



JEAN SHEPHERD

• It is my firm belief that when the dust has settled on our century and it is ours whether we like it or not, automobile literature will be studied for the truths it contains about the life and times of the people, particularly that ephemeral sub-genre of world literature, the New Car Owner's Handbook. For example, I have before me a magnificent example of Thirties Baroque inspirational literature that says more about that romantic era than any Bogdanovich film ever will.

It is my contention that that curious decade will ultimately prove to be the high-water mark of native American style and design. After all, it was the time of the boat-tailed Auburns, the Cord and the classic Packards, not to mention Clark Gable, Fred Astaire and Dizzy Dean. As proof of this contention, I cite this absolute mint-condition catalog produced by a now-defunct car maker that should be studied by sociologists as well as art students. It covers the Terraplane line for 1934 . . . certainly a strange time. It was the time of the Okies and the grinding misery of John Steinbeck's Depression as well as the total elegance and decadent luxury of the dual-cowl Packard Straight Eight. The catalog is done in rich, truly spectacular color lithography and the cover is richly embossed with gold leaf on a royal purple background. It reads: *1934 Terraplane—Built by Hudson* and then the mystically exciting slogan, "Land Flying." It's a very powerful piece of high literature. I quote the preface:

"Terraplane—the registered and copyrighted name of the new and different kind of automobile developed by the Hudson Motor Car Company. The Terraplane is built on the new Hudson Principle of Unit-Engineering which produces an airplane ratio of power to weight. This principle in the Terraplane makes possible a performance ability never before approached in a motor car."

The first car pictured is painted in a soft,

very subtle olive-and-avocado green with gleaming chrome wire wheels. It is described as "The Terraplane Deluxe Six Sedan . . . with Luggage Vestibule." Did you get that? "Luggage Vestibule." Even the words catch the elegance of the age.

On the next page the catalog goes on to point out the Grecian concept that genuine beauty springs from within:

"The external beauty of the 1934 Terraplane expresses its internal excellence. When you become the owner of one of these cars, your feeling of pride in it will grow out of the knowledge that the beauty of line which your friends admire is the beauty of a true thoroughbred."

Reading this catalog makes you realize how far down the line we have gone in cheapening almost everything we make . . . from clothespins to jet planes. For example, this phrase: "In closed models, upholstery is your choice of rich whipcord or specially woven mohairs to harmonize with the outside finish. Convertible models feature specially tanned natural cowhide leathers. The steering post on all models adjusts to five positions. The front seat has four full inches of adjustability and can be easily adjusted for different heights. This makes you a compartment tailored to your own order." Wow! And at the bottom of that same page is the slogan: "The thrill of the lowest-priced field." That means that the Terraplane for

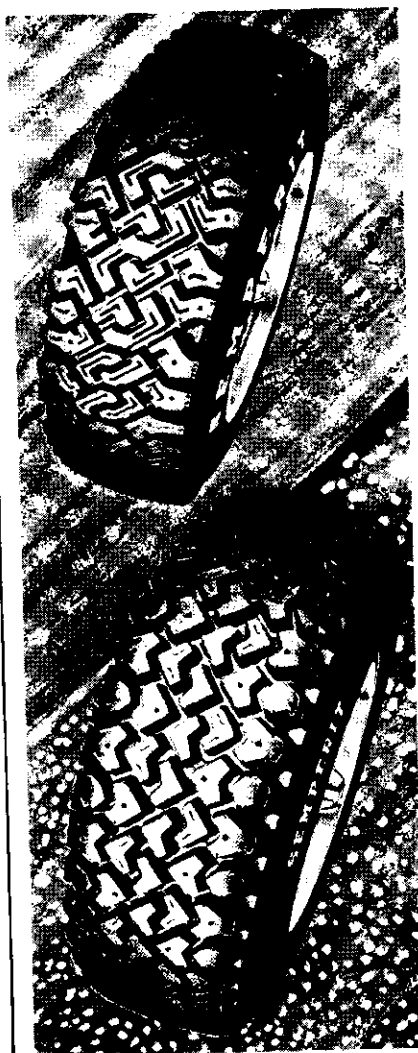
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The old Hudson
catalog describes
Terraplaning.
Can you imagine a
brochure today
mentioning Impala-ing
or LTDing?
9

1934, with its rich mohair and natural cowhide, wire wheels and gleaming finish, was right down there with the Fords and Chevys. It's hard to believe.

