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Beginning—The Story of Houdini—Page 16

Gus Reveals Some Tire Secrets

His Easy Ways to Make Roadside Repairs Save a Lot of Time



A Flat Tire—and the Jack Is Missing!

Gus sat on a rock and bossed the job while Joe repaired a punctured clincher tire without jacking up the wheel. The tire was mended quickly and easily with the aid of nothing but tire irons and a "sizzle patch"

By Martin Bunn

"GOOD MORNING, Gus—what do you know about real estate?" said Joe Clark to his partner, just as the latter was unlocking the door of the Model Garage.

"Not a darn thing at this time of day," Gus growled crossly and a bit sleepily.

"Oh! All right, you old grouch!" grinned Joe. "I only wanted to tell you that there's a house up my way that I want to buy. I thought maybe you'd take a run up there with me and tell me if it's a bargain."

"Humph!" grunted Gus. "One of those places over on Biddle Avenue, I suppose?"

"No, sir!" answered Joe emphatically. "This one is on East Main Street."

"I don't know anything about those houses," said Gus, showing a bit more interest. "Suppose we take a run up there this afternoon and give it the once over. The kid can take care of the gasoline pump, and business is slack now anyway."

Along about half-past three Joe suggested that it was time to start, and the two men climbed into Joe's flivver and started off, leaving Bill, the kid who did odd jobs around the garage, standing importantly beside the gasoline pump. This was the first time he had been left in charge of the place, and he was as proud as a peacock.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Joe, as they rattled down the road. "This boat certainly does steer hard. I can barely keep it on the road."

Gus looked at his partner with a pained expression on his face.

"Son," he said, "as a bookkeeper you are a whiz, but you are surely a dummy about autos. Haven't you seen that this bus rides as rough as a broncho? I was just waiting for you to notice that your right front tire is almost flat! I suppose it would have to come right off the wheel before you'd get wise."

Joe appeared decidedly crestfallen as he stopped the car at the side of the road. And his face registered downright chagrin when he discovered that the jack was missing from the toolkit.

"Whatever became of that jack, I wonder?" he muttered disgustedly. "Now I suppose we will have to run back to the garage on the flat tire and ruin it in the process."

GUS meanwhile had been poking around in the toolkit.

"Drive back nothing!" he said emphatically. "What do you suppose these 'sizzle patches' are for, except to repair flat tires with?"

"Sure, I know what they are for," said Joe; "but what good are they to us if we have no jack to take off the tire?"

"Don't worry about that," replied Gus; "just you get behind this bus and push it along slow so I can see if I can locate the hole."

Gus kept a sharp watch on the slowly revolving front tire and his keen eyes soon spotted the head of what turned out to be

an extra long carpet tack in the rubber. "Now," he said, "this is your car and I am going to light my pipe and boss the job while you do all the work. Get out your tire irons, the clamp, and sizzle patches."

JOE did as directed, for he long since had learned that when Gus said he knew how a thing could be done, he was pretty sure to be right.

While he was locating the irons, Gus filled his pipe and settled himself comfortably on a near-by rock.

"Get busy with the irons now and pry off the bead of the tire right where we pulled out the tack and for eight or ten inches on each side of the puncture. That's the idea," he nodded, after a few minutes of strenuous work on Joe's part. "Now pull out the tube and find the hole."

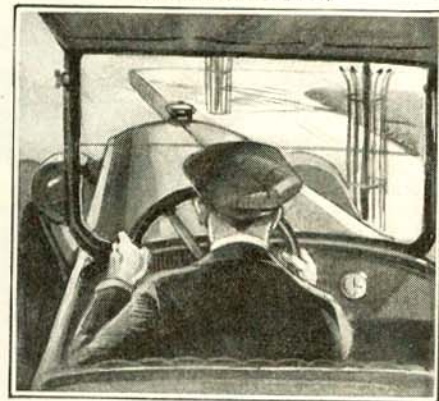
Joe meekly followed directions and when he had found the puncture in the tube, he proceeded to scrub the surface of the rubber surrounding it with a rag dipped in gasoline from the tank, tore off the protecting paper from the uncured rubber on the bottom of the tin sizzle patch, clamped it firmly in place over the hole, and finally touched a match to a corner of the brown cardboard-like substance, which immediately started to sizzle and fume like a firecracker fuse.

GUS settled back to enjoy his pipe while the patch was cooling.

"In five minutes, or thereabouts, we should be on our way," he said. "And you will kindly notice, Joe, that we did not need the jack after all. Of course, you couldn't do that with a straight side tire, but it's a handy kink to know if you own a light car fitted with clincher tires."

