ALL THE V8S ON THE AMERICAN OVAL TRACKS OF THE EARLY 50S

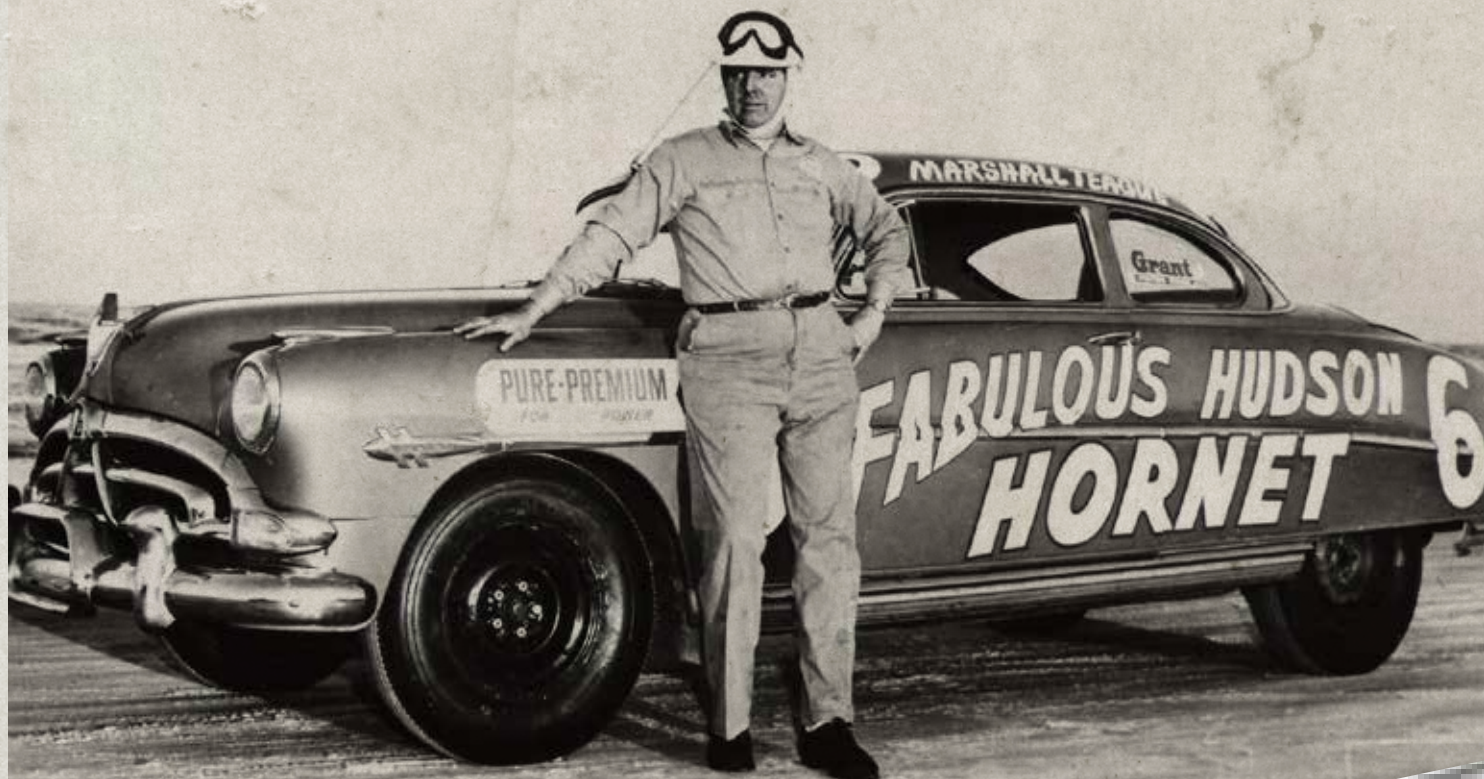
IF YOU'RE a fan of vintage NASCAR – or, more likely, if you have a child under the age of 10 – you would have heard of the Fabulous Hudson Hornet. For NASCAR aficionados, it was the team that laid waste to the competition from 1951-54. For the rest of you, it was that old blue race car voiced by Paul Newman that kept Lightning McQueen honest in the animated kiddie flick *Cars*.

