



GUS strikes oil...and trouble

By MARTIN BUNN

GUS WILSON wiped his hands on a piece of waste and turned away from the '41 coupe he had been checking over. "No luck," he reported to the out-of-town salesman standing hopefully nearby. "It might take me quite a while to locate the cause of that vibration. You say it starts when you get up to 35 miles an hour?"

"Yes," the salesman answered, "and as the car goes faster, up to around 50, the vibration gets worse and worse."

"Might take me quite a while," Gus repeated, "and I can't really get to work on your job until I've finished the two others I've promised for this afternoon. I'm sorry, but if you're in a hurry you'd better try someone else."

"Well," the salesman said after a moment's thought, "today all my calls are right here in town, so I can get along on shank's mare—not that I like walking. But first thing tomorrow morning I've got to move on upstate. Think you can have my bus fixed by then?"

Gus told him he couldn't promise but he'd do his best, and the salesman left his car. But it wasn't until four o'clock that Gus got around to the coupe and drove it out for a road test. There was no shimmy or tramp, and the engine ran smoothly enough—but, just as the salesman had said, vibration did start at 35 and get worse as speed increased.

When he got back to the shop Gus called Stan, the grease monkey, to help him. They gave the coupe a thorough checking. There were no symptoms of any engine or transmission trouble that might cause excessive vibration.

"A wheel must be out of balance—although the car doesn't handle like it," Gus decided after more than an hour of trouble-shooting.

They checked the wheels. All of them

balanced. Then they checked everything else that Gus could think of. But at six o'clock, when Stan went home and Gus started downtown for his dinner, the cause of the vibration remained a mystery.

As Gus was going into the Park House dining room the salesman hailed him. "Got my car fixed up?" he wanted to know.

Gus shook his head. "So far I haven't been able to find out what's the matter with it," he admitted. "How long have you been noticing that vibration?"

"Well now, let's see," the salesman said. "It started after I had that little accident—that was a couple of weeks ago."

"So you've had an accident, have you?" Gus asked.

"Oh, it didn't amount to much," the other told him offhandedly. "A trailer truck stopped suddenly, and I ran into it. I wasn't going fast, and all the damage was a busted radiator."

"Well, I'll have another shot at it after dinner," Gus told him. "Something tells me you could have saved yourself money if you'd mentioned that accident sooner."

THE first thing Gus did after he got back to the shop was to raise the coupe's hood and examine the engine fan. Two of its blades were badly twisted. "I thought so!" he muttered. "Ran smack into the tail end of a truck and smashed his radiator, and both he and the so-called mechanic who fixed it were too darned careless to make sure that nothing else was damaged." He set to work to remove the damaged fan. "That bump was what twisted those blades all right—and it's a hundred to one that they're causing the vibration."

After installing a new fan unit, he took the coupe out on the road. There was no vibration at any speed. "Darn that guy!" he growled. "If he'd had sense enough to

tell me he'd been in a front-end collision—oh well, the wasted time goes on his bill. Now to put this buggy away and close up for the night."

But on driving up to the shop he could see his plans for closing were due for a change. A large sedan with its lights out was standing near the door. As Gus turned off the ignition and went into the garage, a big heavy-set man wearing a bushy mustache walked toward him. "You open for business, mister?" he asked. "Excuse me for just walkin' in."

"That's all right," Gus told him. "The shop's supposed to close at six o'clock, but if you're having trouble—"

"I am—I sure am," the big man said. "It's my lights. They've gone out on me three times tonight, and the third time it burned out my last fuse. Mrs. Jackson—that's my wife—sure is provoked with me because I forgot to buy some more fuses. She always makes sure we carry at least half a dozen."

"You don't take any chances, do you?" Gus grinned. "Suppose you bring your car in here where I can get a good look at it."

Jackson did so, his wife sitting rigidly in the rear seat. "Been having much trouble with your lights?" Gus asked.

