These Firemen Jump to Work

FROM the top of a mountain deep in a national forest, a lonely lookout slowly scans the neighboring slopes. Suddenly his eyes focus on a tiny puff of smoke. Within a few minutes a plane loaded with paratroopers heads for the fire.

These paratroopers carry no guns. They are the "smokejumpers" of the U. S. Forest Service, trained to parachute into isolated wood areas and put out a fire with only the tools dropped alongside them—there seldom is water. Then they must find their way afoot to the nearest road and civilization. In one year alone, the airborne firemen made 1,236 individual jumps, fighting fires in public and private forests in the Northwest.

Smokejumpers of the Forest Service get ready to step into space to fight fire below. Various kinds of planes, including the reliable old DC-3 —and even ancient Ford Tri-Motors—are used.

Hand tools are jumpers' main fire-fighting equipment. They don't attempt to extinguish blaze, but isolate it by cutting a clear path around it, then let it burn out. Moist earth is turned to prevent smoldering. Smokejumpers are most often used against small fires—frequently caused by lightning—in areas remote from roads and trails. They also rescue lost or injured persons.

Parachutes used by smokejumpers have two narrow slots cut in rear, permitting jumper to guide descent, pick landing. Slots were developed by a smokejumper.

Portable short-wave radios keep jump teams in contact with ranger station. This and other equipment is dropped from plane, but men carry own food supply.

Fully equipped smokejumper wears high-collared canvas coveralls and football helmet with wire-screen face guard to protect him during a treetop landing. Back 'chute is released by static line; chest 'chute is emergency spare. Leg pocket holds rope for slide from a tree to the ground.

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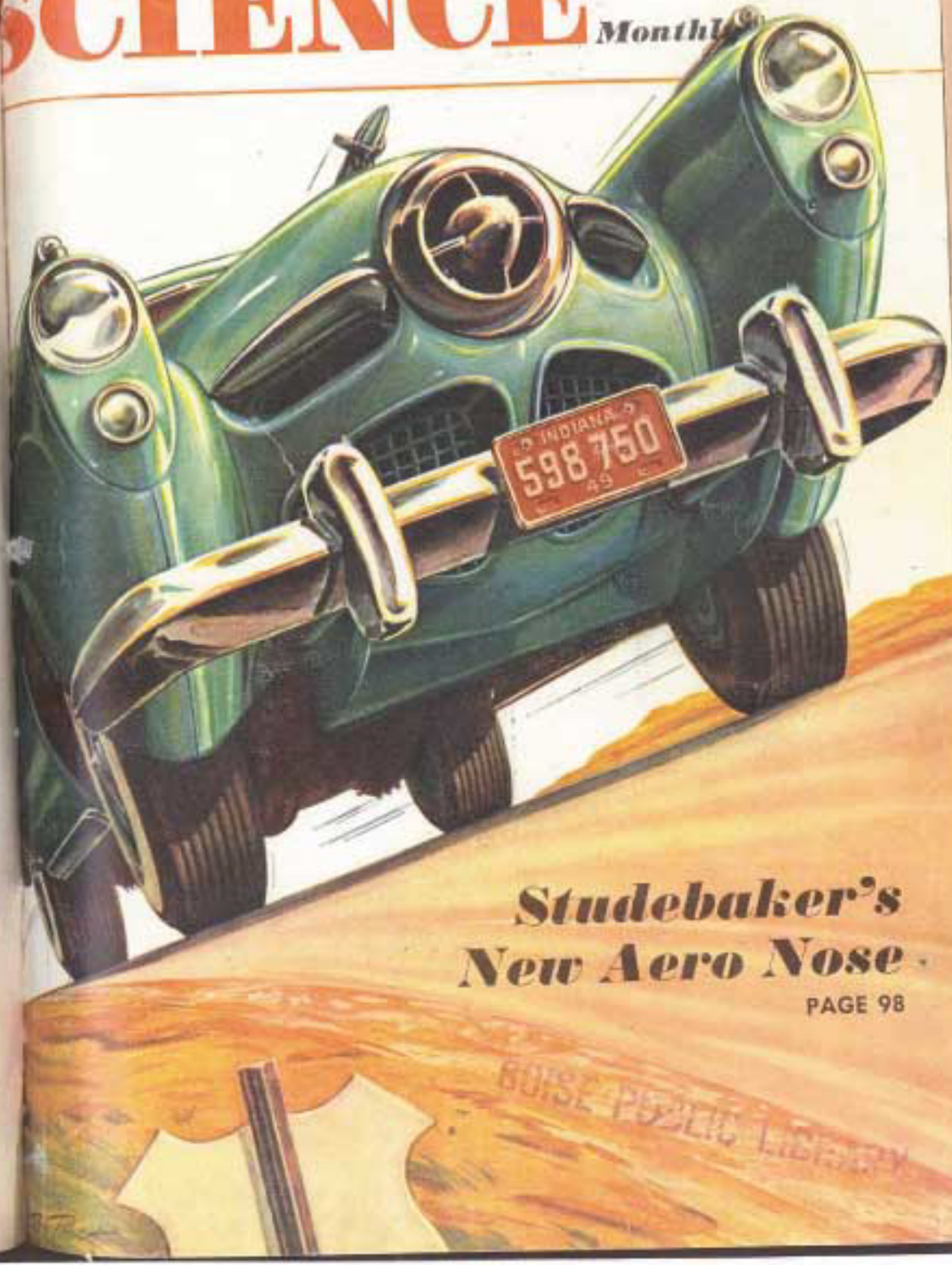

Studebaker's New Aero Nose

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