

GUS goes to the races

By MARTIN BUNN

TOWARD four on a warm Friday afternoon Gus Wilson looked out his shop window at a pelting rain. "This is going to keep up all night," he predicted to Stan Hicks, the Model Garage grease monkey. "There'll be wet grounds and no ball game tomorrow."

Just about that time, out at the old Lakeview half-mile track eight miles away, Jack Dunn came into the tack room of a stable. It was here he kept his string of half a dozen selling platers and one good stake horse with a bad leg.

A little old Negro looked up expectantly from a bit he was polishing. "No good, Henny," Dunn told him. "We came in fifth—seven lengths back of the money."

Henny shook his head. "That oats fellah was roun', Mistah Jack," he said.

Dunn grunted, walked to the window, and watched the pouring rain. "We've got to win a good purse soon, or we're done for," he muttered. "Looks like it'll rain hard all night, and that's what the weather man says. If it does, the footing at Empire Park's going to be fetlock deep, and Air Hero ought to be able to do it."

Henny nodded. "Ah was jes' thinkin' that, Mistah Jack," he agreed.

Dunn swung around, went to the deal table that served him as desk, found the Empire Park condition book, and thumbed through its pages. "Here we are . . . 'Brookdale Handicap—\$3,000 added—mile and a sixteenth.' Demerara's the horse to beat, and Air Hero can do it. I wouldn't risk that tendon on a hard track for another two weeks, but in mud . . . How's that Army truck?"

"Runnin' fine, Mistah Jack," Henny said.

"Post time for the Brookdale is 4:30," Dunn told him. "Keep Air Hero quiet in his stall as long as you can, but start in time. Don't make it too early, or he'll fuss himself into a lather with waiting, but don't be a minute later than 4:15."

And just about then at Empire Park, 10 miles the other side of our town, two sharp-faced characters were conferring under the grandstand. "I tell you, Brownie, he's a real mudder, and with the track soft Dunn will start him," one insisted.

Brownie swore. "Best chance of the season for a cleanup gone. With Air Hero out, Demerara would be sure. And I ain't betting heavy dough if it ain't sure, Al."

"Yeah," Al blinked. "How much is it

worth for Air Hero to show up too late?"

Brownie looked at him hard. "It's worth two hundred," he said. "But no rough stuff—the Pinks are watching me."

"There's no rough stuff to a truck stallin'," Al answered. "I used to be a mechanic—and a good one—in the old days."

SATURDAY was sunny, so Gus hopefully phoned the ball park, but the game had been called because of wet grounds. Joe Clark, his partner in the Model Garage, was sympathetic. "Why don't you go to Empire Park?" he urged. "Do you good to get outdoors."

"Not me," Gus laughed. "One-horsepower nags are too slow for me. I've seen all the top race drivers since Barney Oldfield pour out real speed."

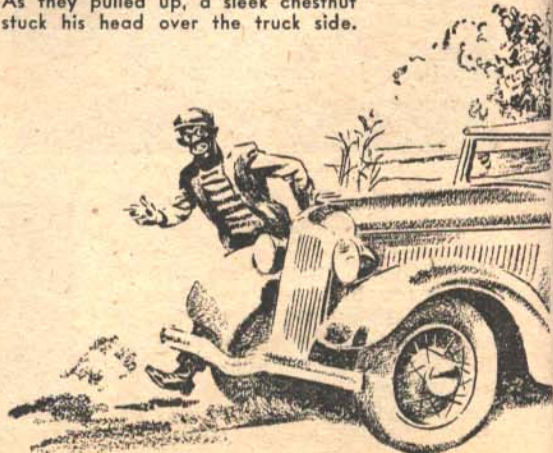
Joe went back into the office and Gus set about tuning the 2½-ton 6 x 6 truck Chris Blauvelt had bought from military surplus. He was still at it when he was interrupted by a breathless voice saying: "Excuse me, mistah! Excuse me, mistah!"

He looked up at a little Negro whose face glistened with muddy sweat and who gasped from near exhaustion.

"Take it easy," Gus warned, and pushed the little man into a chair. "Feel better now?" he asked after the old man had had a cup of water. "Who are you?"

"Ah's Henny Gilpin, mistah. No one knows me no mo', but Ah was a right good

As they pulled up, a sleek chestnut stuck his head over the truck side.



jockey when I rode for old Mistah Jack Dunn."

"O. K., Henny," Gus said. "Now tell me what's the matter."

"It's mah truck, mistah. She stalled, and I run a long ways befo' a gen'man gave me a lift. He 'lowed maybe yo' all could get it started."

"Sure, I'll get it started for you," Gus assured him. "But what was the idea of half-killing yourself with running?"

