



Sunday, 13 July 2014

The Maxwell

You want an example of how times have changed?

A comedian today could never get a laugh out of owning a Maxwell. Even if anyone in the audience knew what it was, they wouldn't see humour. They'd see someone collecting an antique car that would probably be worth a good chunk of money.

How different were things in the middle part of the 20th century. The American auto industry was always coming up with something brand new. You don't want to be out-of-date, old-fashioned and laughed at, was their message. Thus it was the driving public was convinced to get behind the wheel of something with portholes, large fins or a horse-collar grille. It was NEW!!



But Jack Benny wanted to be laughed at. So in 1937 he and his writers came up with an obsolete car for him to drive, showing his character was so cheap, he wouldn't buy a new one. Thus was born Jack Benny's Maxwell, a car with which he was associated for the rest of his life. Incidentally, Benny had a different car association at one time. His show had been sponsored by Chevrolet, but no one except radio historians and ardent Benny fans recall that.

Benny built his character piece by piece. But one can only do the same jokes for so long. So as time moved past 1960, Benny and his writers started downplaying or eliminating certain things. The Maxwell was one of them. Here's an unbylined syndicated newspaper feature from October 20, 1962.

Jack Benny About Maxwell: 'She's Just Too Expensive'

Automotive reactionaries, concerned over the passing of tall, slow automobiles, have often cited Jack Benny as a paragon of taste.

"Benny," they say, "had sense enough to hang onto his Maxwell."

Even as they cast admiring glances at the low, hyper-horsepowered 1963 cars now making their advent on the highways of America, they cling to the Maxwell, among other vehicular relics, a symbol of a past whose departure they mourn.

But even that last anchor to the Good Old Days is dragging.

No one seems to have seen Jack Benny's Maxwell lately, either on or off The Jack Benny Program on the CBS Television Network on Tuesdays. And for good reason.

Benny's Maxwell, a wonderfully nondescript car of time-dimmed origin, seems to have fallen victim to plusher times.

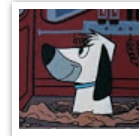
The Maxwell automobile was born during the first decade of this century and died in 1924. It existed less than 20 years.

Oar hero made driving a Maxwell part of his miserly character in the mid-1930s, a few years after the Jack Benny Program started on radio.

When Benny and his writers developed the joke the Maxwell automobile had been out of production for at least 12 years.

Benny's Maxwell jokes, in fact, have enjoyed a longer life span than the automobile which gave them birth. Anyone who has attempted to maintain vintage machinery certainly can appreciate the expense and labor of keeping a Maxwell, or even a joke, running well past the midway point of the 20th Century. Benny can.

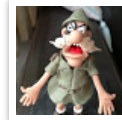
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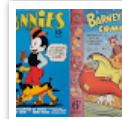
Movies with Michael



Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

service of cowboy church. Today's musical selection begins with Gene Autry singing "Dear Hearts and Gentle Pe..."
6 hours ago

Termite Terrace headlines



Question for All You Cartoon Collectors! - OK so I've been doing some

looking around. Bosko apparently had a comic book and I'm wondering if any of you know of

In earlier days. Benny might patch one of the Maxwell's worn rear tires with a pair of tennis shoes.

"It worked just fine," he would explain, "except that driving late at night I had the eerie feeling that someone was sneaking up on me."

And, he would go on, "Every time I drove past a tennis court the car tried to jump over the net."

If one exercises his memory a little, he might recall that the Maxwell had five fenders; the extra was kept in the back seat to cover the driver's head in the event of rain.

Benny's Maxwell was the most awful-sounding piece of machinery imaginable. Mel Blanc, who is with Benny still, was the snorting, coughing, hacking, stammering voice of the Maxwell in flight on radio.

The Maxwell was rolled out briefly last season, but only as a device to get Benny into a situation—in this case a chichi (and highly improbable) version of the Beverly Hills, Cal., police station. The auto itself was not seen.

It is not impossible, of course, that the Maxwell will turn up again.

"We'll use it if it's called for," Benny says.

But chances of it bucketing down Wilshire Boulevard in this day of high horsepower are mighty slim indeed.

Perhaps it would help if a simple economic fact were pointed out to those who grieve that Benny's Maxwell has been retired from active duty: Jack's Maxwell, no longer just an old car, has become an antique worth more now than it was when it was new.

"The car's just too expensive," says Benny. "I can't afford it."

Everyone loved the idea of a broken-down Maxwell, it seems. Jack always seemed to have been chauffeured in one during public appearances. And one theatre took advantage of it, as we read in the *Syracuse Journal*, May 10, 1941.

Keith's Seeks Oldest Maxwell Car

Inspired by the appearance of Jack Benny's famed Maxwell in "Buck Benny Rides Again," opening today at Keith's, Manager Harry Unterfort has launched a search for the oldest Maxwell in Onondaga County.

The winner will be paid \$5 in cash. Deadline for all entries is 6 P.M. Saturday.

In addition, the Keith management will give guest tickets to all Maxwell owners and their guests who drive up to the front of the theater in their cars. Maxwells must be of 1930 vintage or older, however, to qualify for the stunt.

In 1925, the vice-president of sales for Maxwell-Chrysler stated "the automobile buyer of today is a different sort of a person from the buyer of yesterday." Within a year, there were only Chryslers, no Maxwells. They belonged to yesterday. Except on a certain radio comedy-variety show. The Maxwell was mentioned in Jack Benny's newspaper obituaries. It was mentioned in Mel Blanc's newspaper obituaries. It never got an obituary of its own.

Posted by Yowp at [07:12](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

1 comment:

Tim Hollis 15 July 2014 at 14:24

Just as a bit of trivia, apropos to nothing, around 1970 the Early American Museum across the street from world-famous Silver Springs, Florida, displayed a restored Maxwell with a framed photo of Jack propped up next to it to remind people of the association. (I was too young to fully appreciate that at the time, but of course my parents got it.)

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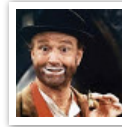
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Born on July 18, 1913 - Red Skelton - *Today's post commences

with the Guzzler's Gin routine ...

1 day ago

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Sorry... - As far as I know, I do not have any diseases. I just have too much to deal with right now so I won't be blogging much if at all. I'm postponing all the web...

1 day ago

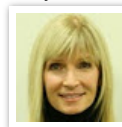
[Cartoon Research](#)

In His Own Words: H.T. Kalmus on Disney in Technicolor - Suspended Animation #276 Many references may be found regarding two-strip Technicolor. I have been guilty of discussing Walter Lantz's King of Jazz (1930)...

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Normally when any of the jocks got a reaction, it'd be split.

The ones

that were really liked wou...

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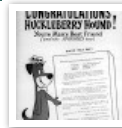
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Wabbit Twouble: A Small Addendum to An Outstanding Podcast -

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10 months ago

 **Likely Looney, Mostly Merrie**
That's all, folks! - My posts have gotten thinner over the years. I'm aware of that. I've been hopeful for a long time, that I can remain active with blogging and sharing furth...
1 year ago

 **Dr. Grob's Animation Review**
The Flying Man - 'The Flying Man' is a very short absurdist film in which a man drops his coat to take a swim in mid air. Another man with a dog drops by, tries the same th...
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