



Recently, I have been the caretaker of a very special Hispano-Suiza J-12 with body by Saoutchik. This car was the first production J-12 and featured at the 1931 Paris Auto Show. It was also shown at the '31 London show and the early '32 Geneva show. The car was purchased by the Shah of Persia and before delivery Saoutchik incorporated some specific changes for the Shah. The car was delivered in October of 1932.

In 1963 an Israeli broker purchased the car (with 10,000 km on the odometer) from the Shah of Iran for an American buyer. In 1979 the car was sold to a New Zealand collector and remained there until August 2017.

The current owners, Mark & Sonia Richter, purchased the car (with 20,000 km on the odometer) in 2011 and extensively toured the car in New Zealand before shipping it to Seattle. Upon arrival, they completed the 2017 Motoring Classic and showed the car at the Pebble Beach Concours in the European Classic Class – Early. It was awarded first in Class. The Richters then drove the car back to Seattle and left it with me, planning to participate in the 2018 Motoring Classic. I was encouraged to drive the car as often as I wanted.

Last fall when I drove the car I noticed that when cold, it seemed to take longer to get started than one would expect. Once it was running there were no problems and, at the time, I thought it was the operator's unfamiliarity with the car. On the road the experience is special. I have never driven a car of this vintage as comfortably at freeway speeds in traffic. The brakes are just like

a modern car with power brakes and take very little effort.

The car wasn't driven during the winter and this past spring I felt it was time to exercise it. We signed up for the May 19, 2018 CCCA and RROC tour to the Sommerville's home in Arlington. Roy Magnuson had a planned 60 mile tour that would take us there on some very nice, back roads. I got the Hispano started at home and we met the group



in Mill Creek. All went well until we were in downtown Monroe waiting for a traffic light to change. It was a bit of an uphill and I stalled the car when our turn came to move ahead. Several attempts to start the car got us nowhere. It just wouldn't catch. At the time Frank Daly, with passengers John Koziol and Steve Larimer, stopped to assist. Frank was driving his lovely '37 Packard 12 Conv. Sedan. Then Jack Goffette and Barb stopped. They were driving Jack's modern Bentley. A few moments later a Monroe police cruiser pulled up behind the Hispano. One of the officers walked up to the driver's window and said

"Guess we had better call a tow truck and have him take it to my house." Both of the cops were very pleasant and supportive while they directed traffic around the Hispano.

After several minutes of praying and trying to start the car, (see photo of Frank praying) Jack Goffette suggested that if the police cruiser backed up that I might be able to jump start the car in reverse. This I tried and the car caught instantly. From then on I kept the idle speed up higher and also gave quite a bit more throttle each time I accelerated from a stop. The bright spot in all of this was the fact that the tour group had moved ahead and the two lane roads were uncluttered by the slow moving group. This allowed Sandi and me to really enjoy the power of the Hispano's 9.4 liter engine and the incredible brakes. Frank was following (trying to keep up) in the Packard. It was a wonderful,

sunny, morning with two, big, Classic 12-cylinder cars and their drivers were having a ball.

Following our visit at the Somerville's we all headed home. I was concerned about keeping the engine speed up, as I really did not know why the car would not restart when hot. As we traveled in a group, there was safety in the fact that a short tow would get the Hispano running, if the problem developed again.

Getting near home everyone headed off in their own direction.

We were about 4 miles from our house when I slowed for a traffic light and a line of cars. I was still coasting and when the light turned green I applied the gas. The engine stalled. An immediate attempt to jump start the car was unsuccessful; we were just going too slow. Using the starter I was able to pull into the middle of the road leaving enough room for traffic to get by. Nothing I did convinced the car to restart. Pushing was out of the question, as the car is heavy and the road was flat. About 45 minutes later, son Kirk, came with a tow strap and



a very short pull got the car running again. We made it home.

I really did not know the cause of the Hispano's starting problem when warm and talked with the owner in New Zealand who suggested replacing the spark plugs. I did look at the spark plugs, there are 24 of them, and they looked too good to be the cause of the problem. A little bit of oil on the outboard plugs, but the inboard plugs looked perfect. (The car has Champion D16 plugs on the inlet side of each block and NKG AD-6 plugs on the exhaust side of each block. This was a deliberate choice following some testing in New Zealand). At this point I was getting suspicious about the magnetos and talked to the mechanic in New Zealand who had done extensive work on the car over the years. (The Hispano J12 is fired by two magnetos. One for the 12 inside spark plugs and one for the 12 outside plugs. There is not a coil ignition.) I was told that the magnetos had been rebuilt in 2005 by a competent magneto guy and it was felt that my problem was probably something else or, possibly, the condensers in the magnetos.