Powering those cars to victory was the 308ci, Twin H Power-equipped flathead six. Yep, that's right; a flathead six was dominating stock car racing in the early 50s. Mind you, back then stock car racing meant just that – the cars that raced were stock.

Sure, the Hudson engine made pretty decent power – 170hp in Twin H-Power form – but it was also the combination of good handling, a low centre of gravity and torque that left the competition eating dust.

Enzo Ferrari once said: "Horsepower sells cars, torque wins races." That could have been Hudson's motto. With 270lb-ft of torque, the Hudson was way

There's no mistaking a Twin H-Power equipped Hudson six; those air cleaners are a dead giveaway. This one is a bit shinier than the factory version, and while the originals were painted gold, it wasn't heavy metalflake



BEACH HOP

The legend of the Fabulous Hudson Hornet was born on the sands of Daytona Beach, Florida, when local racer Marshall Teague rocked up with his '51 Hudson Hornet to a little garage that claimed to be "The Best Damn Garage in Town".

It was Smokey Yunick's place, and the Fabulous Hudson Hornet is what started his long and illustrious career in motor racing. Marshall also managed to impress the big wigs at the Hudson factory and struck up a deal, effectively making them the first factory-backed team in NASCAR.

By 1954 they were getting around 250hp out of the Hudson six, up to 280 with tube headers, but they weren't allowed under race rules. The last Hudson Hornet that Smokey race prepped is owned by Ivan Zarembo and is rumored to make around 290hp. It's almost impossible to break 300hp in aspirated form, but then there's always supercharging or nitrous or turbos.



ahead of the flathead Ford V8, and even out-torqued the new OHV Oldsmobile 303.

The Hudson's handling advantage was the result of the unibody design adopted by the company from 1958. While all the other manufacturers were building separate body and chassis cars, Hudson's step-down chassis design – named that because you stepped down into the car – resulted in a much lower centre of gravity yet still allowed for a luxurious ride and plenty of room for the passengers. The disadvantage to this design was that it was difficult to make major changes to the car's overall styling. And, at a time when the Big Three (GM, Ford and Chrysler) were offering a new look every year, it became a tough sell to convince buyers of the engineering advantages.

Despite their domination on the race track, it didn't equate to sales at the dealers, and in 1957 Hudson merged with Nash to form American Motors Corporation. But that's another story... Sadly, another memorable saying, "Win on Sunday, sell on Monday," may not be true.

