



# Terraplane

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Terraplanes were built by the Hudson Motor Car Company of Detroit, Michigan between 1932 and 1938. In its maiden year, the car was branded as the Essex-Terraplane. In 1934 the car became simply the Terraplane. The name was phased out in 1938 as the Hudson-Terraplane. Terraplanes were inexpensive yet powerful vehicles that were used in both town and country, with both cars and trucks bearing the Terraplane name.

Hudson had manufactured the inexpensive Essex from 1919 as a lower priced vehicle line; the company merged Essex into the parent in 1922. The Essex is generally credited with helping to make the fully-enclosed automobile an affordable model for inexpensive automobiles. The low-priced closed model Essex coach "had promoted the sensational recovery of Hudson" as an automaker in 1922.

Declining sales of the Essex, combined with the growing pressure from the effects of the Great Depression forced Hudson to replace the Essex with a re-designed automobile with a lower manufacturing cost and selling price. Roy D. Chapin decided to repeat the successful Essex strategy in 1932 by producing "a very light car in the bottom price class, a vehicle which would combine style, comfort, and reliability." Although it was daring to launch a car during the Great Depression, Chapin was convinced that the Terraplane name would have "great public appeal" as it also linked with the public interest in aviation that was so prevalent at that time.

The new Essex-Terraplane was launched on July 21, 1932, "with sensational vigor" that "accounts of the affair appeared in newspapers throughout the United States." The special event included over 2,000 dealers that came from 40 states to Detroit, Michigan. Hudson also had famous aviatrix Amelia Earhart helping to introduce the first Essex-Terraplane. It was a modern-engineered car on a narrow English-style tread width. Orville Wright purchased one of the first Essex-Terraplanes for himself. The 1932 model bore a slight resemblance to its Essex predecessors. The 1932 and 1933 models had the name Essex-Terraplane on the grille shell ornament.

For 1932 and 1933 all common US body styles were available. Limited commercial vehicles became available in 1933. In 1932 only the Model K on the 106" wheelbase with a 193" 6 cylinder engine was available. For 1933 offerings were expanded. The Model K was retained. A Model KU 6 cylinder on 113" wheelbase was added. Also a Model KT with a 244" straight 8 cylinder was offered on the 113" wheelbase. There were "Standard" and "Deluxe" trim levels for the KU and KT. 1933 models all adopted standard American tread width.

Only the 1933 Essex-Terraplanes were made with an optional eight-cylinder engine of 244". The Hudson had the identical engine, but with a displacement of 254" due to a larger cylinder bore and than the Essex-Terraplane Eight. Both engines shared the same crankshaft and stroke. 1933 Essex-Terraplane 8 cylinder cars were favored by several gangsters of the day, particularly John Dillinger, Baby Face Nelson, and John Paul Chase, for their lightness, acceleration, handling and discreet appearance.

The Essex-Terraplane Eight was distinguished by having four vent doors on each hood side as opposed to all six-cylinder versions that had seven stamped louvers. A 1933 Terraplane 8 convertible coupe set a record for the race to the summit of Mount Washington that remained unbroken for over twenty years. Essex-Terraplanes participated in innumerable record events around the United States, and some others around the world setting dozens of records at many venues. Their particular strength was in hill climbs.

For 1934 the word "Essex" was dropped and the car became the Terraplane. The cars were slightly heavier and rarely joined competitive events particularly as they now lacked the eight cylinder power plant. By 1936 Terraplane commercial cars were produced in fair number. The name Terraplane remained constant through the 1937 model year when widened bodies had salesmen offering fifty five inch "yard sticks" to compare their front seats to any other in the industry. In 1938, knowing they were going to drop the Terraplane, Hudson management chose to phase out the Terraplane name similarly to how it had been introduced and the 1938 cars were named Hudson-Terraplane.

The Terraplane contributed greatly to Hudson Motor Car Co. sales during the Depression 1930s. Sales of the Terraplane outpaced Hudson vehicles in the late mid'-30s and it is said that Hudson management was not fond of that fact and was partly why they chose to eliminate the car as a make.

Hudson Motor Car Company products were assembled in other countries under license. The British sounding names of "Hudson" and "Essex" had made them popular in countries of the Commonwealth and thus Terraplanes also were built outside the US in England and Australia in low volume. Australian law made it impractical to import a fully assembled car and thus main bodies were built by local craftsman at firms such as Ruskin Motor Bodies Ltd. and GMH (Holden) both of Melbourne, Victoria. In a few cases these bodies included styles not available in the US market such as tourers (US "phaeton" equivalent) and utilities ("utes": the Aussie pickup truck). Additionally in England, the Railton automobile began manufacture on the Essex-Terraplane 8 chassis in 1933 and thereafter used Hudson chassis for both 8 and 6 cylinder models.

Perhaps the most memorable sales slogan of the Terraplane years came from 1933: "On the sea that's aquaplaning, in the air that's aeroplaning, but on the land, in the traffic, on the hills, hot diggity dog, THAT'S TERRAPLANING".

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