After the car sat in the garage a few days I was able to start it and do a bit of testing. The ignition switch on the dashboard has four settings, "O," "D,"

"G" & "2." I was told that the switch needed to be in the "2" position for the car to start, meaning both magnetos. With the engine running at a slow idle I turned the switch back to the "G" position, which fires just the outside plugs on each bank. The idle slowed a bit, which is to be expected, but the car continued to run. When I turned the switch to the "D" position, which fires the inside plugs on each bank, the car stalled. I restarted the engine and at a bit faster idle ran the same test again. The same result was noted for the outside plugs, but when the switch was turned to the "D" position the idle dropped off further, but the car still ran. This was a clue that one of the magnetos was not operating as well as the other. But, the car seemed to run fine and the decision was made that as long as I kept the idle up a bit, we should be OK.

Being the brave (foolish?) souls we are when it comes to vintage cars, I decided to give the Hispano another chance and take it to the CCCA picnic at the Dochnahls on June 24. However, in case something went bad, (misery loves company) we invited my son and his wife to join us. The drive down was uneventful and I continued to keep the idle speed higher than normal and gave the car more gas than normal each time

we started up from a stop. On the way home, however, in a very busy part of Issaquah near I-90, the engine quit just as we were pulling away from a stop light. While we were coasting a little bit, Sandi, my son and his wife jumped out and all started pushing. Fortunately they were able to get me around the corner onto a much less busy street.

All attempts to start the car, including being pushed and trying to jump start it, failed. The first call was to my daughter, but we could only leave a voice mail. The second call was to AAA for a ramp truck. We were told that the wait was as long as two hours and that the tow truck could only take two passengers. Plan C involved calling Uber and sending Sandi and Kirk home to get a tow strap and vehicle. When my daughter called saying she was on her way, we were back to Plan A. We hooked-up her Explorer to the tow strap and I was able to jump start the Hispano again, but this time it took more speed than on the previous jump starts. With my daughter tailing the Hispano, we resumed our journey. Two blocks from home while turning a corner, the Hispano died again. Of course it wouldn't start.

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We again hooked-up the tow strap and I got enough of a pull to get the car running. Once I got it home it went straight into the garage.

I was now convinced that the magnetos, when warm, were the problem. Further talks with the New Zealand mechanic pretty much got an agreement with my diagnosis.

In early July I removed both magnetos and shipped them back to Mark's Magneto Service in Connecticut. I hoped that the magnetos would be back in time for the Hispano to be used on the 2018 Pebble Beach Motoring Classic. Early in August I learned that each magneto was undergoing a total rebuild and they would not be back in time. (Fortunately the Hispano owners had purchased another car which they did use on the Motoring Classic.)

The magnetos returned mid September and I reinstalled them in the car based on markings made during the removal process. The car would not start. Not even close. Obviously, the timing had changed and we were going to have to retune the engine. This resulted in a few more conversations with the mechanic in New Zealand, as I have no specifications. After several attempts to get the car running by repositioning each magneto, it suddenly started but was running very rough on just one magneto. By making further minor adjustments with the operating magneto, the engine ran quite smoothly. There is only a small opening in the crankcase forward of the firewall where a little bit of the flywheel can be seen. It is marked with letters (I have no idea what the letters mean in French) and the markings are very difficult to read with a timing light. As I 'tweaked' the magneto rotation while listening to the engine, I discovered a white paint dot on the flywheel. This was not factory made, but someone's marker to help in timing the magnetos. Using the timing light I set the operating magneto to fire at the white dot. I then set the second magneto so that it, too, fired at the white dot. Tada! The engine was running beautifully and at a very low idle.

Two road tests since the above exercise was completed seem to verify that the timing is very, very close, if not right on. A talk with the mechanic in New Zealand didn't help identify the white dot. He did not remember it from when he worked on the car. However, after my report on my driving experience, etc., he agreed that the engine is running as intended. I am able to idle the car at an even lower speed than before and the car will start when warm on either magneto alone. That is something it would never do before. Once the car is shut down for a few minutes and while still warm, my finger barely touches the start button and the car is instantly running. Currently, my confidence is such that I would feel comfortable heading across country with the car tomorrow.



Microtip: Rescue Tape

Rescue Tape, silicone tape or self-fusing tape is one of those products regularly seen at boat and RV shows but seems to be unknown to many Classic Car owners (and... it does not appear on Gary Johnson's comprehensive list.)



So, what is it, can it really fix almost anything and should you buy it?

Rescue Tape is the most common name for the self-fusing silicone tape with a thousand uses. It's claimed to fix everything from radiator hoses to space shuttle components. It can stop leaks in your garden hose and even stem the flow of a bleeding finger.

Stretched and wrapped, it will seal a leaking radiator hose, gas line, water pipe or air hose... and pretty much anything else that leaks! It can insulate electrical wiring and is claimed to withstand temperatures beyond 200°C with a tensile strength up to 950psi. Rescue Tape will bond fully in under a minute by stretching the tape while you wrap it around a repair. And that is just a start of a list of potential uses!

While generally used for short-term fixes, it does seem to stay in place indefinitely and is easily cut away leaving no sticky residue.

Editor's Note: It is so useful that I suggest you consider adding it to your tool-kit. Don't leave home without it!

<http://unsealed4x4.com.au/5-cool-uses-rescue-tape/>

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