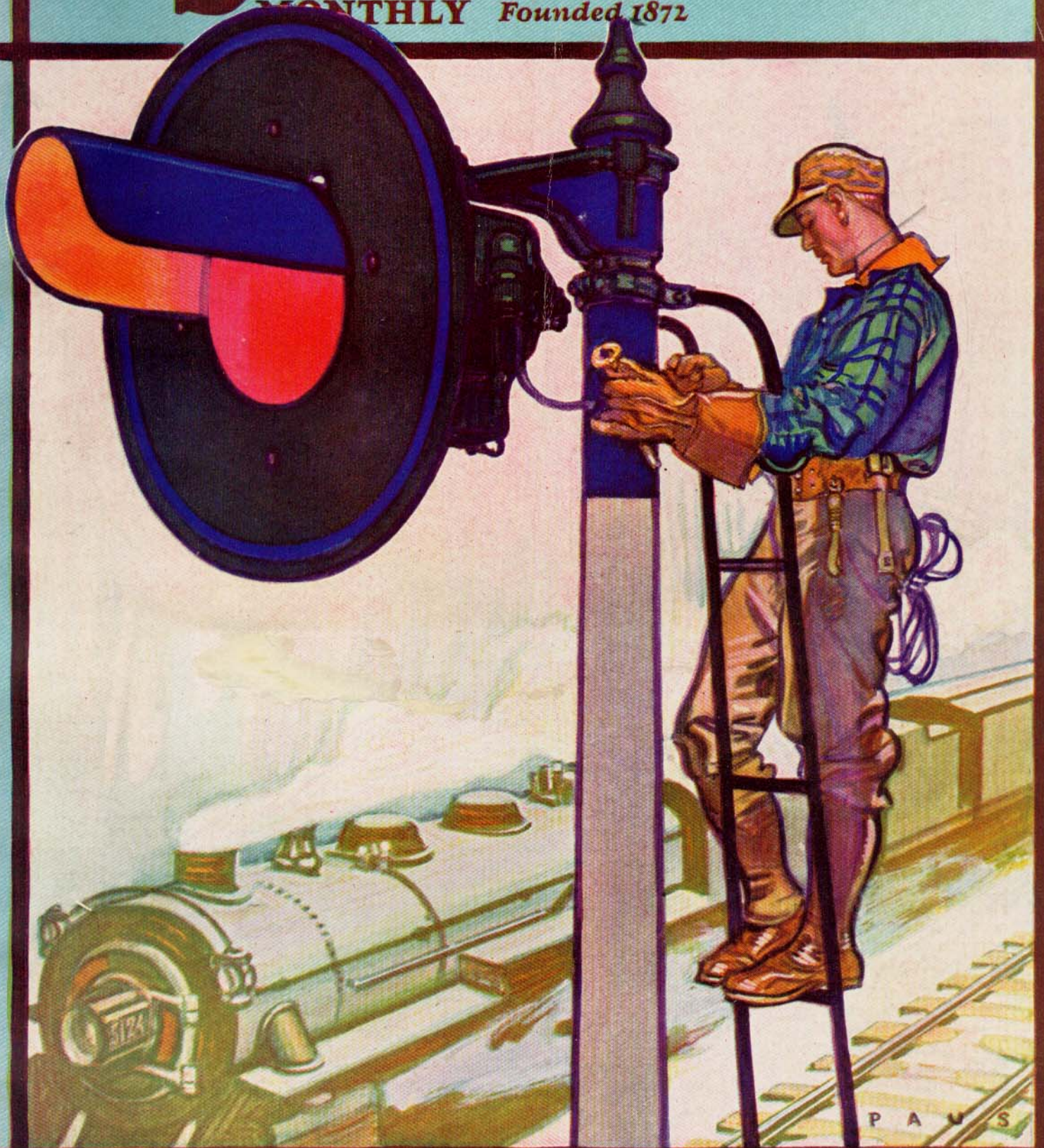


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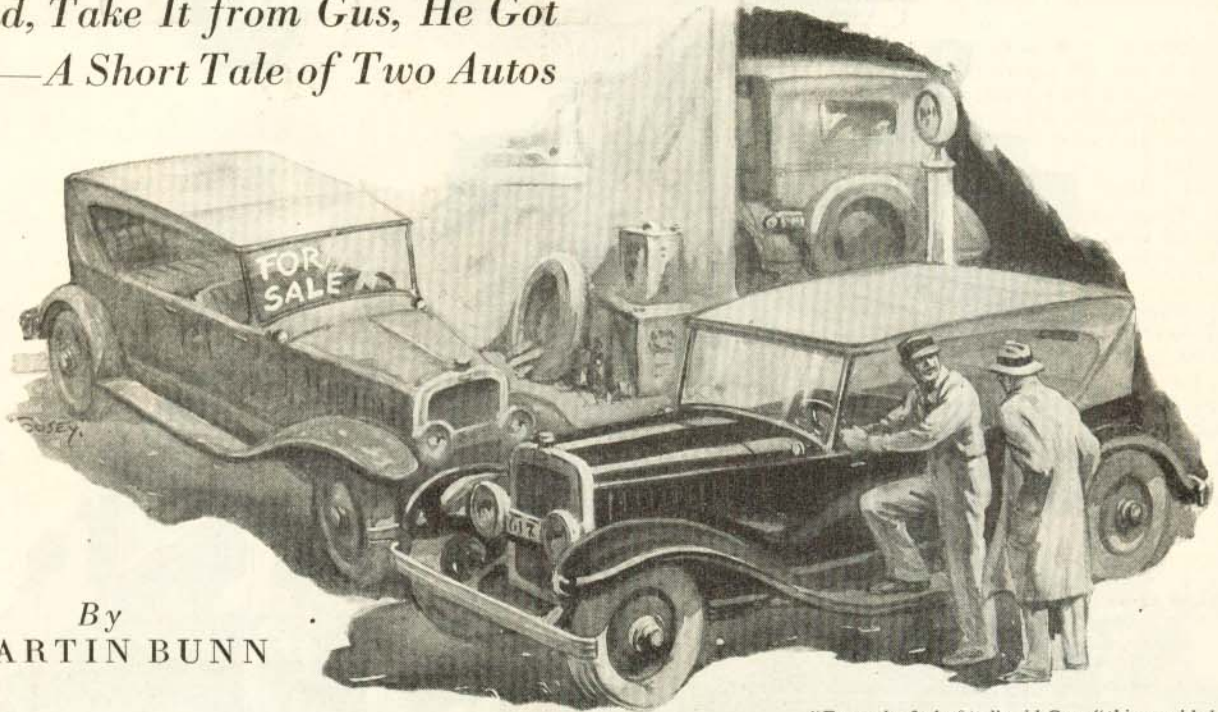


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He Wanted a Used Car Bargain

And, Take It from Gus, He Got It!—A Short Tale of Two Autos



By
MARTIN BUNN

"I'M a mechanic, not a blooming auto salesman!" Gus Wilson grumbled as Joe Clark, his partner in the Model Garage, finished reading the letter he held in his hand.

"Why be so grouchy?" grinned Joe. "Hamilton was a good customer and we ought to be willing to do something for him. It wasn't his fault he got transferred to San Francisco so suddenly. All he asks us to do is sell his car for the best price we can get and send him what's left over after taking out what he owes us."

"All right," Gus agreed. "Put an advertisement in the paper. We ought to get a couple of hundred more than the current price for a car of that make and year. Mechanically it's practically as good as new. Hamilton always handled it as carefully as a crate of eggs."

Several prospective buyers answered the advertisement, but only one showed real interest. It appeared that he had been looking for a secondhand car of that particular model for some time.

"What gets me," growled the prospect, "is how you have the nerve to ask so much. I've seen other cars that looked just as good that I could have bought for a lot less."

"THIS car's worth more, Mr. Estey, because it's in exceptionally good condition," Gus insisted.

"Aw, rats! That's what they all say!" Estey sneered. "I guess I'll keep on looking." And he walked out.

"Humph!" Gus grunted to Joe. "There's another bargain hunter who's going to get stung before he's through."