Then there are full-page color pictures of The Deluxe Six Coach, The Deluxe Six Coupe . . . with Rumble Seat and a truly stunningly elegant Deluxe Six Convertible Coupe in two-tone "Nile-and-Navy" blue with Fawn leather. The Terraplane Six Phaeton and the Terraplane Six Roadster are in canary yellow with ebony black fenders and the usual tanned cowhide. They are machines of such classic beauty that you wonder why Hudson ever went out of business.

After leafing through this catalog, you begin to glimpse the aspirations of the Depression Thirties that were rarely mentioned by the fiction of the period. The catalog concludes with several pages of Terraplanes in action entitled: "On Hills, In Traffic, The Champion of Champions."

"In 72 attempts to break every important



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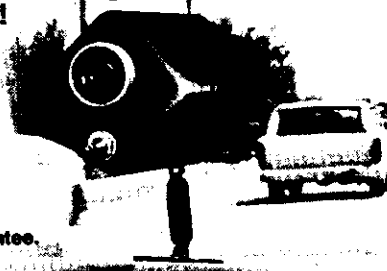
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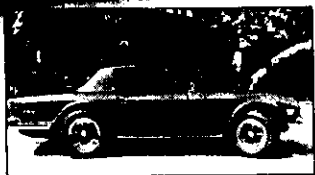
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Fiat 850	68-73	199.50		209.50	
Fiat 124	68-75				237.50
Datsun	65-67		209.50		
Datsun	68-70	199.50	209.50	209.50	209.50
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official record for hill-climbing and acceleration in the United States and Canada, the Terraplane won 72 victories—an achievement never before approached by any car. These victories were won under the strict supervision of the Contest Board of the American Automobile Association, by stock Terraplanes chosen at random from the factory production lines by an AAA official." "Stock Terraplanes chosen at random?" Even Bill France wouldn't take that.

But the most telling reflection of the times is saved, appropriately, for the last pages of this great catalog, in which the Hudson Terraplane people explain their "Unit-Engineering" design. You just don't read this kind of stuff in today's flimsy little puff sheets. I quote again . . . and remember, this is engineering they are talking about:

"Unit-Engineering means power—power such as you have never before known in an automobile . . . Terraplane power. Usable horsepower only, for real horsepower is measured in the relation of moving parts to one another and of structural weight to engine efficiency. Bobby Jones is the world's greatest golfer. The power in his drive sends the ball 250 yards straight down the fairway. John Jones is just as powerful but his drive is 100 yards away in the rough. The difference? Form. And form is merely another word for coordination—the perfect relationship between power and its means of transmission. Hudson's principle of Unit-Engineering is form in motor car designing and construction. Terraplaning is the expression of form in motor car performance.

Note: "Terraplaning" becomes a verb . . . can you imagine "Impala-ing?" or "LTDing?" No way. This is not to impugn Chevy or Ford, since they are no different from anyone else building cars today. It's just that 1934 obviously was a year when people who had the money to buy cars cared deeply about them.

Reading this catalog makes it easy to see why old codgers get all misty-eyed when they prattle on about Graham-Paiges, Hupmobiles, Flying Clouds and LaSalles. I used to laugh at my Old Man when he talked about his Pontiac Silver Streak and how my '53 Ford was a piece of plastic junk. Thank God he didn't live to see the Pinto.

It's really rotten to have to admit that the Old Man might have been right. And that those old shuffleboard players in St. Pete and Sun City really did see the Golden Age. And all we'll have to look back on and to tell the kiddies about in the future is the Reynolds Wrap Age . . . our own, our very own. But what the hell, Rome didn't last forever either and they're selling dirty postcards on the steps of the Parthenon. As sickening as the thought is, forty years from now some fool will be writing about the Seventies as an age when men were men and life was lived with reality and style, people were true, morals were steady and high, and good things really counted.

CAR and DRIVER