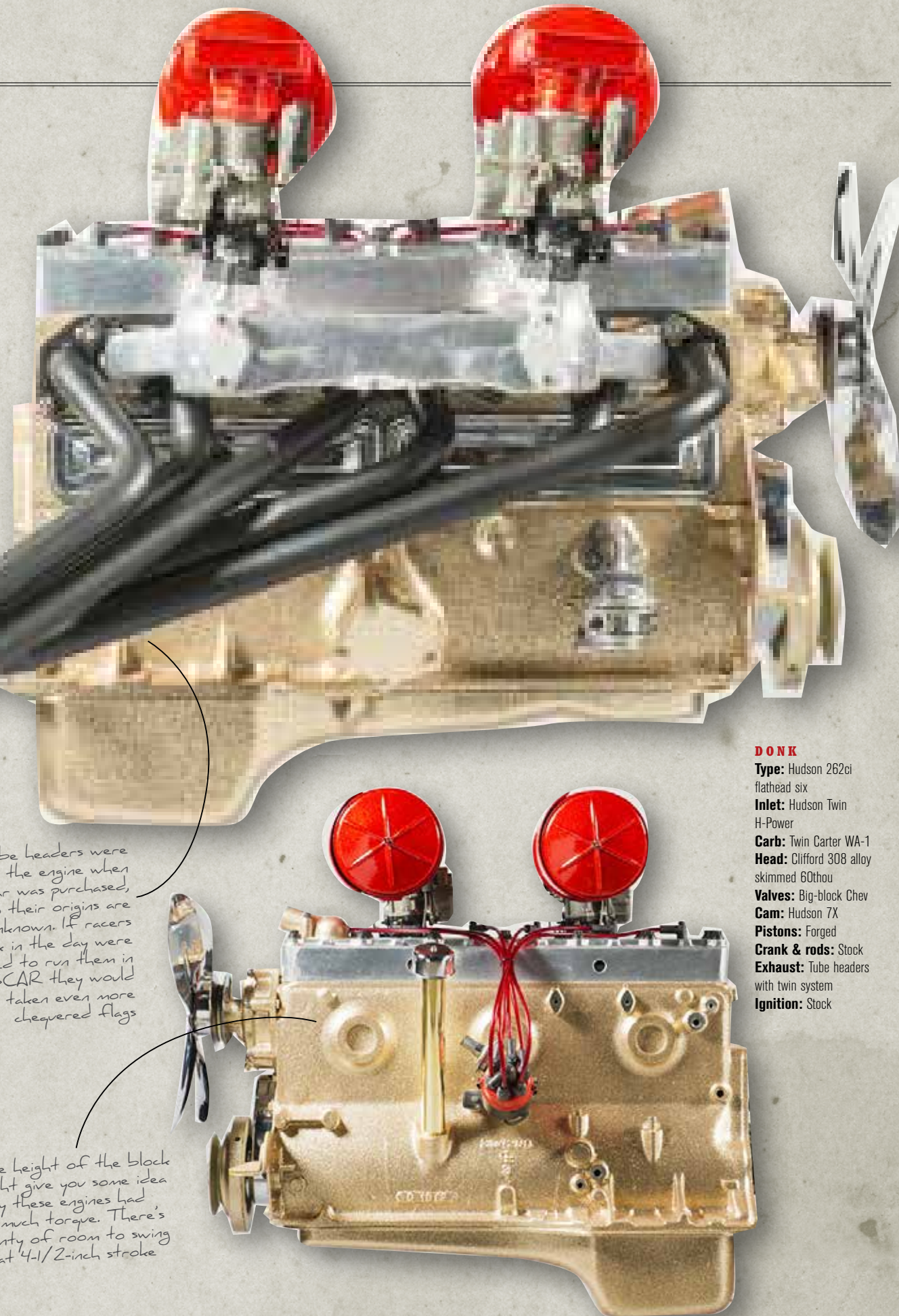
One quote that is undeniable, though, is: "To finish first, first you must finish." That's the other thing Hudson was good at. Their

engines were built like the proverbial brick shithouse, and rarely failed to finish a race. The GM products struggled with handling; the Fords had no power; and the Chryslers – despite having the Hemi – were no more powerful than the Hudsons. Studebaker was also a competitor, but their engines suffered from reliability issues.

It may seem odd that a company would persevere with such outdated technology as placing the valves in the block rather than the head, but it's important to keep in mind that the OHV engines were only just starting to emerge. Flathead engines had the benefit of decades of development, and the Hudson six was arguably the finest engine of this type ever produced. Sure, the OHV engines eventually surpassed the performance of their valve-in-block predecessors, but it wasn't until the small-block Chevy arrived in 1955 – and hot rodders eventually figured out how to hop

The tube headers were on the engine when the car was purchased, so their origins are unknown. If racers back in the day were allowed to run them in NASCAR they would have taken even more chequered flags

The height of the block might give you some idea why these engines had so much torque. There's plenty of room to swing that 4-1/2-inch stroke



