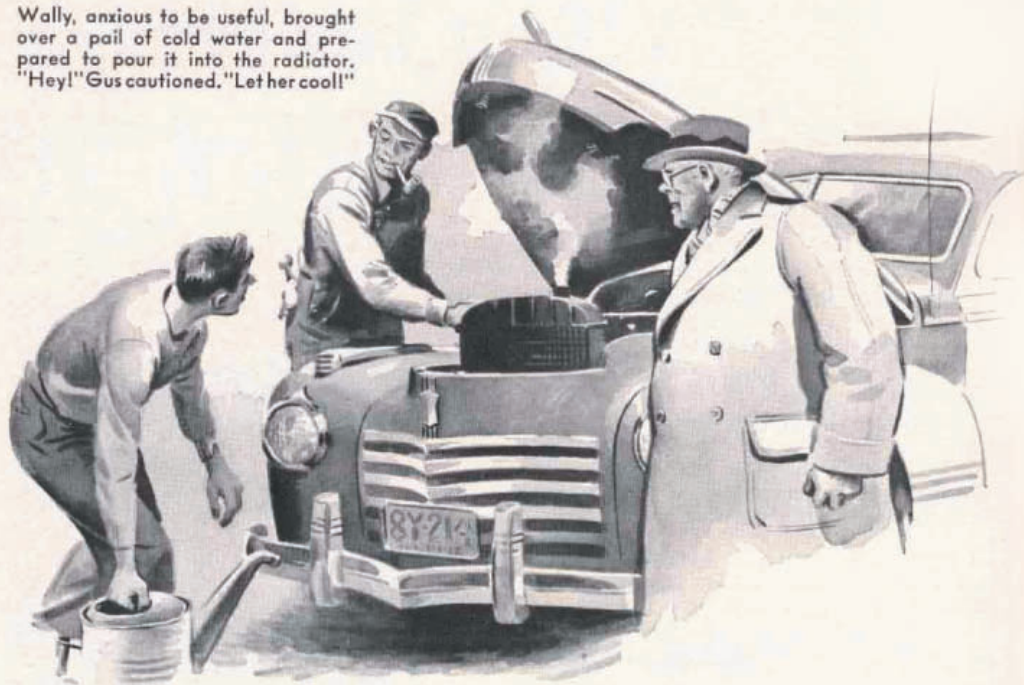


Wally, anxious to be useful, brought over a pail of cold water and prepared to pour it into the radiator. "Hey!" Gus cautioned. "Lether cool!"



GUS settles an account

Joe Clark may think it is poor business to rib a customer, but the Model Garage proprietor is willing to pass up cash now and then for the sake of a laugh

By MARTIN BUNN

IT WAS eight o'clock on a bright winter Monday morning. Joe Clark, his hands full of time-and-material slips and his eyes serious behind his rubber-tired spectacles, was fussing around the four or five cars standing in the Model Garage shop. "Piling up on us again," he said fretfully.

Gus Wilson stretched himself and interrupted his partner with a loud and impolite yawn. Then he grinned widely. "Take it easy, Joe," he advised good-naturedly. "Starting a week's work by getting yourself all hot and bothered trying to do half a dozen things at once is just about as sensible as trying to drive 50 with a cold engine."

Joe went into the office a little huffily. Gus grinned after his indignant back and thought that after a while he'd make some excuse to go in and kid him along enough to smooth down his ruffled feathers. Just then a horn began to honk outside the closed shop door. Gus turned to Wally, the latest of a long succession of grease monkeys. "Open the door," he said, "and let that squawker in."

Wally slid the door open and a well-kept sedan of last year's vintage was driven in, a haze of steam issuing from under it.

From the sedan emerged a large and flashily dressed man with a red face, and before the visitor's highly polished shoes had hit the cement floor Gus saw that he was blazing mad.

"This—this—this—car is driving me crazy!" he sputtered.

Gus smothered a grin by looking sympathetic. "They can do that sometimes," he admitted. "What's the trouble?"

"Don't stand there like an idiot asking me fool questions!" snapped the visitor. "Do something! Can't you see that my motor's red hot?"

Gus Wilson isn't used to being spoken to

wouldn't give way an inch, so finally the cash-store magnate, growling, went off in a taxicab.

After the irate Pickett had departed, Gus looked at Wally and grinned a little sheepishly. "Don't take the way I talked to him as an example of the way to talk to our customers," he warned. "He was a special case—the kind of big-mouthed guy I always take down a peg or two when I get the chance. Besides, one of his stores skinned me on those fishing pants. Do you know how to go about checking a car that's overheating?"

"Sure," the new grease monkey proclaimed confidently. "You see if the radiator is stopped up." He grabbed up his can of water and started for the blue sedan.

"Go easy with that water," Gus warned him. "Start the engine, and pour in just a little at a time. That's right. Now let the engine idle for five minutes."

He came back when the five minutes was up. "Put your hand on the radiator, near its bottom," he told Wally. "That's right. Now near the top. Which is warmer, bottom or top?"

"There ain't no difference," Wally reported. "Yes there is, too. The top's a little the hottest."

Gus made the same easy test. "Right," he said. "The top feels just a little warmer, but there's very little difference between top and bottom. That shows that the radiator isn't clogged. If it were, the top would be a lot warmer than the bottom. Let's see, now."