After waiting the prescribed time, Joe pushed the tube back into the shoe, pried the bead on the rim, pumped up the tire,

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A Sure Guide for Parking

To avoid scraping tires against the curb in parking, Joe invented an ingenious scheme for gauging distance. With his car parked correctly, he got in the driver's seat and observed just where the curb line appeared in relation to the top of the radiator. After that it was a simple matter to judge the distance from the curb by repeating the same line-up when he drew up to the edge

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and they proceeded on their journey. Soon there came the sound of a motor horn. Gus looked around to see who it was trying to pass.

"It's old Mr. Conklin," he said. "Give him plenty of room. The old duffer can't see well, and he's liable to tear off a mudguard for you."

Joe pulled over close to the edge of the road and Conklin rolled by.

"Look!" exclaimed Joe. "He has a flat tire too!"

"Give her the juice!" Gus called out sharply. "That's a new tire he bought from us. We can't let him ruin it."

JOE opened the throttle and the little car quickly picked up speed. The chase scarcely had begun, though, when there came a resounding report from the car ahead.

"Now I suppose he'll blame us for selling him a defective tire," Gus grunted. "Well, pull in behind him. We might as well take our medicine."

But this time, both Gus and Joe were wrong. The soft tire had not blown out. It was, instead, an old tire on the right front wheel of Conklin's car that finally had let go.

Conklin was climbing out as the little car pulled in behind him.

"Hello," he hailed them. "You arrived just in time. You can help me change tires."

"That's why we were trailing you," said Gus.

"How did you know I was going to have a blow-out?" asked the other in surprise.

"I didn't, but your left rear tire is almost flat. We were trying to overtake and warn you when the other one surprised us by blowing out."

Conklin swung around with a grunt.

"More bad luck," he said gloomily. "Two flat tires and only one spare. What am I going to do about it?"

"Nothing to it," said Gus. "Put the spare on in place of the blown-out front shoe, and we'll fix this soft one for you. Got a jack in your toolkit?"

CONKLIN produced a jack and a couple of spindly little tire irons about eight inches long.

Gus looked disgustedly at the tire irons. "There's a real tire iron," he said, holding up a two-foot length of spring leaf. "You can't do good work on tires without at least one real man-sized iron."

"Look here, Mr. Conklin," Gus continued, as he examined the front tire, "this tire is junk. You have got pretty good mileage out of it, judging from the looks of the tread; but you certainly knocked off at least a thousand miles by scraping against the curbstone so much. See,

—the blowout came right where the side wall of the tire was worn nearly through."

"By jinks, you're right," exclaimed Conklin, bending down and peering over the rims of his glasses at the ugly hole in the side of the casing. "You know, I never can tell when the wheels are close to the curb, and what with all these new-fangled regulations about parking close to the curb, the only way I can be sure is to edge in till I feel the tire scrape."

"Yes," Gus replied, "lots of people have the same trouble. Even Joe, here, wore out a couple of front shoes before he invented a scheme that works fine. Tell him about it, Joe."

"Well, as Gus says, Mr. Conklin," explained Joe, "I couldn't seem to gage the distance from the curb to the tires at all, but finally I hit on a scheme that works out fine. First, you park your car carefully, getting out and observing its distance from the curb and moving closer or farther away until it's just right. Then you get into the driver's seat, look over the front of the radiator to the point where the street touches the curb and notice just where this line appears in relation to the top of the radiator. After that, all you have to do to park the car at any time is to be sure that you are in the same driving position and watch the curb line and the radiator until they line up right."

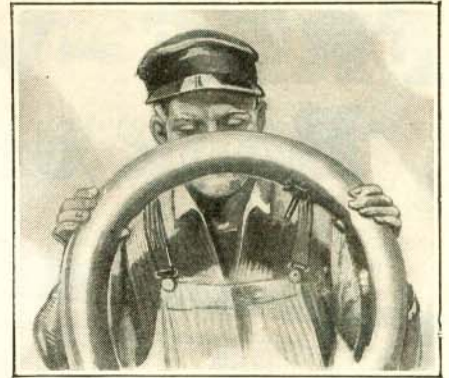
"Sounds like a good scheme," said Conklin. "I'll try it out."

"I'll try it out."

BY THIS time, Gus had the blown-out tire off the wheel, and had substituted the spare. Joe tightened up the rim bolts and then jacked up the rear wheel.

"Must be a slow leak," Gus growled disgustedly, as he carefully looked over the tread of the soft rear tire without finding any visible cut or nail in its corrugated surface.

