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If Your Headlights Went Out —

And You Were Speeding Forty Miles an Hour, What Would You Do? Gus Explains the First Rules for Safe Driving

By

MARTIN BUNN

WE'D better step on it, Gus; the wife'll have the eats waiting by now," Joe Clark urged as he locked the door of the Model Garage and hastily climbed in beside his partner.

"Huh!" snorted Gus Wilson. "You don't have to tell a hungry old bachelor to hurry when there's home-cooked fodder in sight!"

The veteran auto mechanic snapped on his lights, for it had become quite dark, and swung out onto the concrete road. The gears whined in second while the car gathered headway and then, as Gus noiselessly shifted into high, a sedan whizzed past them at high speed.

"Another guy late at mealtime maybe," Gus suggested. "He sure is in one great big hurry."

The sedan rapidly drew away from Gus's car and the tail-light finally winked out as it reached a distant bend in the road.

"Something's funny or else I'm losing my sense of distance," muttered Gus. "How did he get around that bend so quick? Didn't seem to me he'd even reached it."

"G'wan!" Joe grinned. "Of course he did. Where else could the lights go?"

But when they reached the bend, Gus's headlights glared on a man standing in the road and waving his arms to attract their attention. The front end of the sedan was jammed through the fence on the outside of the pavement.

"What happened?" asked Gus as he pulled up.

"Lights went out all of a sudden," explained the stranded one. "I reached over to see if the switch had snapped off, and the next thing I knew I hit the fence."

GUS got out a flashlight and rapidly inspected the wiring. "Here's the trouble," he grunted. "Wire broke off right at the switch." He reconnected it and the lights came on at once. Luckily nothing vital appeared to be broken, so he backed the car onto the road again.

"Better bring it down to the Model Garage tomorrow and I'll make sure everything is all right and take the wrinkles out of that mudguard."

The accident victim muttered something unintelligible and immediately drove off.

"And not so much as a 'thank you,'" Joe whistled in astonishment.

"Don't blame him," Gus smiled. "He's just scared stiff. Kind of 'accident shocked.'"



Gus's headlights glared on a man in the road, waving his arms. His car had crashed through a fence.

Gus's suggestion had registered, however, for the next day the man appeared at the Model Garage.

"My name's Considine," he began, "and I want to thank you for what you did for me last night. That was my first accident and it sure did scare the daylights out of me. Spoiled my self-confidence, too. I'm nervous as a cat now."

DON'T let it get your goat," Gus smiled as he started ironing the dents out of the mudguard. "It's no disgrace to be a beginner so long as you don't get to think you know it all. Trouble is, there's a lot to driving besides shifting gears and turning the wheel. And most people are lucky if they find that out before they get into a serious crash."

Considine smiled ruefully. "Yesterday I'd have said that was a lot of bunk. Now I know better. What would you have done if you'd been in my place last night?"

"That's easy," replied Gus. "My foot would have been pushing a hole in the floor board with the brake pedal the instant after the lights went out, and I'd have watched the sky line along the trees to keep me on the road till I stopped."

"But," added Gus, "if I'd been you I wouldn't have been driving so fast. You oughtn't to drive fast until you've had more road experience. Lots of things can happen when you are hitting it up that wouldn't mean anything if you were going slower. A blow-out, for instance, means nothing if you're ambling along, but it takes a good man to keep a car on the road if a tire lets go at high speed."

"How fast ought I to drive, then?" Considine inquired.

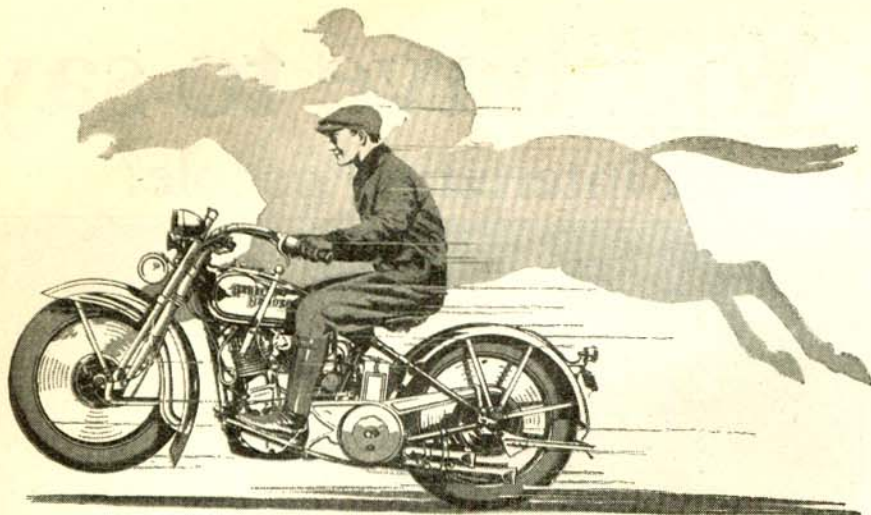
"Well," said Gus, "when I first tackled driving a gasoline buggy, back in the days when a progressive gear shift was the latest thing and cars didn't have any windshields, the man I was working for took me out for my first lesson. We were roaring along at thirty miles an hour—dangerous speed in those days—when all of a sudden the boss jammed on the brakes and I nearly dove over the hood, seeing as how there was no windshield to stop me. 'There,' said he, after I'd crawled back into the seat, 'I just wanted to show you the first principle of safe driving, and that is to know how to stop quick. Never drive so fast that you can't stop within the clear space you can see ahead.'

