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**How the New Toys Work**

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# Gus Wilson Plays Santa Claus

With a balky 1936 model instead of a sleigh,  
Gus plays Santa in two different places at once.

**By Martin Bunn**

A FEW minutes earlier the hands of the Model Garage clock had pointed to quitting time. Wrapped in heavy coats and mufflers, Stan Hicks and Greg Jones, the grease monkey, were leaving. Gus Wilson was still at his bench, working over a carburetor.

"Merry Christmas, boss," Stan waved. "Don't eat too much turkey."

"Same to you," Gus grinned. "Have a good time."

A splatter of fine rain swirled through the door as Stan and Greg stepped out into the storm. Gus turned back to his job. He still had more than two hours before the Police Department's annual party for kids. Gus was to play Santa Claus this year.

At six o'clock he put away his tools, wriggled out of his coveralls, and washed

up. Then he unwrapped the well-padded Santa Claus outfit and put it on. Grinning widely, he studied himself in the mirror over the wash basin. He held the false whiskers up to his face for a minute and again looked in the mirror.

"Just try 'em on for size," he murmured. Gus put the whiskers aside and stepped to the front window for a look at the weather. The temperature had dropped a few degrees and the rain had changed to snow—big, wet flakes that were beginning to whiten the highway. Across the road, the lights of the diner gleamed dimly. Occasionally, the lights of a slow-moving car showed up through the gloom. By morning, Gus thought, there'll be a lot of drivers wondering why they didn't get their chains fixed before they put 'em away last spring.

As he turned from the window, headlights flared and a horn sounded. Someone



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had turned into the garage driveway. Gus hesitated, wondering why he hadn't thought to turn out the shop lights. He glanced at the clock, saw he had time to spare, and rolled the shop door aside.

A 1936 sedan, showing its years only too well, rolled slowly into the shop. Gus shoved the door shut and turned to see a young woman smiling at him.

"I'd just about stopped believing in you,"

she said, "but I'm certainly glad to see you right now."

Gus stared at her for a moment, and then remembered his costume and grinned. "Oh, this get-up," he said, looking down at his overstuffed red suit, "I'm Santa Claus at a kids' party this evening. Guess I got dressed up for the occasion a little ahead of time."

"Well, I hope you have a gift for me, or

for my car, at least. It could do with one."

"What's the trouble with it?" Gus asked.

"I don't know," she said. "It just doesn't want to run. And it's got to run. I've got to get to a kids' party too, and it's a hundred and fifty miles from here."

Gus started to say that it wasn't a night for anyone to be driving that far, much less a girl, but then something in her eyes told him it would take more than a snowstorm to stop her.

"I suppose the car's just getting old," she went on. "It's a '36 model. My husband drove it sixty thousand miles before the Army sent him overseas. Then after—after the war I had the motor rebuilt, and I've driven it over thirty thousand since then. I travel for a cosmetics company and my job keeps me moving around a lot."

"How does it act?" Gus asked.

"The motor misses and stalls almost every time I stop," she answered. "It must have been about two months ago, when I was in Chicago, that it started. I noticed too that it was using up an awful lot of gasoline. The man at a garage there told me that gasoline was running down into the crankcase and diluting the oil."

"What'd he do about it?"

"Put a new fuel pump on. Not a rebuilt one. I asked about that, but he said it had to be a new one. And it didn't do a bit of good. I didn't get more than six or seven miles to the gallon when I drove to Detroit."

"Somebody in Detroit should have known what was wrong," Gus smiled.

"That's what I thought, too," she said.

"I thought people there would know all about cars. But they didn't. At least not at the garage I went to. They put on an electric fuel pump. The man said that would stop the trouble because an electric fuel pump doesn't connect with the crankcase."

"Apparently that didn't do the trick."

"No, it didn't. It was just as bad as ever. Then I drove to Cleveland. Two big places hadn't helped, so this time I tried a little shop on a side street. The mechanic went all over the motor and said the valves were causing the trouble. He ground the valves and put in new valve guides. After he finished the job, he tested the compression—whatever that is—and told me it was okay and that I wouldn't have any more trouble."

"But you have," Gus said.

"I certainly have. The car still uses too much gas, it keeps missing, and gas still gets into the oil. The trip from Cleveland

was a nightmare. I stalled at a traffic light down the road and a motorcycle cop told me to try your place. He said he had just been by here and noticed your lights still burning, so he knew you hadn't closed."

Gus looked at the clock again and then back at the girl. There were tears in her eyes. She looked down and began fumbling in her handbag for a handkerchief.

"Make yourself comfortable over there by the radiator," Gus told her. "I'll see what we can do about getting you rolling on your way home again."