With a hammer, he pounded the lock on the rim around to the open position and then, raising the tire high in the air, he brought it down on the ground with a thump. He made sure, of course, that the point of impact was about six inches from the break in the rim and on the side opposite the locking lever. The jar snapped the rim open and it was then a



One Way to Find a Slow Leak

"I didn't see it," said Gus. "I could find it just as well in the dark. The eye is a sensitive organ, and mine felt the small stream of air that was coming out of the tiny hole"

simple matter for Joe to pry the tire off the rim with the erstwhile but treasured spring leaf.

"How are you going to find the leak?" Conklin questioned, as Gus pulled the tube out of the casing. "We haven't any water to put it in and watch for the bubbles."

"That's easy," said Gus smiling; "just watch."

HE PUMPED up the tube to a diameter considerably larger than normal, and then passed the tube, inch by inch, close to his eyes.

"There!" he called out suddenly. "The hole is right here."

"I wish I had eyes like that," said Conklin admiringly, "I never could see a hole as small as that. I even can't see it now you have pointed it out to me."

"I didn't see it either," said Gus. "I could have found it just as well in the dark. The eye is a pretty sensitive organ, and mine felt the small stream of air that was coming out of the hole. Blowing up the tube till it was good and fat stretched the hole so that a lot more air came out than when it was in the tire."

Gus pulled a stubby indelible pencil out of his pocket and carefully ringed the hole on the tube so that he would not lose track of its location. Then the clamp and sizzle patches were brought out again and shortly thereafter Conklin's car was resting on four inflated tires.

"I'M EVER so much obliged," said Conklin gratefully, as he climbed in behind the wheel. "Have another new tire ready for me tomorrow. I'll stop in some time in the morning."

"By the way," he went on, "I've been thinking of fitting the old bus with balloon tires. What do you think of the idea?"

"I don't think much of it," answered Gus candidly. "The tires you have are over-size, and your car isn't heavy, so you can run the tires at fairly low pressure without injuring them. A whole set of balloon tires with new wheels for them would cost you quite a bit of cash. And, besides, the slight improvement in the riding quality would not be worth

(Continued on page 174)



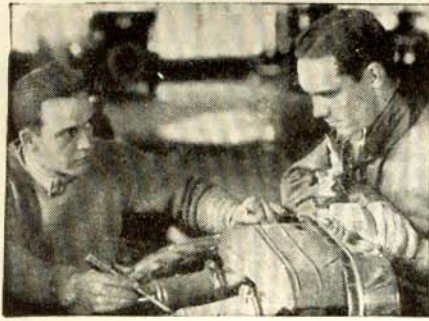
A Spring-Leaf Tire Iron

Using an old spring leaf as a tire iron, it was a simple matter for Joe to remove the tire of Mr. Conklin's car from its rim. The extra leverage was also a decided advantage

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Some Tire Secrets

(Continued from page 66)

the extra expense incurred in the change." "But I thought balloon tires made such easy riding that you could go right up over curbstones or roll over a brick on the road and hardly notice any bump."

"Not with balloon tires as they are made today," said Gus. "That applied to the early models, which looked like overgrown doughnuts and carried air at a pressure as low as 20 pounds. They rode like a feather bed, but picked up all the nails in creation, the car shimmied all over the road if you drove it fast, and the gasoline bill went up and up. The balloon tires they are making today are really a compromise between the old-fashioned oversized cord tire and the true balloon."

"Of course if you were planning to keep your car for another three or four years, it might be advisable to change because of the slightly better riding qualities—"

"I'm going to trade it in next season," Conklin broke in.

"That settles it," said Gus. "Come around for your new tire in the morning. Don't forget to ask me for an old spring leaf for a tire iron."

"Looks like it's too late to do any house-hunting this afternoon, Joe," he remarked, as Conklin drove off. "We ought to get back now and see how many gallons of gas Bill has sold."

JOE agreed and when they rolled up to the garage it was to find Bill engaged in conversation with a man who was just climbing in his car preparatory to driving away.

"Howdy, Mr. Perkins," called Joe. "Anything we can do for you?"

"Sure," said Perkins; "you can make me out a receipt in full for this bill for \$124.50 I owe you."

Joe got busy at once and Gus strolled over to Bill.

"How did you make out, son?" he inquired.

"I'm some gas salesman," said Bill.

"A whole gang of motor-campers who were traveling together stopped here and I filled their tanks while they ate up all the hot dogs down at Jerry's stand."

"Well," said Gus to Joe, who had strolled over, "that's once, anyway, when we made money by trying to neglect business! Let's take a whole day off tomorrow!"

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