

# POPULAR SCIENCE

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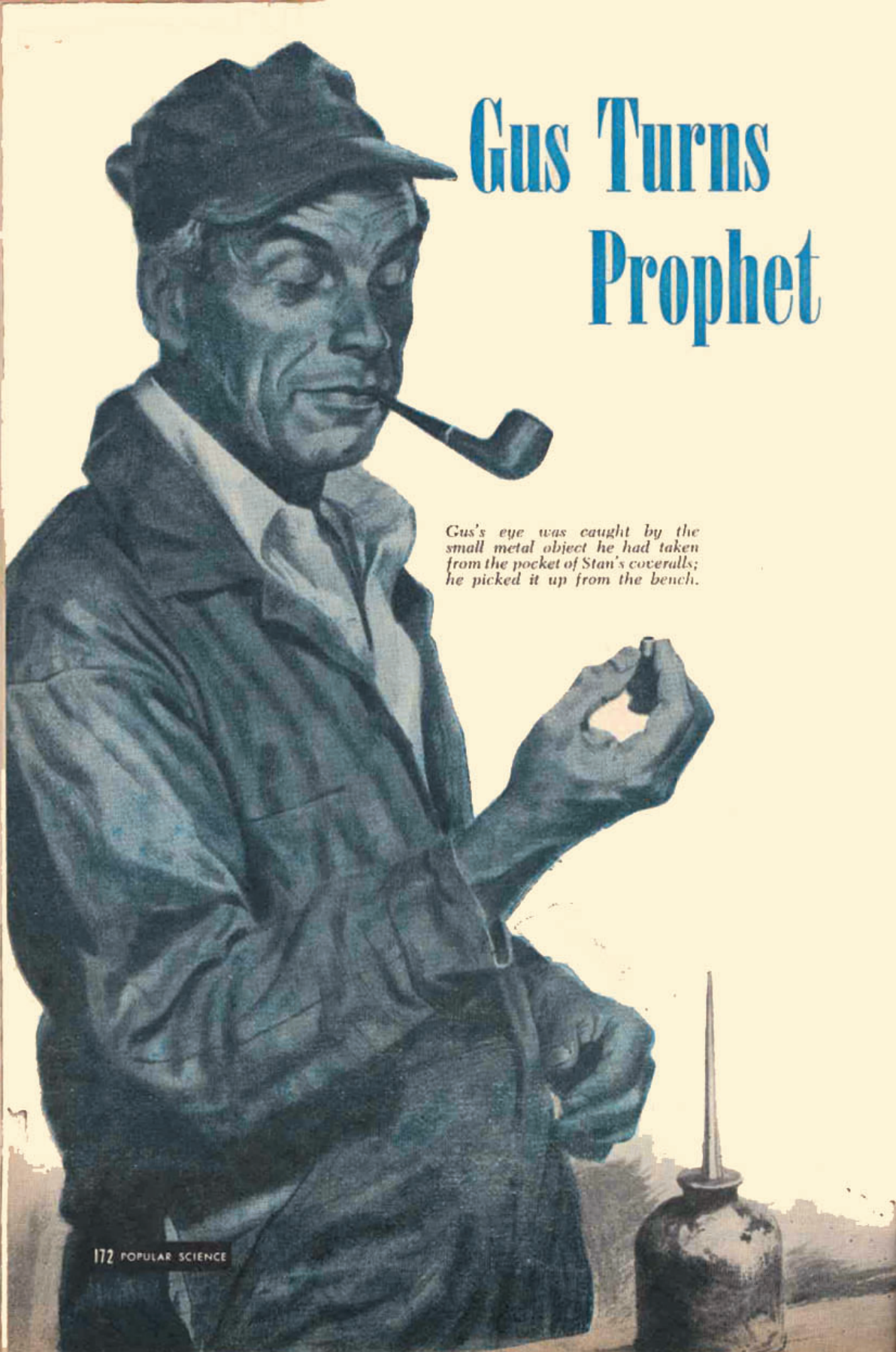
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**Dirt Track  
in the Sky**

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# Gus Turns Prophet

*Gus's eye was caught by the small metal object he had taken from the pocket of Stan's coveralls; he picked it up from the bench.*



When Stan put a car back together and had a piece left over, Gus didn't need a dream book to tell that the customer was coming back mad.

# Without Profit

By Martin Bunn

GUS WILSON was first down to the Model Garage that sunny winter morning. Whistling cheerily, he took off his coat and vest and hung them on their accustomed hook. He lifted down a pair of coveralls, wiggled into them—and found them unaccountably tight. “I must be putting on weight,” he mused as he reached into a pocket for his tobacco. Instead of the familiar tin of “Delight,” his fingers closed on a small metal object. Surprised, he took it out, glanced at it absent-mindedly, and put it down on a workbench. He fumbled in another pocket and fished out the crumpled remains of a pack of chewing gum. Then light broke. “Darn it! These are Stan’s coveralls.”