He checked over the cooling system, and shook his head. "Nothing wrong there," he decided. "No signs of a leak anywhere. Overflow pipe is O.K. Hose is all practically new. Let's see that water pump. . . . Working fine. . . . The fan belt was new a few days ago, but it might have—no it's all right. . . . I'll have a look at that thermostat, though. Always check the thermostat when you're up against a case of overheating, Wally. If it fails to open properly it makes the engine run too hot, and if it fails when it's in the open position it lets it run too cool."

He removed the thermostat and took it over to his workbench. Then he filled a small can with water, dropped the thermostat into it, put a thermometer beside it, and set the can on a lighted gas plate.

When the thermometer registered 160 degrees, the thermostat opened. Gus fished it out of the can with a piece of bent wire. As soon as it was in the air it closed. "Nothing the matter with that," he said. "Jack up the rear end and we'll have a look at the brakes."

But the brakes weren't dragging.

"It must be the engine," Gus said. He replaced the thermostat. Then he checked the carburetor and the timing. Both were O.K.

Gus whistled tunelessly as he stared at the engine. Then he went over to the glass-fronted cabinet in which he keeps his instruments and precision tools, and came back with a compression tester. "What's that thing for?" Wally wanted to know.

"It shows up leaky piston rings, for one thing," Gus told him. "Sometimes a bad piston or bad rings cause overheating. He took out all the spark plugs and dropped about a teaspoonful of carbon remover in each cylinder. "That'll help loosen any gum that has formed on the rings or valves," he explained. "You get into the car, open the throttle all the way, and step on the starter when I tell you to," he instructed Wally. Then he pressed the tester's rubber adapter in a spark-plug hole and commanded "shoot!" As the engine turned over, the hand of the tester moved across the dial and stopped at a little over a hundred pounds. A test of each cylinder gave the same reading. "O.K.," he said. "The compression is good, and every cylinder is the same. Put the spark plugs back in, Wally."

He went over to the glass-fronted case and came back with another instrument. "It's a vacuum gauge," he said just as Wally got his mouth open to ask a question. "When an engine is normal the indicator hand shows 18 inches or more of vacuum and stays steady." He connected the tester's hose with the intake manifold. "Start her up. . . . Now keep her running steady at just a little over idling speed."

The hand moved to 18 inches, and stayed there.

Gus nodded. "That's all right," he observed. "There must be something else."

He did a half minute of heavy thinking. Then he drew the bayonet gauge out of the oil filler, and dabbed at it with his forefinger. "Mighty heavy oil," he said. "What's on the clock?" (Continued on page 218)

GUS SAYS:

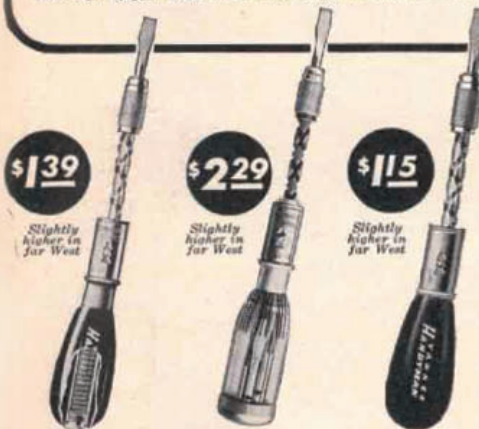
You've reached a mighty critical driving period when you first find your brakes don't work perfectly. The only excusable trip you can make after that is a mighty slow and careful one to your garage. If it seems advisable, have your car towed there by a wrecker.

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Gus Settles an Account

(Continued from page 144)

"Huh?" Wally said. "Oh—I getcha." He looked at the speedometer. "A couple of hundred over 35,000."

Gus walked around to the front end and examined the bumper. Scratches showed that the license plate had been moved from the right side to the center. "That cuts off some air," he said. Then he knelt down and looked through the radiator grille. "That's funny," he said. "I can't see a thing."

"What should you see?" asked Wally.

"Light. Specially with the hood raised," Gus replied. He got up and looked down behind the grille. A large, oblong piece of black cardboard was leaning close up against the grille. With a slight pressure, Gus shoved it back and it almost completely covered the front of the radiator.

"By gosh. That guy who put in the new fan belt and then fixed this car so it wouldn't run too cool sure *fixed* it!" he said. "I don't think this car ran too cool anyway. The fellow probably never gave it time to warm up. Now, the minute the engine starts, the fan pulls the cardboard back against the radiator and shuts off *all* the air. Maybe that mechanic should be fired, like Pickett said."

About closing time, Joe Clark came into the shop after the day's time-and-material slips, and was surprised to find his partner looking decidedly crestfallen. Joe picked the slips out of the cigar box in which Gus drops them. "What the devil is this?" he yelled after a few seconds. "'One pair of pants, \$1.79.'" He read the name and address at the top of slip. "Robert J. Pickett, hey?" he said. "He's a big shot. But what about the pants?"

"They're those no-good fishing pants I bought in one of Pickett's stores last summer," Gus said grouchy. "I've always been sore about them, and when Pickett came in here today with his radiator steaming I saw a chance to get even. So I put 'em on his bill."

Joe looked shocked. "What did he say when he saw that item?" he asked.

Gus's face got red. "Not a word." Then he had to laugh. "Robert J. Pickett is quite a boy," he admitted. He just talked along for a while about how successful he had been running a strictly cash business. Then he got into his car and stepped on the starter. "Wait a minute," I told him. "You've forgotten your bill."

"No, I haven't forgotten it," he came back at me. "And I haven't forgotten that pair of pants you've put on it. Charge it, brother—and try and get it!"