

Gus Comes Home to Trouble

By Martin Bunn

GUS WILSON was in such a hurry to get back to the Model Garage that, instead of waiting five minutes for the bus that passes it, he took a taxi from the railroad station.

He had had a grand time visiting his sister out in Colorado, but now that he was almost home, the two weeks he had been away seemed like two years. In the course of the 10-minute ride, so many misgivings about what might have gone wrong in his absence chased each other through his mind that he was almost surprised to see the familiar garage still standing.

His partner, Joe Clark, grinned a welcome from the office door, and Stan Hicks, the grease monkey, leaning against the gas pump as he slow-motioned through his morning chore of hosing off the concrete driveway, called out breezily, "Hi, boss!"

"Hi, kid!" Gus returned just as breezily, and started for the office. "How're things?" he asked, unable to hide his anxiety.

"Swell, just swell," Stan assured him in a matter-of-fact tone.

Joe Clark was just as placid. His eyes twinkled delightedly from behind his horn-rimmed glasses, but all he said was, "Have a good time?"

"Fine!" Gus told him. "It's good to be back, though. I've been sort of worried about things."

"You needn't have been," Joe assured him. "Everything's gone O.K. Plenty of work, but all of it routine stuff that Stan and that Mike Cawthorne you hired could handle without any headaches. I let Mike go yesterday, knowing you'd be back today."

Gus grunted. He was relieved—and a little deflated at the same time. "There's no indispensable man even in a garage," he told himself with a rueful mental grin. Aloud he remarked that he had his best suit on and had better get home for a change before getting to work.

As he started for the office door it was opened violently ahead of him, and a tall, thin, glum man he didn't know stomped his way in. His thin lips mouthed an unlighted cigar as the visitor looked the partners over,

an expression of bitter dissatisfaction on his lean, dark face.

"There never has been a time," he declared solemnly, "when automobile mechanics charged so many so much for doing so little. Maybe Winston Churchill didn't say that—but he would have, by gum, if he'd had any work done on his car!"

Joe bristled. "Why, Mr. Downunder . . ." "Underdown, if it's all the same to you," the sour man corrected acidly.

Joe reddened. "Yes, of course—Mr. Underdown," he amended. "What I was going to say—I mean, what's the matter?"

Underdown dexterously rolled his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"You remind me of a doctor I had a couple of years ago," he said slowly. "Sold me an operation—said if I had it I'd cut six strokes off my golf score. That would have brought me down under 90, so I had the operation—cost me a thousand before I got through with it. It didn't do what the doctor said. I've never broken 90."

"That's—that's too bad," Joe said uncertainly. "But what's it got to do with your car?"

"Same sort of deal," Underdown went on. "You sold me a motor tune-up, didn't you? You claimed it would give my old bus more power and a quicker pickup, didn't you? You claimed—"

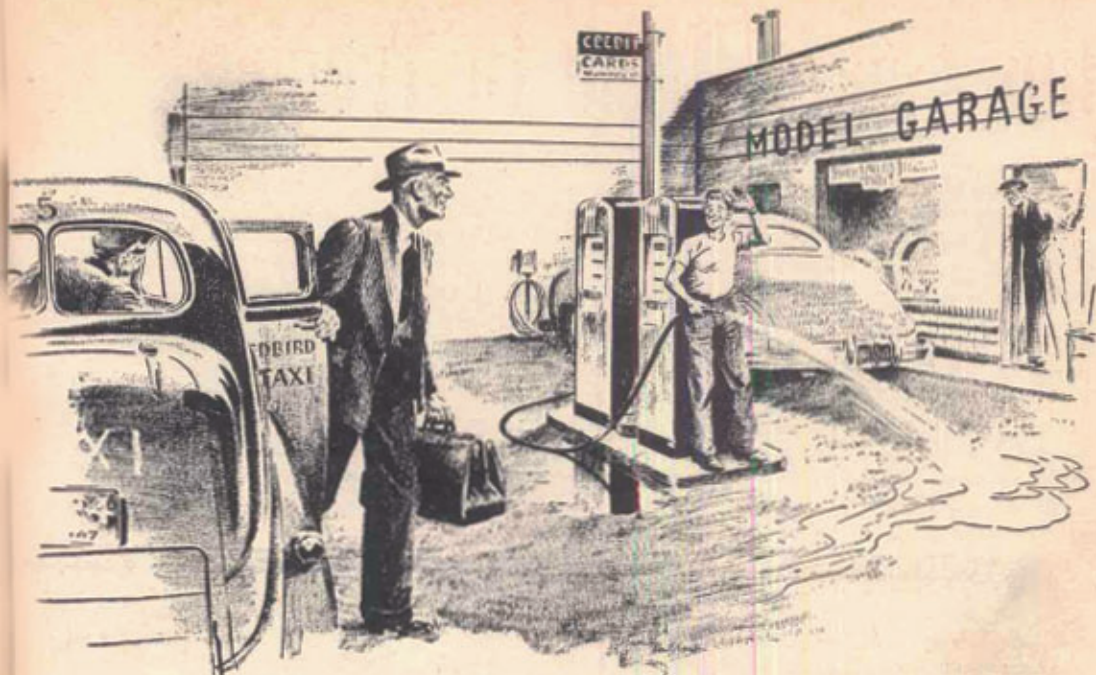
"Well?" Joe broke in.

"Well," Underdown mocked. "It's just like my operation. The motor runs O.K., but not the way the doctor claimed it would. It hasn't got any more power, and its pickup isn't any faster than it was before the operation. I'm not satisfied I got my money's worth—that's flat!"

Joe gave Gus a get-me-out-of-this look, and Gus went to his assistance. "If you've got your car outside, Mr. Underdown," he suggested, "suppose you and I take a little ride in it? Maybe I'll be able—"

"You're Gus Wilson, I suppose," Underdown said. "Feller told me you're a whiz. That's why I brought my car here."