Several days later Estey drove up to the Model Garage in a car like the one the two garagemen were trying to sell for Hamilton.

"What do you think of this boat?" he called, as he stepped from his car. "Just stopped around to show you high-binders I know a bargain when I see one. I bought it from a dealer over in Flintville for two hundred less than you wanted for yours. You ought to drop your price at least three hundred after seeing this."

And, at first glance, Estey's purchase appeared worth at least that much more than the other. Gus walked around it several times, eyeing it keenly.

"Thanks for showing it to us, Estey," he said pleasantly. "Now that I see what you can get for the price you paid, I'm going to raise mine another hundred!"

"What are you trying to do, kid me?" snapped Estey.

"NOT at all," Gus replied. "You asked me what I thought of your purchase and I'm telling you my first impression. Let's trundle it around a bit and see whether I ought to apologize."

Gus climbed behind the wheel and Estey got in beside him. The gray-haired mechanic eased the lever into first and let in the clutch very gently, but the car started with a jerky motion. Then he threw it into second and stepped on the throttle. There was a grinding roar from the gears as the car picked up speed. He dropped into high and again gave it the throttle. A whining hum became quite audible.

"Sorry, Mr. Estey," said Gus, "but I'm afraid I can't take back what I said. From the feel of it, this crock's been driven forty thousand miles if it's been driven an inch."

"Look at the speedometer," snapped Estey. "It shows the car's been driven

"From the feel of it," said Gus, "this crock's been driven forty thousand miles if it's gone an inch."

only a little over eight thousand miles."

