

## Ypsilanti's Miller Motors to become National Hudson Motor Car Museum

Kurt Ernst Jun 9th, 2014



*The Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum, soon to be home to the National Hudson Motor Car Museum. Photos by Jim Donnelly.*

Ypsilanti, Michigan's Miller Motors continued to represent the Hudson brand long after the company closed its doors, earning it the title of "the world's last Hudson dealership." Now, 58 years after the American automotive brand's demise, Miller Motors will fittingly serve as the home to the National Hudson Motor Car Museum, the nation's first institution devoted entirely to the Hudson brand.

The building at 100 East Cross Street in Ypsilanti has an automotive dealership history that dates back to 1916, when Dodge automobiles were sold at the location. By the end of the 1920s, the shop had phased out Dodge in favor of Hudson-Terraplane and Willys-Overland, although this latter franchise lasted only from 1928-1929. Until the Wall Street crash, 1929 turned out to be a record year for Hudson sales in Ypsilanti, with the dealership moving 212 new cars through its doors.

In 1932, Carl Miller bought into the dealership with partner Alex Longnecker. The pair had experience in car sales and considered several higher-traffic locations for their Ypsilanti Hudson dealership before settling on the store's existing location. Though located blocks off the city's main street, the East Cross Street location had the advantage of cheap rent, and in the frugal post-Great Depression years, a penny saved was truly a penny earned. Roughly a decade later, Miller was able to buy out his partner, and his Hudson Sales and Service

business managed to sell between 30 and 60 cars annually, a reasonable volume in the postwar years. The announcement of Hudson's "step down" models for 1948 was big news, and Carl Miller's son Jack remembers the showroom windows being whitewashed, with only a few portholes cleared for outward visibility, in order to create added buzz. As Jack Miller related in the [April 1984 issue of \*Special Interest Autos\*](#), his job was to count the spectators gathered outside the showroom windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of the new Commodore Eight sedan; though he made an effort to count every head, he stopped counting when the total reached into the hundreds.

When American Motors was formed by the merger of Nash-Kelvinator and Hudson in 1954, the dealership picked up additional product lines. By 1956, it no longer made sense to refer to the shop as Hudson Sales & Service, so the name was changed to Miller Motors to encompass more than just a single brand. The Hudson brand received its final curtain call in 1957, and American Motors began ramping up pressure on Miller Motors to modernize and relocate to a higher-traffic location; Carl Miller refused, and in 1959 the automaker pulled his franchise. Without new cars to sell, the Millers refocused their efforts on selling used cars and repairing cars already sold to customers, always with an emphasis on the Hudson brand. As the years progressed, Jack took over the business from his father and eventually refocused his efforts on selling Hudson parts and restoring Hudson automobiles for sale. Selling at least one restored Hudson each year was a point of pride for Miller, who took his title of "Mr. Hudson" and his shop's reputation as the last Hudson dealer very seriously.



*The museum will house Hudson memorabilia as well.*

In 1996, Miller sold off his spare parts business and turned his attention to opening a museum that honored Ypsilanti's automotive past (as well as the Hudson brand), and the result was the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum. The dealership-turned-museum features displays honoring Tucker (specifically, a movie prop car from the 1988 film), Kaiser-Frazer, the Chevrolet Corvair, the Chevrolet Nova, and even the Hydra-Matic transmission, all of which have ties to Ypsilanti. Over the years, the museum has grown beyond the boundaries of the dealership to encompass numerous buildings, including an adjacent former post office that now houses the Tucker and Kaiser-Frazer displays.

The National Hudson Motor Car Company Museum, the result of a partnership between the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum and the Hudson Essex Terraplane Historical Society, will open in September occupying the former Miller Motors dealership, and will be organized in such a way as to relate as much of the Hudson brand's story as possible. In addition to the Hudson models that once formed the backbone of Jack Miller's collection, other historic Hudson models will be exhibited on loan from collectors. Per museum manager Ed Souers, that list will include everything from a 1910 Hudson Model 20 two-seat roadster to the final 1957 Hudson model built, a Hudson Hornet Hollywood that rolled off the assembly line in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on June 25, 1957. It will also include a vehicle to be added to the National Historic Vehicle Register, the number 92 "[Fabulous Hudson Hornet](#)" of NASCAR racer Herb Thomas. It was Jack Miller who tracked down Thomas's badly-neglected racer, arranged its purchase (after a decade of negotiation) and restored the car to its as-raced state; last November, Miller sold the car to Souers, who will proudly display it in the museum he manages.



Plans call for regular display updates to the dealership's single-car showroom, and each rotating display will feature period-correct artifacts and memorabilia to tell the story of more than just the Hudson brand. As Souers explained, the primary purpose of the National Hudson Motor Car Company Museum will be to tell the brand's story in a clear and comprehensive manner, and Souers hopes that the museum can foster longterm cooperative relationships with other U.S. automotive museums. It already has a relationship with The Henry Ford, which has placed a Derham-bodied 1951 Hudson Hornet used by Hudson's last president, A.E. Barit, on long-term loan.

The National Hudson Motor Company Museum is scheduled to open on September 21, which corresponds with the weekend of the annual [Orphan Car Show in Ypsilanti](#).