"No sir, none at all—not until tonight,"

Jackson answered. "Then while I was driving up a hill a little while ago, out they went. When I put in a new fuse they were all right again until I came to a traffic light. Then they went out again. When I put in a new fuse—the last one I had—they burned all right for a couple of miles, but as I started up at another stop light, out they went. I was all out of fuses, so I drove slow till I came to the first place that was open."

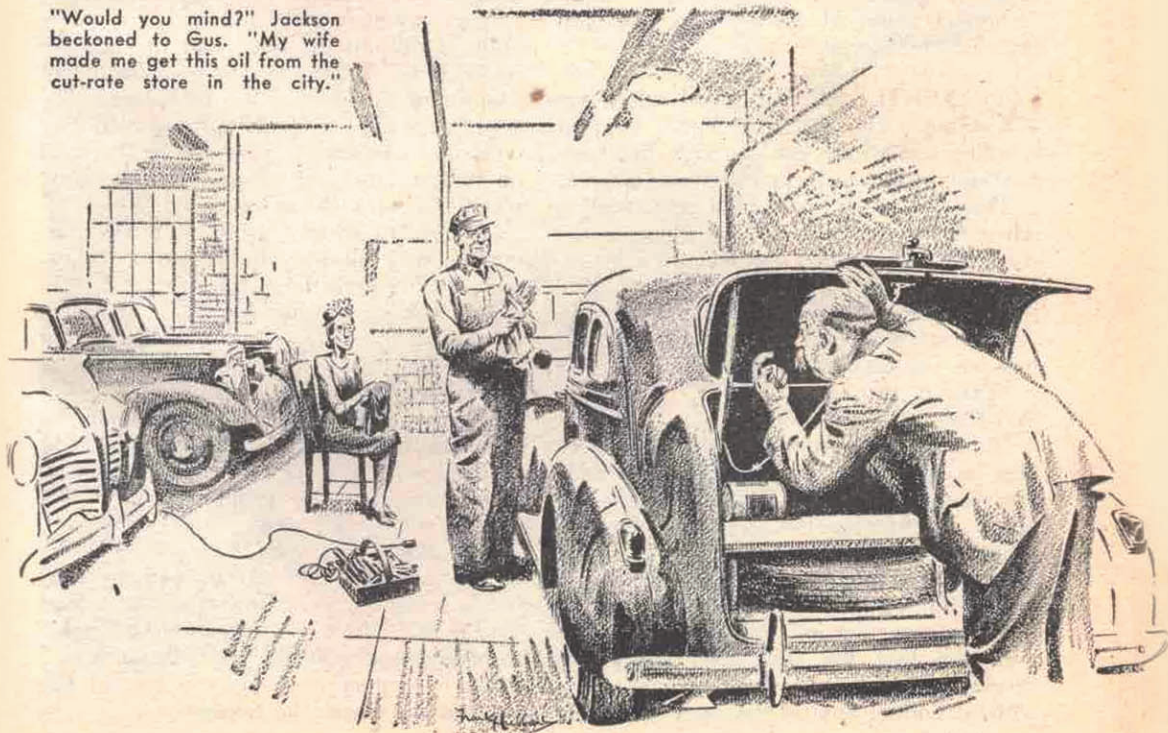
"I'll check your lighting circuit. Now, if the lady doesn't mind getting out—" Gus suggested politely. Mrs. Jackson, a grim-looking woman whose mouth turned down at the corners, descended from the car and plumped herself disapprovingly into the chair Gus brought for her.

The usual instrument tests showed no short circuit or ground, so Gus began to examine the wiring. "What's this extra wiring on the fuse block?" he called from the car.

"Oh, I did that," Jackson replied proudly. "I rigged up one of those automatic tilt switches that lights up the glove compartment when the door is opened. Did the same in the luggage compartment, so it lights up when the door's lifted. That was about a year ago."

"It looks okay," Gus said, "but *this* doesn't." He pointed to a frayed wire. "The

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fuse clip has shaken loose and the wire here is bad. One of those loose strands could cause a short circuit and blow the fuse."