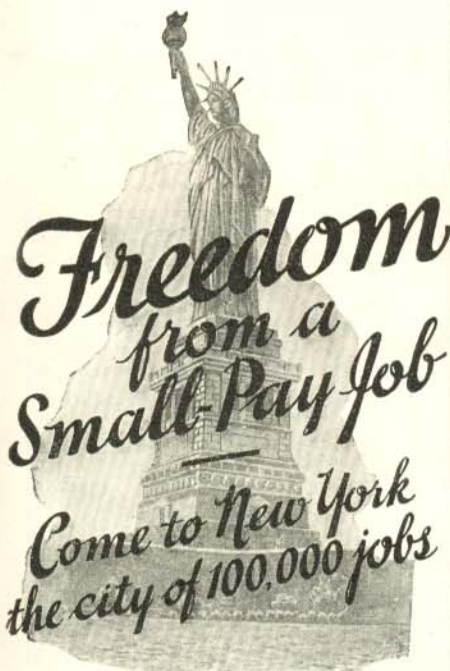
"Turning the speedometer back is what they call 'reconditioning' in the 'gyp' secondhand auto business," Gus explained. "That, and slapping on the cheapest coat of paint they can get."

"YOU'RE sore because I didn't buy from you," grinned Estey.

"Humph!" Gus growled. "Why should I be sore? I'll find a customer for that car all right. I haven't been in the auto business since the days of the one-lung chugger without learning something about the critters. And if you want to know how I know this car's a worn-out old wreck, I don't mind telling you. Notice how that clutch works? Kinda rough, isn't it? That's because the clutch facing is almost worn out. Did you hear those gears growl in second with a sort of a clicking noise? That's worn gears with a few chips knocked out of them, and probably loose transmission bearings in the bargain. And you'll notice there's a pretty stiff whine whenever I give it the throttle. A rear end has to be in pretty rotten shape to make so much noise. And from the muffled effect, I'm almost sure both the transmission and the rear end are full of fine sawdust. That's a regular trick to quiet gears. We'll find out about that when we get back to the garage."

"I'LL believe that when I see it," Estey growled.

"There's a plenty you could have seen if you'd only looked for it," said Gus. "Look at that clutch pedal. It's a dead give-away. No clutch pedal could be so worn in any eight thousand miles. And the brake and (Continued on page 154)



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The Used Car Bargain

(Continued from page 76)

accelerator pedals, too. Look at the steering wheel where your hands naturally grip it. It took a lot of pawing to wear away the wood like that. Then there's a terrible lot of play in the steering apparatus. They've tightened the adjustment till it works stiff without getting rid of the slack."

They were approaching a particularly rough and bumpy stretch of road. Gus took it at a fast clip. The car gave forth a whole collection of clattering noises as it bounced over the bumps.

"Sounds like every shackle bearing is loose and the joints in the brake rods as well," Gus commented.

"All cars are a bit noisy except when they're brand-new," exclaimed Estey. "I'll bet that boat you're trying to sell would sound just as bad."

"Not by a jugful!" Gus grunted. "You can try it yourself if you want to."

THEY headed for the Model Garage. The motor seemed to be getting more and more noisy.

"While I'm checking up on what's in the transmission and rear end," said Gus, "I want to see what kind of oil they put in the crank case. The usual stunt is to put in extra heavy oil to help deaden the loose bearings. That's a lot cheaper than taking down the motor and tightening them."

Gus got busy at once and sure enough, the transmission and the rear end both had been filled with a mealy mixture of heavy oil and fine sawdust. The crank case was filled with oil several grades heavier than recommended by the maker of the car.

"Now you drive this one," said Gus, beckoning to Estey to take the wheel of Hamilton's car. "Drive over the same route and at the same speed."

By the time they returned, Estey was thoroughly convinced.

"Gosh! What a lemon I did pick!" he sighed as he gazed disgustedly at the shiny varnish of the car he had been so proud of only a short time before. "I'm beginning to realize there's more to this secondhand car game than just the model number and the condition of the paint."

"I DON'T want to be a crape hanger," said the veteran auto mechanic, "but if you've taken that car on time payments you'd be mighty wise to charge the down payment to experience and let them have the car back again."

"Is it really as bad as that?" asked Estey doubtfully.

"Look here," Gus requested, stooping down and pointing to the frame of the car just under the edge of the mudguard. "Too much wear is bad enough, but this is even more serious. That isn't roughness in the paint on the frame right there. That's where the frame was broken and a welding job has been done. The car's been in a smash-up. No doubt of it. Personally, I'd never buy any secondhand car that had been in a smash unless I knew a whole lot more about it than I do about this one."

"That settles it," Estey roared angrily. "I'll make those crooks give me back my hundred bucks down payment or somebody's going to get all mussed up!"

"Do you think he'll get his money back?" asked Joe, after Estey had departed in his shiny pile of junk.

"Maybe they'll give him part of it to avoid a scrap. He's a pretty husky chap," Gus smiled. "But it's boobs like Estey who keep the 'gyp' secondhand auto dealer in business. It's a shame, too, because 'gyp' dealers give secondhand cars a bad name and make it hard for the honest automobile agencies to dispose of their trade-ins."

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