DONK

Type: Hudson 262ci flathead six

Inlet: Hudson Twin H-Power

Carb: Twin Carter WA-1
Head: Clifford 308 alloy skimmed 60thou

Valves: Big-block Chev
Cam: Hudson 7X

Pistons: Forged

Crank & rods: Stock

Exhaust: Tube headers with twin system

Ignition: Stock



Lots of effort went into getting the paint finish durable and sparkly – gold base, lots of metallflake, then buried in clear. The manifolds and head have all been HPC coated and everything else chromed



Some odd corrosion has occurred on the intake manifold and the 'S' in HUDSON has mysteriously disappeared. There was some bad corrosion on the inside edge of the intake that required repairing using plasma-spraying technology



The head is from Clifford and is much thicker and beefier than the factory original with better coolant passages, higher compression and a relocated sparkplug

THE 308 IS THE ONE THAT GETS ALL THE GLORY, BUT ARGUABLY THE 262 RESPONDS JUST AS WELL



There is nothing better for Hudson fans than popping the bonnet and seeing the Twin H-Power induction sitting on top of the mighty flathead six. Tony's is more fancy than most!

them up – that the Hudsons got left behind.

Even so, a few die-hard Hudson fanatics kept racing – and winning. Up until the early 70s, a bloke by the name of Gary Ellard was winning NHRA stock classes in his '53 Hudson Hornet. He even won the Winternationals in 1969. He still races at nostalgia events, and the car runs 15.10@98mph. Not bad at all.

Another racer that became synonymous with Hudson performance and in-line six-cylinder performance in general was Jack Clifford. He raced a '54 Hudson Hornet and was undefeated in his class in 1963. He was a mechanical engineer on the Apollo program, so I guess you could say he was a dead-set rocket scientist. Sadly, Jack passed away quite a few years ago, but his California-based business, Clifford Performance, is still going.

There are plenty of Hudson lovers out there, though, including Sydney's Tony Vacher. Tony lusted after his own Hudson for years, and, after much searching and a false start, now has a '50 model almost ready to hit the road. The car was solid, but the engine needed a rebuild. With business commitments reducing his available shed-time to zero, he sent it to Ben Erdahl at Lucky's Speed Shop for a freshen-up that turned into something cooler again.

As Ben recalls: "I said to Tony, 'We can do a stock rebuild, or we can hop it up,' at which point his eyes lit up and he said, 'Really? There's actually speed equipment available for this thing?' I did a bit of research and found Randy Maas from 21st Century Hudson in the US. He plays with these things all the time. Using the 308 version of the 7X motor, he can lift the

front wheels of his '41 Hudson drag car.

"Randy put together a full rebuild kit based around his combination, but it varies a little bit because this motor is a 262. You can get two variations of the 7X camshaft; one is an authentic reproduction of the original, the other option – the one we went with – is a more contemporary lobe design but based on the original cam."

The 308 is the one that gets all the glory – there's no replacement for displacement – but arguably the 262 responds just as well, if not better to modification. And with a shorter stroke you can rev them higher.

Another area where the 262 is superior is in cooling. Due to the extremely large 250-thou increase in bore size for the 308, each pair of cylinders is siamesed and the cylinder wall is siamesed with the valve port bowl. This can lead to cracking in the exhaust port area due to the large amount of heat build-up.

This particular 262 has had a 60-thou overbore, taking it out to just over 270 cubes, and another 60 thou off the head for a bit of extra kick. Throw in a set of headers – which were never allowed in stock car racing – and it should get the custom Hudson it's going in moving along quite nicely. There's also a Turbo 700 overdrive auto going behind it, which will help in the cruising and economy stakes as well.

Though the easier option would have been to slot a small-block Chev in, it's super-cool that Tony decided to take the road less travelled. When he pops the bonnet and people see the big Twin H-Power logos, no-one will be disappointed that it's not a V8. 🏁



Though this engine is the smaller 262ci version, it still responds to all the same hop-up tricks that made the 308 such a legend in its day. With a 60-thou overbore, it now measures up at 270 cubes