Spotting his own coveralls on an adjacent hook, Gus changed into them, found his tobacco, lit his pipe, and began to plan the day’s work. After an instant his eye was caught by the metal object he had taken from the pocket of Stan’s coveralls; he picked it up from the bench. It was a short, hollow cylinder, with both ends chamfered. After momentary puzzlement he identified it. Then he thought back through the jobs of the previous day. “Gosh!” he exclaimed at a sudden recollection. “Stan cleaned that gas tank and fuel line, and tightened the connections. Now we *will* have fireworks! Why’d it have to be that red-headed Horace Spinker—the worst-tempered man in town?”

Gus, who is blessed with the gift of taking his work seriously in a light-hearted sort of way, laughed and put the little cylinder back in Stan’s coverall pocket. Then he hung the

garment on its hook and hastened into the office to make a phone call. A woman’s voice told him irascibly that Mr. Spinker had left and asked for a message.

“Never mind,” Gus replied. “I’ll be hearing from him soon enough anyway.”

Stan came in a few minutes later, red in the face and out of breath. “You’re sorta early, ain’t you, boss?”

Gus put on a glum face. “I was glad to get up—bad dreams,” he growled. “You believe in dreams, Stan?”

“Me? I dunno.”

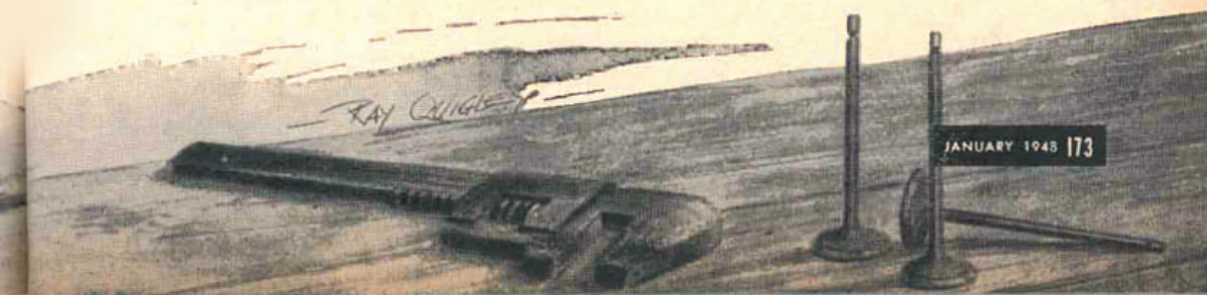
“I had one about you,” Gus said. “You sure were on a spot. There was a big fellow with a red face and red hair and red mustache who was going to cut your heart out because you’d fouled up his car. He sure was mad, and—” the master mechanic shook his head forebodingly. “If there’s anything in dreams, you’d better watch your step today. I wouldn’t want to have a fellow as big as that mad at *me*.”

Stan grinned a little nervously. Gus’s serious manner had impressed him. “I ain’t afraid of dreams,” he muttered. “They don’t mean nothing.”

“I hope you’re right,” Gus told him somberly. “But I wouldn’t bet on it.”

IN SPITE of Gus’s carefully portentous manner and a doleful yarn or two about dreams that had come true, things went along placidly enough in the shop until about three o’clock, when Joe Clark stuck his head in from the office door and shouted:

“Job for the wrecker! Spinker just phoned







*Almost an hour later, Stan drove the wrecker back into the shop with Spinker's car in tow.*

that he's stalled five miles up the highway. Says his starter and ignition are O.K. and his gas tank is a third full, but his car quit on him and he can't get it moving again.

"All right—we'll fix him up," Gus called back. Then he turned to Stan. "You do it, will you?" he said. "You worked on Spinker's gas tank and fuel line yesterday."

Stan stared at him, his jaw dropping. "Spinker?" he said weakly. "Say, ain't he that big guy with the red hair and the terrible temper?"

Gus whistled softly. "Now I remember," he muttered. "He's the fellow who was after you in that dream. Look here, kid—if you're scared to go—"

On Stan's face there was the look of the men who held Bastogne. "I'll go," he said, and climbed into the wrecker.

**A**LMOST an hour later he drove back into the shop with Spinker's car in tow. From the sedan the terrible-tempered Horace erupted, his face the hue of underdone roast beef and his stubby red mustache bristling belligerently. "What is this you're running—a clip joint?" he yelled at Gus. "You soak me for fixing my car, and this half-witted grease monkey of yours busts some-

thing so it dies on my hands! I'll report this to the Chamber of Commerce—I'll—"

"You'd better throttle down before you bust a blood vessel." Gus turned to Stan, who had got out of the wrecker looking as if he'd had a rough ride. "What's the matter with this bus?"