They went out to a 1939 sedan. Gus slid behind the wheel. The engine ran smoothly enough, but when they got on the highway and Gus pressed his foot suddenly on the



Joe grinned a welcome from the door, and Stan, in slow-motion at the morning hosing, called, "Hi, boss!"

accelerator pedal, the power plant's response indicated that Underdown had a real kick coming. Noticeably lacking was the flashy acceleration to be expected from a job just out of the shop with a good tuning. And when they climbed a fairly steep grade, there wasn't any power to spare.

"You win," Gus told the customer. "She isn't as good as she ought to be. If you want to leave her until quitting time this afternoon, I'll see what can be done."

AFTER Gus had driven the sedan into the shop, Stan came over to him. He looked embarrassed. "Say, boss," he began, "I've got to talk to you."

"Go ahead and talk," Gus told him.

Stan had turned red, and his grease-smeared face showed drops of perspiration.

"You've heard about the high cost of living and everything," he blurted out.

"I've more than heard about it," Gus assured the youngster.

Stan hesitated, looking miserable. Finally he stuttered, "I—I ought to get a—a raise."

"Why?" Gus asked.

Stan turned still redder. "Oh, I dunno," he muttered.

Gus laughed and gave him a friendly poke in the ribs. "You certainly don't rate a raise

for being a good salesman for yourself," he said. "I'll think it over and see what Joe says about it." He indicated the sedan. "Remember this job?"

Stan nodded. "It was in for an engine tune-up a couple of days after you left."

"Who did the work, you or Mike Cawthorne?" Gus asked.

"Mike did, mostly," Stan told him. "I helped, but he wouldn't let me do much. He's the sort of guy who thinks he's the only one who knows anything."

"Either of you road-test it after it was finished?" Gus wanted to know.

Stan shook his head. "No. Mr. Clark did. He said it was O.K."

Gus tried not to grin. "It's not O.K. now," he said. "There's not enough pep. Let's check the engine."

It ran smoothly. The vacuum tester didn't indicate that there was anything the matter. But, just as had been the case on the road, when Gus stepped on the accelerator pedal the engine didn't answer instantly. He checked the carburetor, and found that it was working normally. Then, after some silent thinking, he had Stan remove the manifolds from the block and examined them.

The inside of the intake manifold was covered with a brown varnishlike coating, and



His thin lips mouthed on unlighted cigar as the visitor looked the partners over, an expression of bitter dissatisfaction on his face.

the inside of the exhaust manifold had an uneven but generally thick carbon deposit.

Gus shook his head sadly. "Sloppy work," he commented. "I thought better than that of Mike Cawthorne. He probably cleaned out the inside of the manifolds, but he didn't do a thorough job. He left some of the old deposit of varnish binder in the intake and some spots of carbon in the exhaust, and new deposits built up quickly."

Stan's face got red again. He looked as if he wanted to say something, but for a long moment he was silent. Then he blurted: "That wasn't Mike's fault, boss. He gave me the job of cleaning the manifolds. I was sore because he wouldn't let me do anything more important, and I guess—I guess I wasn't careful enough."

Deep gloom shrouded his usually cheerful face, and he spoke aloud his gravest thought: "Now what chance have I got for a raise?"

Gus managed to smother a grin. He looked at his young assistant and shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he said, "you'd better get back at them with a wire brush. And make sure this time you get them thoroughly clean. It would be easier to soak them overnight in a gum solvent—ethyl acetate or something like that—to loosen the deposits and then clean them off with an air jet, but I promised Mr. Underdown I'd have his car ready this afternoon."

Stan went to work, and when he brought the manifolds to Gus an hour later the inner passages of both had been polished clean and smooth.

"O.K.," Gus approved after an inspection.

"That's the kind of job you should have done the first time. And here's something to remember. If you ever use a gum solvent to get the varnish binder off inside an intake manifold, be very careful to remove all the loosened matter afterwards. That stuff can cause real grief if it gets carried into an engine."

When Stan had reinstalled the manifolds, they took the car out for a road test. Gus pressed his foot down, and the old sedan leaped ahead. Its acceleration was really flashy. And when they climbed a hill, there was plenty of power and then some.

Stan shook his head in bewilderment. "I don't get it, boss," he said. "I know I did a bum job cleaning those manifolds the first time, but I don't see how the little carbon and stuff I missed could make all that difference."

"Ever see the manifolds of a racing car?" Gus asked. "Their inside passages are plated—or well polished, at least—to improve the volumetric flow of the mixture and of the exhaust. To get the most out of an automobile engine, those passages must present the least possible friction so the pistons can suck in the largest possible charges of mixture and expel the largest possible volume of exhaust gases.

"You don't find plated manifolds on anything but real hot-rod jobs; but whatever kind you have, they must be clean and smooth to get top performance out of the car. The deposits that built up quickly on the rough spots you didn't get rid of interfered with the easy flow of mixture and exhaust in this engine, so it had a sluggish pickup and couldn't deliver full power. Get it?"

Stan thought it over. "Yes," he said finally, "I get it. Say, auto engines are sort of funny, ain't they?"

"You're telling me!" Gus agreed grimly. "By the way, I spoke to Joe about your wanting a raise."

Once more Stan's face got red from embarrassment. "I guess I haven't got it coming to me now—after that punk job on Mr. Underdown's manifolds," he muttered gloomily.

Gus laughed good-humoredly.

"We all have to learn the hard way sometimes," he said after a moment. "And you didn't let me think that it was Mike's fault. Your pay envelope will be five bucks fatter this Friday, son. O.K.?"

"O.K., boss," Stan grinned.