



# OLD 'SHAKY'

## Veteran Detroit Traffic Stopper

By Jerry Drenzek

In an era when Detroit area garage owners tried everything from balloons and banners to Niagara Falls vacation sweepstakes to draw attention to their business, Roy C. Wetmore's garage on legendary Woodward Avenue had them all beat.

Wetmore's unusual form of advertising was of the point-of-purchase variety. It could be seen 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year since 1928! For perched atop the corner of the second floor in an open-air alcove, rests a wobbly-wheeled vintage relic with a purposely misaligned front end. The front wheels perpetually rotate above Woodward motorists courtesy of a belt-drive system, powered by an electric motor. The wobble is accentuated by a white stripe painted on the tire tread, and just so this roadside attraction won't be missed, the "car-on-the-roof" protrudes about a third of the way out of the second story.

It all began just before the depression era, in 1928, when a tired Wills Saint Claire was rescued from the scrap yard and made presentable (except for "Wetmore's Wobble"), with some paint and primping, to nest in the alcove. Initially, the idea was just to use the front axle to demonstrate the misaligned front wheels, but the scrap dealer wanted no part in separating the Wills from its axle, so the car was sold intact. A quick-thinking employee suggested the car be lifted in place with a crane and let the wheels rotate misaligned.

Wetmore thought it was a good idea, too, and consequently, the reason behind many a Woodward Avenue fender bender. It

seems that drivers were gawking at the shimmy and shake of the car on display and not the car ahead of them. The Wills Saint Claire was replaced by a Hudson that Hudson Motor Car Co. executives claimed was damaging to the corporate image. They demanded that Wetmore remove the misaligned car from the display or face legal action. Instead, the Hudson was fitted with a special grille supplied by the auto moguls. The disguise made the car look somewhat generic and unrecognizable as a production car, so legal matters were never again discussed.

The successor to the "generic" Hudson was a 1940 Buick Super four-door sedan in the early forties, followed by a '49 Lincoln Cosmopolitan sedan which was said to be almost new when put on display. It held vigil there until mother nature's elements took their toll. The badly weathered car

was replaced one spring morning in May of 1966. The replacement car was a turquoise-green 1964 Chrysler New Yorker four-door sedan.

The Chrysler, being the fifth and final car used in the alcove, was involved in a rear-end wreck (possibly in front of Wetmore's). But the way the Chrysler was displayed, passing motorists never would recognize the damage. Today the Chrysler is still there with front tires spinning wildly misaligned, only now it sports a bright red paint job that really makes the car stand out from the white art-deco designed building.

Wetmore's novel form of advertising works as well today as it did back in 1928. The proof is the brake lights and pointing fingers that still continue on Woodward Avenue in front of the Wetmore Garage.

1. This graphic symbol of the American car culture works as well today as an advertising statement as it did back in 1928.

2. High above the garage, the Wetmore name still stands. Note the wooden

artillery wheel and tire positioned in the brickwork.

3. Woodward Avenue traffic whizzes by the latest version of "old shaky wheels," which has been standing vigil since 1966.