"Ah got Air Hero in it," Henny moaned.

"Who's he?" Gus asked, puzzled.

Henny pulled himself together. "Ah works for young Mistah Jack Dunn—the Big Pine Stable," he explained. "Our stake hoss, Air Hero, is entered in the Brookdale Han'icap at Em-piah Park, an' Mistah Jack's dependin' on me to get there by 4:15."

"Oh, I see," Gus said. "But you can't be blamed if your truck stalled."

"Mistah, yo' gotta un'er-stan'," Henny urged desperately. "Unless Air Hero win, Mistah Jack's gonna be sold out." He looked at

the shop clock. "Deah Lawd," he murmured. "It's mos' quarter to foah."

Gus was tossing tools into his roadster. "What kind of truck is it?" he asked.

"She's an old Army truck—jes' like the one yo' is working on," Henny said.

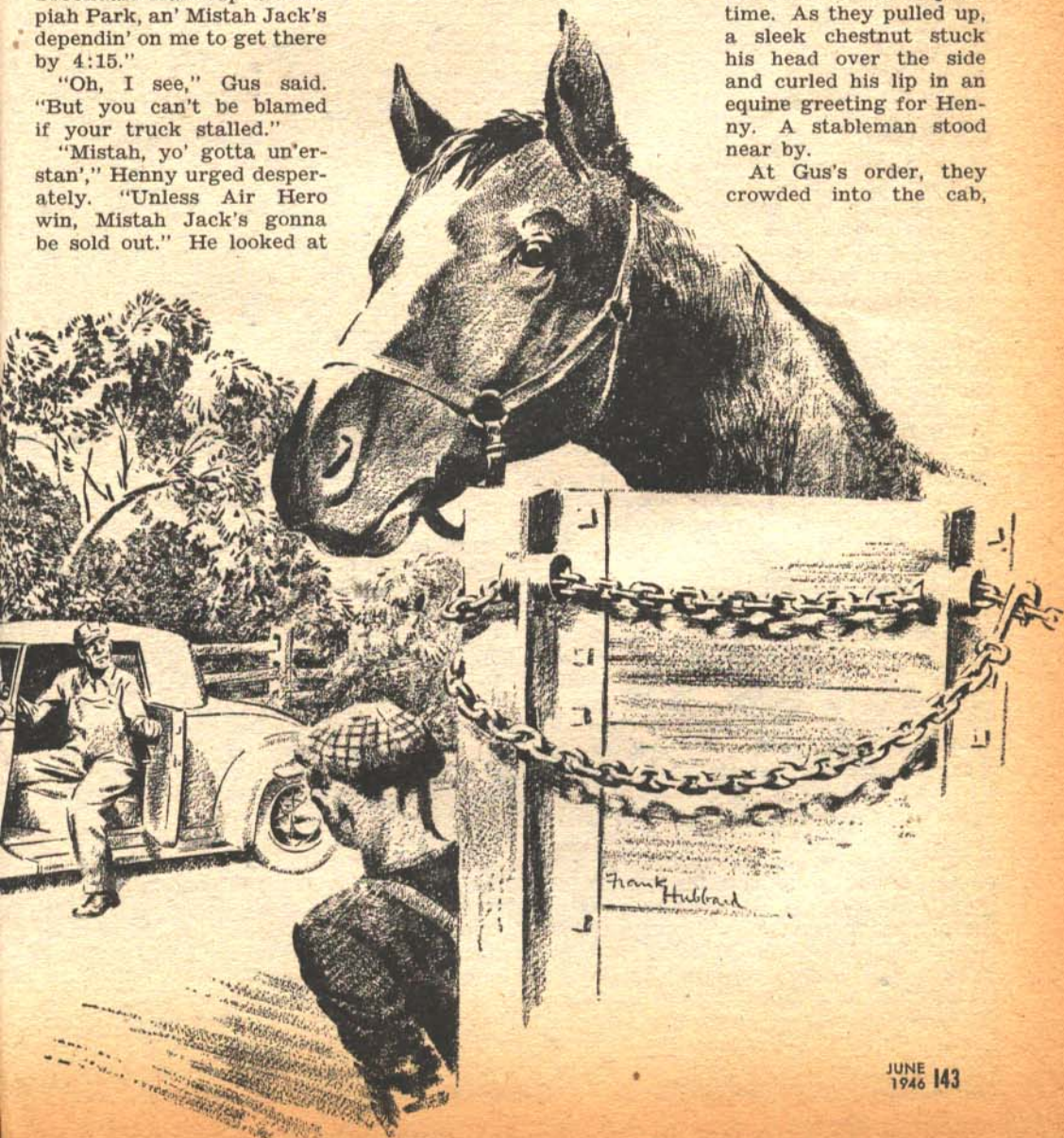
Something Blauvelt's driver had told him clicked in Gus's mind. "What happened before it stalled?" he demanded.