THAT principle is just as good now as it ever was, and it's a kind of automatic rule, because while you're a beginner you won't be able to make as quick stops as you will after you get so that your foot snaps onto the brake pedal without having to stop and think about it. Whenever there was any doubt in my mind whether I was going too fast I used to imagine another car darting out of a side road and see how quick I could stop—but you want to be sure there's no car behind you when you try it!"

"I thought four-wheel brakes made fast driving safe," said Considine.

"Safer—not safe," Gus stated. "Nothing can make driving safe if you're going too fast. Of course, other things being equal, you can hit it up a bit more if you have four-wheel brakes."

"And while we're talking about speed," Gus continued, "remember that a safe speed on dry roads is a lot too fast when the going is (Continued on page 174)



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If Your Headlights Went Out—

(Continued from page 84)

slippery. And lots of new drivers don't realize that the roads are much more slippery just after the rain starts than later, after the downpour has washed away the slime that forms out of the first drops when they mix with the dust on the road."

"But if you have chains on the wheels you can't skid," interrupted Considine.

"Yeah?" growled Gus. "I used to believe that, too, when I was just starting in. It cost me just thirty-eight dollars to find out it wasn't so. I had chains on, but I went around a curve too fast on some ice, and the next thing I knew the back of the car tried to get ahead of the front end. One rear wheel lammed into the curb and snapped the axle right off. Chains are a help. But you don't have anything like as much traction with 'em on ice as you have without 'em when the pavement is dry."

"But you're safe anyway if you go slow enough—and look at all the time you waste dawdling along," protested Considine.

"Rats!" snapped the grizzled veteran. "You're not safe at any speed on ice without chains, and what's the use of hurrying to save a few minutes when you stand a chance to earn a ride in a nice, fast motor hearse by doing it?"

"AND besides," Gus continued, "when you do save a few minutes by taking chances you probably waste 'em right away bragging about it! Speed doesn't cause accidents, but speed at the wrong time does, so drive always at a speed that you know is safe. If there is any doubt in your mind, play safe—go slower.

"Going slow isn't the whole story, either. You can be a regular old slow-poke and still take your life in your hands every time you go on the road, if you don't get wise to the biggest idea in safe motoring, and that is: Never take a chance on what the other fellow's going to do, nor on what he may think you're going to do. Don't depend on your horn—the other fellow may not hear it. Keep your eye on the cars ahead, and signal to the fellows behind what you are going to do.

"THERE'S another angle to this safe driving business," Gus went on, as he stood off to observe the effect of his operations on the mudguard. "You want to remember that safety depends a lot on the condition of your car. Brakes should be just right and you certainly don't want anything wrong with the steering gear. I was in a garage one time when a hot-air merchant was grumbling to everybody about how loose his steering gear was. But he didn't do anything about it and a little later when he started out, still shooting off his face, the whole works came loose in his hands. Before he could stop, he'd busted into a tree and smashed his radiator. He didn't deserve any sympathy and, believe me, he didn't get it. The gang razzed him about it for years afterward!"

FOR more than three and a half years Gus and Joe have been giving readers of POPULAR SCIENCE MONTHLY the benefit of their long experience with motor cars. And each month these two veteran proprietors of the Model Garage grow more popular. Many readers have written that the mechanical advice offered by Gus in Mr. Bunn's entertaining stories have helped them solve difficulties which every motorist encounters. What is your particular problem? Let's ask Gus Wilson about it. Write to Mr. Bunn in care of Popular Science Monthly, 250 Fourth Avenue, New York City.