Gus tightened the fuse clip, re-soldered the lug on the wire, and was about to go on with his inspection. But Mrs. Jackson stopped him. "You've found what's wrong!" she snapped. "Don't try to find something else now to charge us for."

"I've found *one* thing that *might* have caused your fuse to blow," Gus told her. "There might be something else. But it's up to you to decide."

"I intend to!" Mrs. Jackson came back. "Hen-ree," she rasped, "tell the man to put some oil in—and make him use the oil we bought!"

Jackson's face by this time was a ripe tomato color. "Would you mind?" he beckoned to Gus. "My wife made me get this oil from the cut-rate store in the city today, and I forgot to put it in," he said, pointing to the can in the luggage compartment.

Gus laughed, took the can, and emptied it into the filler pipe. Mrs. Jackson put up a howl when Gus presented his moderate repair charge, and was still talking about it to her henpecked Henry as they drove out of the shop.

"For that poor fellow's sake," Gus thought as he prepared to close up for the night, "I hope I found what was really wrong in that lighting circuit."

APPARENTLY he had found what was wrong. The salesman came in next morning and got his car, but Gus didn't see anything of Henry Jackson for over a week.

Then about half-past nine one evening when Gus was again working alone in the shop, the door opened and Jackson came in. He was so excited he could hardly talk. "My l-lights again," he started to babble to Gus. "For a w-week they w-were all right and just now—th-they went out again!"

"Take it easy, Mr. Jackson," Gus said. "Why all the excitement?"

"Bu-but my w-wife," Henry stammered. "I'm on m-my way to pick her up in town. She wants me there at l-least 15 m-minutes ahead of time so there w-won't be any chance of her having to w-wait. W-waiting makes her n-n-nervous. If I don't hurry, I'm in for trouble."

"Drive your car in," Gus said. A glance told him that the fuse had blown out. Working fast, he checked the lighting circuit without finding anything wrong. When he

put in a new fuse, the lights burned brightly again.

Gus scratched his head. "Let's see," he said half aloud, "several times, but not always, when you've blown fuses it's been when you stopped suddenly. It could be the stop-light switch." But a quick check proved the stop-light switch was okay.

"Say mister, maybe I'd b-better take the car the w-way it is," Jackson said nervously. "Where I've got to p-p-pick up Mrs. Jackson is about t-ten blocks from here."

"The same thing might happen before you get there," Gus told him. "You've still got a few minutes." He scratched his head again. "Traffic lights—sudden starts—hills—well, no harm in trying."

Gus jumped into the car and drove out of the shop. In the driveway he stopped, then started off with a jerk. He heard a dull thud somewhere in the rear, and at the same instant the lights went out.

Gus backed into the shop, jumped out, and opened the luggage compartment. "I think we've found the troublemaker," he said, holding up a can of oil. "I'd lay a small bet you bought this in town today."

"Well, yes, so I did," Jackson admitted. "And tonight your lights went bad again."

You see, the can rolls around on the steel floor of your luggage compartment. When you go uphill or start up fast at a traffic light, it rolls to the back and touches the wiring of this automatic switch you installed. Months of that frayed the insulation, until a week ago the can finally touched bare wire and short-circuited the current to the steel floor. You didn't buy a new can until today, when the same thing happened."

"By golly, Mister," said Jackson admiringly. "Wait till my wife hears this. Why—why, it's *her* fault if I'm late tonight!"

"So it is," Gus chuckled as he put in a new fuse. "You'd better tape up that wiring before you carry any more oil back there, if your wife insists you must."

"No sir, I don't think I'll let her, if she tries," declared Jackson, with an odd light in his eyes. "For years I've been careful to do things like she wanted them. It isn't the first time they haven't turned out right."

Gus closed the hood carefully. "You're all set now. Yes, I think you can say your wife's being extra careful about oil caused your grief." There was a meaningful twinkle in his eyes as he added: "That's not a bad thing to remember—being *too* careful can sometimes get you into trouble."