"I dunno," Stan growled, with a glare at Spinker. "I tried to check it but that screwball kept yelling at me."

Mr. Spinker had taken the shop's only chair. He leaped up again as if the business end of a hornet had made contact. "Screwball!" he howled. "I'll show you—"

Gus placed a large palm on his chest, and straightened his arm. The raging Horace sat down again—hard. "Just take it easy," Gus advised soothingly, "while we find out what's wrong."

Spinker sputtered for half a minute, and then suddenly switched from explosive rage to complaining self-pity. "I've got my living to earn," he moaned. "I've got to see a big customer downtown, and I'm an hour late already!"

"That'll work out swell," Gus told him. "You go ahead and see your customer, and when you get back we'll have your car ready for you. Better not waste any time—the bus is pretty near due, and there won't be another one for half an hour."

Spinker departed, still complaining. Gus grinned at Stan. "We're rid of that pest for a while," he said. "All right, kid—it's your baby."

**H**E WENT back to the job he had been working on, and Stan started to check Spinker's sedan. After making certain that



there was as much gasoline in the tank as the gauge indicated, he carefully examined the pump and the flexible coupling hose, and blew back on the fuel line. Obviously gasoline wasn't getting to the pump—it was as dry as a bone.

While he was scratching his head over the puzzle, Gus strolled over to him. "I haven't found it yet, boss," Stan admitted.

"Look in your pocket," Gus said.

"Huh?"

"Look in your pocket—your right-hand pants pocket."

Stan stared at his employer in deep puzzlement; then he felt in the pocket indicated, and after a moment fished out the little metal cylinder. As he looked at it his face flushed a fine brick red. "Holy cat!" he groaned.

"It's a good rule," Gus suggested mildly, "to put back anything you take off a car."

"I know, boss," Stan said contritely. "But this little do-funny dropped out of somewhere while I was working on the fuel-line connections yesterday afternoon. You were out and I couldn't find where it came from, so I put it in my pocket until I could ask you. Then I forgot about it until just now . . . Say, how th' heck did you know it *was* in my pocket?"

"I might have dreamed it," Gus told him with a grin, "but actually I found it in your coveralls this morning when I put 'em on by mistake. Remembering that you had worked on Spinker's car yesterday, I knew you were going to have trouble with a hot-tempered redhead."

Faint hope of an alibi brightened Stan's face. "Say, boss," he offered, "it couldn't have been my leaving this jigger off that made Spinker's bus stall. I road-tested it when I got finished yesterday, and he told me he didn't have any trouble until it coughed a couple of times and went dead on the way back from Centerville."

"Spinker told us he needed the car in time for an early start to Centerville," Gus said. "When I happened on that do-funny, as you call it, I figured he'd run into trouble on the way home, but it was too late to do anything to prevent it. So—"

"Wait—wait a minute, boss," Stan gulped. "You say you knew when Spinker's car was going to stall. How th' heck—"

Gus picked the little metal cylinder out of Stan's hand, and increased the grease monkey's suspense by relighting his pipe before talking. "This little gadget," he explained, "called a ferrule, is supposed to form a seal between the fuel line and the internal tank connection, and so prevent gas from getting out and air from getting in. It fits in under the connector, and the chamfers at both ends of it are to seal the lips of the fuel and connection lines. Get it?"

"Yeah—I see," Stan said. "But I don't see how you knew—"

"I'm telling you," Gus went on. "On Spinker's car the connection is about three inches above the tank bottom. While the tank is at least one-third full it doesn't make any great difference whether or not the ferrule is in because air can't leak into the system. But when the gasoline falls below the connection, air is drawn in and the fuel supply to the carburetor is cut off. Spinker had the tank filled when he called for the car last night. Knowing he was starting with a full tank, and that without the ferrule he'd be stalled when two-thirds of the gasoline was gone, it wasn't hard to figure he'd run into grief on the way home."

Joe Clark had come into the shop while Gus was talking. "You're a red-hot prophet, aren't you?" he said.

Gus wrote out a time slip covering the job, scrawled "no charge" on it, and handed it over to his partner with a grin. "Sure," he admitted, "but on this job prophecy is on the house!"

END

### Ferrule Bars Air from Gas Line

On some cars a small ferrule, chamfered at both ends, is used to insure an airtight seal at the point where the fuel line joins the tank. With this ferrule omitted, gasoline can be drawn out by the pump only while the fuel in the tank is above the imperfect coupling. When it falls below, air is sucked in and the fuel pump fails to deliver.

