

TUMBLEWEEDS *The Newsletter of the Southern*

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STUDEBAKER'S CLIMATIZER by Hans Smaling

"Climatizer" is Studebaker's fancy name for the fresh air and heating system that the company offered, starting in 1939, on all its passenger cars. It probably deserved the fancy name, because it offered a level of comfort far superior to previous systems. Older systems employed by all manufacturers let fresh air enter the car through open windows and/or vent wings. The car's interior was simply heated by means of a hot water heater mounted under the instrument panel, fed off the engine's cooling system or a gasoline burning device.

The "Climatizer" was a step up from the old style systems in that it had its own separate ducting with the heater element incorporated in the fresh-air stream. It was still necessary to crack the windows open, but now for a different reason: to get fresh air to flow through the car's interior and used air to be expelled through the open window. Result: no more stuffy interiors or fogged-up windows! The latter feature was enhanced by the addition of a hot-water wind-shield defroster that, at least before WW II, could be ordered separately. In 1942, the old style heater and defroster were still available for all models (President 8, Commander 6 and Champion) at the exorbitant price of \$ 20.00. That same year, the installed list prices for the three available versions of the "Climatizer" were:

Complete climatizer with defroster	\$ 38.95
Complete climatizer less defroster	\$ 32.20
Climatizer less heating element and defroster	\$ 23.00

On the next page you will find a copy of page 11 of the 1942 "Retail Salesman's Guide" for Studebaker Accessories, featuring the "Climatizer" with "Thermo-Control". It gives the salesman the factory's sales pitch, detailing features and characteristics. It is interesting to see that already before the war, here was a ventilating system offered on what can be called a "bread-and-butter" line of cars, incorporating a pollen filter. This filter was later eliminated, probably for reasons of cost reduction and re-invented by BMW and Saab in the early '90's, then hailed as a brand new invention.

The automobile industry has always been very prolific in the use of fancy names for mundane vehicle systems. We had such gems as "Power-Stop" brakes in the days before the invention of the actual power-assisted brake, "Smooth-Ride" suspensions using simplistic leaf springs and much more such fluff language to bamboozle the unsuspecting customer. "Thermo-Control" is another example of this sales jargon. It is no more than a simple hot-water valve mounted on the engine's cylinder head, remote-controlled from the "master panel" mounted under the dashboard, by a lever with bowden cable.

Although this valve is designed to regulate the water flow to the heater coil in a gradual manner, thereby controlling the amount of heat the "Climatizer" puts out, in practise we find that it functions more like an on/off switch, obliging the driver to constantly change its setting to avoid either being fried or frozen, usually with limited success.

Postwar "Climatizers" were improved. The "Thermo-Control" was equipped with a thermostat - a big plus - which could accommodate a much smaller heater core without changing the unit's capacity. Another advantage of the thermostat was that the fan speeds of the heater and defroster blowers could now be reduced from 3 to 2 for both. The heater core and air ducting system were moved from the left to the right side of the car. Not improved were the air ducts themselves, they went from being incorporated in the body paneling to separate spiral-wire reinforced flex tubes that were prone to rot and early demise.

Overall, we can say that the "Climatizer" was ahead of its time, as so many of Studebaker's engineering features. It was a well-appreciated comfort and safety item with good performance.