"Thank you." She opened her coat and pulled a chair up to the radiator. But in a moment she was up again. "Try to do something quick," she urged. "My two kids are at my parents' home—that's standard procedure with war widows, you know—and I've just got to get there in time to have their presents under the tree in the morning." She pointed to a pile of packages in the rear seat.

"Take it easy," Gus smiled, "we'll get you there in time."

The girl smiled and dabbed at her eyes.

After several attempts, Gus started the balky engine. He wasn't so sure about getting her home in time. The engine ran roughly and stalled as soon as he released the throttle. He switched off the ignition, got out of the car, and pulled out the oil stick. It showed the crankcase oil was over an inch above normal level. He rolled a drop of it between thumb and finger and found it much too thin. He sniffed it and found a smell of gasoline.

"How long since you had the oil changed?" he asked.

"Only yesterday," she answered.

Gus turned back to the engine and thought for a minute. "Where have you been keeping your car during this cold weather—in a garage or outdoors?"

"In parking lots," she said. "They're much less expensive than garages."

Her frankness about expenses turned his thoughts to the two kids a hundred and fifty miles away. He unclamped the upper radiator hose and saw there was no thermostat in the cylinder-head water outlet.

"This explains some of the trouble," he told her. "No thermostat. That's why you're using so much gasoline and why a lot of it is getting into the crankcase."

"Why?" she asked.

Gus grinned. "When some cars are parked outdoors in cold weather, as much as

a gallon of gas is used while the engine is warming up. Some of the gas is burned, of course, but some of it seeps into the crankcase. I can fix that in a hurry by putting in a high-limit thermostat and also a shield in front of the lower half of the radiator. Together, they'll cause the engine to heat up quicker. You won't have to choke it so much and less gasoline will get into the crankcase. What does will evaporate faster. Get it?"

"No," she said, "I don't. But if that will fix it, go ahead and do it."

"One other thing," Gus said, "what kind of antifreeze do you have in the radiator—permanent or alcohol antifreeze?"

"It's the permanent kind," she answered quickly. "I know. I watched the man put it in the radiator and it said on the can that it was permanent. The man told me that if my radiator didn't leak, I wouldn't have to bother with it until Spring."

"That's good," Gus said, "because the radiator shield and the high-limit thermostat won't do with a low-boiling antifreeze in the radiator."

As Gus went about installing the thermostat and fitting the shield, the girl came over to watch. "That's fine, fixing that," she said, "but what about the motor acting the way it does? That's worse than using too much gasoline. Tonight, anyway."

"Yes," he admitted, "we've still got to lick that." He tightened the hose clamps and started the engine. It ran roughly, as though the carburetor was in bad shape.

"See?" she said.

"Could be the idling jet," Gus mused, "or it could—yes, that could be it." He cut the engine, jumped out of the car, and took off the air cleaner.

"What's that?" the girl asked.

"Air cleaner," Gus answered, "and there's the cause of the missing and stalling." He pointed to the filter element that was heavily clogged with dirt. "The filter is so dirty that nowhere near enough air can get through. Much too rich a mixture is being drawn into the cylinders. A lot of it can't burn, so it seeps down into the crankcase and dilutes the oil. This filter, plus the excess choking needed with a cold motor, was wasting plenty gas."

Within ten minutes he had washed the filter in gasoline, re-oiled it, and replaced the air cleaner. When he started the engine this time, it ran smoothly.

"There you are," Gus said, "all ready to

roll. Seems like one of those mechanics who worked on your car would have found that filter. But no matter now. You won't have any more trouble, and unless you get snowed in you'll have those presents under the tree before the kids come down in the morning. But I'm afraid you're going to have a tough drive."

"I can take it," the girl said. She opened her purse. "How much do I owe you?"

Gus grinned and held open the car door for her. "We'll call that a Christmas present from Santa Claus to the kids," he said.

"All right," she said, "if that's the way you want it." Quickly she slipped her arm around his neck, pulled his head down, and kissed him. "That's a present from the kids to Santa Claus."

She backed the car out of the shop, turned it, and headed out the driveway through the whirling snowflakes. Gus stood in the doorway and watched until the car's taillights were out of sight. Then he closed the shop door and started back to wash up and put on his Santa Claus whiskers. Joe Clark, his partner, was leaning in the doorway from the office to the shop, grinning at him.

"Saw the shop lights and stopped in," Joe explained. "Been working overtime?"

"Just a little emergency job," Gus said.

"Well," Joe laughed, "sometimes those emergency jobs pay off pretty well."

Gus tied his false whiskers in place and turned from the mirror. "That's right," he agreed, "sometimes they do. Going to the kids' party, Joe?"

"I sure am," Joe said. "I'm full of the Christmas spirit—same as you." END

