

## **TOPPING IT OFF.**

The following instructions are specifically for 1926 to 1929 Hudson and Essex steel bodied sedans, coaches, and coupes. These all have similar wood frames bolted to the steel body framework. The general principle can be applied to custom bodied cars and post 1929 cars, but there are differences in the metal tops. I'm sorry there are no pictures accompanying this description, but I did not take any during the last job, and have none on record, so I will try and describe as detailed as possible.

On these specific models the head lining is installed before the top is fitted, to allow access to the ledge that this is tacked onto, and to make it easier to staple the headlining to the bows. It is essential that the woodwork be in perfect condition also, and if you are renewing this it is important to have waxed cloth, felt, or hood material between the wood and the metal framing, otherwise you will have squeaks and rattles.

You will need to beg, borrow, steal, or hire a good stapler, preferably an air powered one. This makes the job so much easier. It is possible to use the old-fashioned tacking method, but it is infinitely easier with a stapler. Preferably use stainless or lacquered staples. You will also need a sheet of good heavy calico, sufficient good quality top material, and a quantity of white 1" thick polyester wadding.

To start, remove the front visor. This is screwed underneath into the front wood, and bolted into the windscreen post frame. Make sure you have removed all the tacks and staples from the wood if you are re-roofing. You need to then staple the calico sheet over the opening of the roof, attaching it only at the edges around the top opening. Start at the centre front, and stretch it over to each side and keep tension on it as you staple, working your way alternately each side towards the rear, and finally stretch it real tight from the back as you staple. Trim it off to about an inch out from the inner edges.

Next cut out sections of wadding that fit in between each bow, sitting on the calico, and the edges an inch in from the frame and bows all round. Now tease out the edges of the wadding so that you have a tapering, thinning edge all round, that just touches the edge of the bows, sides, and front and back wood. The wadding usually comes in rolls that are about two feet wide, so you now cover the entire top with wadding, and trim it off to an inch wider than the opening. Now tease it out on the edges, so that it tapers out to nothing about halfway around the curved sides, and an inch from the front and rear wood. You can put the odd staple in to hold this in place, or tape it down around the edges with duct tape. It is important that you do not have any of this wadding under the extreme edges where the gutters go, or you will have great difficulty with puckering of the top material as you staple it in place. It is essential to follow these instructions to ensure that the finished job is smooth, springy, and does not allow the position of the hood bows to show through, like a sway-backed horse. The portions of wadding sitting on the calico keep this tight, and the over-all layer of wadding gives the roof a nice springy feel, without any sagging.

Now comes the tricky bit, the top itself. I have found it best to do this outside on a real hot sunny day, as this makes the material more pliable. Just a word about the type of material – the original Hoodite was very flexible, and bituminous/cellulose based, and was good to install, but not very serviceable, and tended to deteriorate badly with sunlight, and needed constant dressing, and if you got 20 years out of it you were lucky.

Modern vinyl top material is much more durable, but is bit harder to fit, as it does not stretch as much. It is by far the best if you get material which is wide enough to go over the entire roof, without joins, otherwise you will have great difficulty keeping the lines of the joins straight.

Lay the material over the roof, and starting at the centre front, staple it under where the visor fits. It is almost essential that you have an assistant helping you to do this, as he/she can hold the material tight until you come around and staple it. Work alternately towards each side and stretch it tightly as you staple. The front corners are the most difficult, as there is a very rounded corner, and the material must be stretched over this and stapled down as you go. If you can't get it completely tight over the front corners, then it is permissible to put a very small tuck towards the centre, and this can be covered largely with the beading later. The trickiest bits are under the front corners, as there are only small holes in the corner steel brace plates, and you have to accurately get a large tack up through the hole into the wood. Don't worry too much though, as you can glue the fabric in place here once you have trimmed it, and cover with sealant. Work your way down each side, alternately stapling each side down as you go, making sure that you have the staples as low as possible so that they are covered by the guttering and beading. As you reach the back it is handy, but not essential, to have a third person stretching the material backwards as well as the two at the sides. I have done most of them on my own, but it is easier with help. Work your way along with the stapler, and finish off in the centre at the back. You may have trouble with material puckering as you staple, but it is possible to stretch most of these out and double staple to bring the edges nice and smooth. If you do stuff up, then you can remove the staples with a sharpened screwdriver, but do be careful that you don't cut into the material.

Having the top material all secured, you now have to carefully trim it off, and I have found it best to use a very sharp small knife to do this. Start at the front and keep the knife blade level and work your way around, carefully cutting below the staple line at the sides, and along the back, cutting exactly level with the join between the wood and body. Be very careful as you trim the front corners, as you need enough to tuck right back under the corner flush with the windscreen post. Under the front roof wood, trim the material so it will not protrude from behind the visor when it is re-fitted.

Now all you have to do is fit the visor, guttering, and beading. We are blessed today with vastly superior sealants, and you need a good black sealant that will set semi-hard yet flexible and with a shiny finish. Put a thin smear of sealant on the top surface of the visor and screw it into place, and smooth any excess off before it sets so you have a completely water-tight join along the front. If you have the original guttering you can now nail or screw this into place and pop the top clip-on covering into place, and finish off with a half-round alloy beading over the rear, and above the visor if you want one here. When fitting the rear beading, make sure you overlap on to the metal, with a good layer of sealant to ensure complete water-tightness. If you don't have the original guttering you can either use a one-piece type alloy guttering, or use very thin "J" shaped guttering and overlap this with ½" half round. This can either be held in place with oval head screws or 1" brads, but you will need to very carefully drill and countersink the holes so that the screws or nails are exactly flush with the surface. And remember to align the slots of the screws to give a professional finished appearance.

You are now finished! Well done!