"She jes' gasped a time or two."

"That *could* be it," Gus muttered. He bent over the truck engine for a moment, and when he straightened up he slipped something into his coverall pocket. Then he jumped into the roadster. "Come on."

Gus took a couple of short cuts and covered the three miles to the stalled truck in quick time. As they pulled up, a sleek chestnut stuck his head over the side and curled his lip in an equine greeting for Henny. A stableman stood near by.

At Gus's order, they crowded into the cab,





Gus at the wheel. They went off smoothly.

"It won't run far," Gus said, "but I'll fix it when it stops." He got up to 40, bypassed town, and the engine died.

Gus jumped out, lifted the hood, examined the oil-bath air cleaner on the crankcase oil-filler pipe, and shouted: "I *did* guess right!" He pulled the filter element he had taken from the Blauvelt truck out of his pocket and fitted it into the air cleaner. A car came up from behind, slowed down as its thin-faced driver stared at them, and speeded up again. Henny wrung his hands. "Please, *do* somethin'."

"I've *done* it," Gus yelled, and they started.

It was exactly 4:15 when they pulled up at the paddock gate. A man ran over to them. "The truck stalled, Mistah Jack," Henny told him as he lowered the ramp, "an' this gen'man fixed it."

Jack Dunn's quick eyes looked Gus over as a bugle blared. "Just in time—there's the saddling call." He led the horse down the ramp. "You've done me a good turn, Mister. How much do I owe you?"

Gus rubbed his chin and looked around the Park. "Oh, a couple of bucks and a ride back to my car would square us," he said.

"Two bucks sounds mighty modest to me, Mister," said Dunn. "I'll do better than that—I'll see that ten bucks goes on Air Hero for you. Okay?"

Gus assented with a laugh. Dunn unpinned his badge and tossed it over. "This'll get you inside," he called as he walked off.

The betting concourse was crowded, and Gus found himself near two men talking earnestly as they waited in the \$50 line. "I tell you, Brownie," said one of them, "I fixed that truck good. That cluck Henny wouldn't never have started it if he hadn't got that—" He broke off to stare at Gus.

By then the two men were at the betting window. A buzzer droned and the slide was slammed down just as Brownie tried to shove a sheaf of bills inside. "Ten on Air Hero, ten on Air Hero," he shouted.

"Scram," he was told. "Window's closed."

Brownie cursed, and Gus followed him through the crowd. As they reached the paved "lawn" in front of the grandstand, there was a roar: "They're off!"

A black horse got out in front. "Deme-

rara! Demerara!" roared the huge crowd.

Gus recognized the chestnut in the bunched horses chasing Demerara. They rounded the first turn, and on the backstretch a big gray began cutting Demerara's lead—and with the gray went Air Hero. At the last turn, the gray was gaining on Demerara, and Air Hero's head was even with the gray's shoulder. As they swung into the homestretch, there was a hush. The gray had caught Demerara, but Air Hero had moved faster and was even. Down the stretch he fought it out with the gray, then shot away to win by a length.

Brownie strode up to Gus, shaking with rage. "You asked for this!" he shouted, and swung hard. Gus sidestepped and sent a sharp left hook to his unshaven jaw. Brownie was picking himself up groggily when a track policeman collared him.

"Nice left, Mac," the cop told Gus. "We've been hoping he'd start something."

SOME of us Model Garage regulars dropped in at the shop that evening, and Gus told us his experiences at the races.

"How did you know what was wrong before you saw the truck?" Doc Marvin asked.

"That model Army truck has a peculiar air cleaner that's part of the crankcase ventilating system," Gus explained. "If the filter element is removed from the air cleaner, the crankcase breather is sealed up. With no air getting into the crankcase, and the air in it being taken out by the ventilating system, a partial vacuum develops in the crankcase. Finally it gets strong enough to hold down the fuel-pump diaphragm. Then no fuel flows into the carburetor, and the engine dies. Air seeps back into the crankcase, and after a while you can start again, but the same thing happens, and the engine dies again. Blauvelt's driver almost lost his stripes in the Army for it once."

Gus pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and carefully divided it in two.

"Here are the winnings from the bet Dunn placed for us. It was Model Garage funds, so Joe and I'll split. There's just one thing I wonder about."

"What's that?" asked Joe.

"What you would have said," Gus grinned, "if the nag hadn't won."