

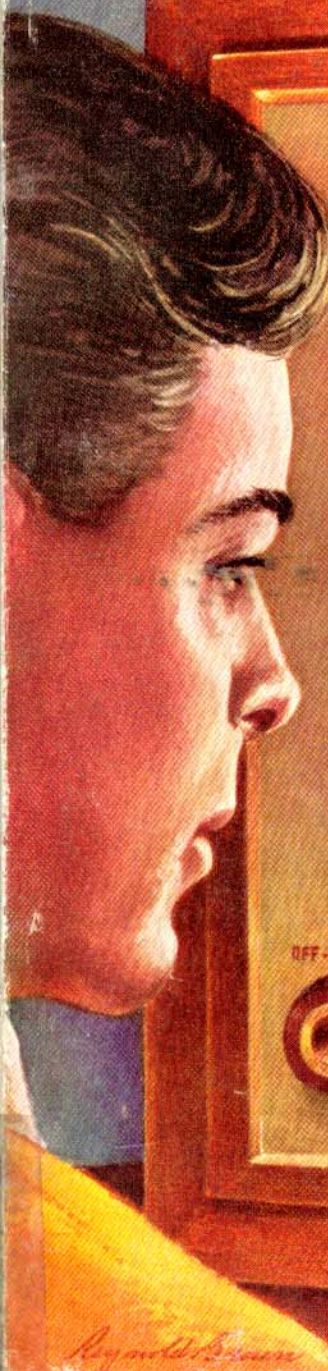
# POPULAR SCIENCE

Feb. 1949



25¢

Monthly



WHAT YOU WANT  
TO KNOW ABOUT  
TELEVISION

PAGE 114

OFF-ON VOLUME

BRIGHTNESS

HORIZ

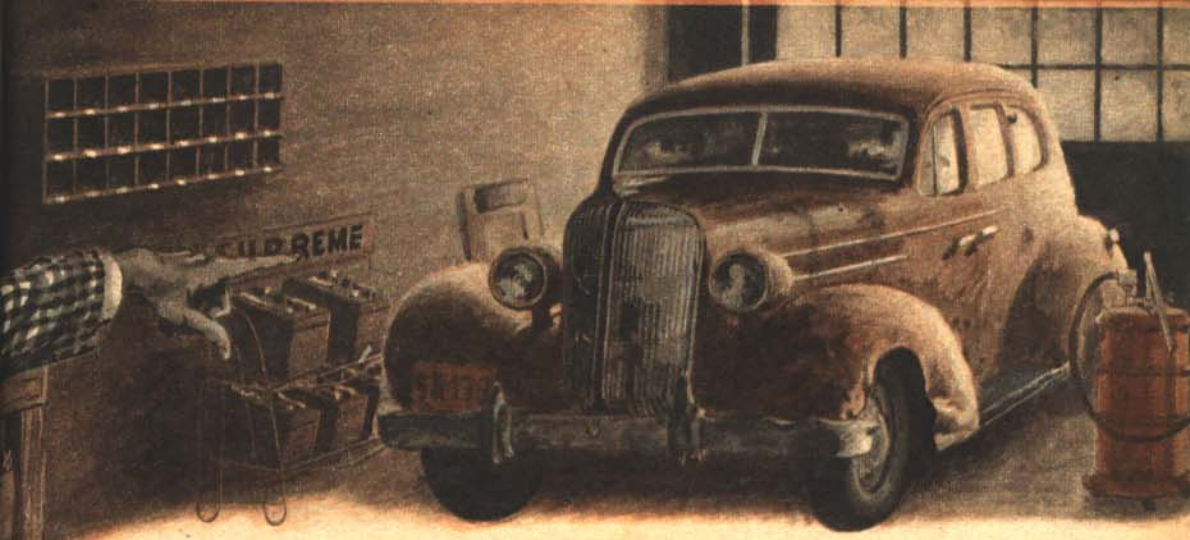
*Raymond Brown*





RAY CASBERG





*"Gabriella," Dr. Evants said, pointing, "is experiencing some slight mechanical difficulty. The symptoms are spasmodic misfiring."*

# Gus and the Car That Knew When to Stop

*By Martin Bunn*

WHEN you've run a garage as long as Gus Wilson has, you've just naturally seen so many people reacting to so many different situations that nothing much surprises you. That's one reason Gus is so slow to make snap judgments about people or cars. But then along comes something that gives you a jolt, sort of knocks your hat off, and leaves you standing there scratching your head and wondering.

The day this happened to Gus started like any other day at the Model Garage. Stan Hicks, who's learning to be a pretty good mechanic, and Greg Jones, the grease monkey, were laughing and kidding each other as Stan began checking a generator. Gus had picked up a main-bearing job where he'd left off the evening before. Then a '35 sedan rolled into the shop.

The man who stepped out of it looked like a Hollywood version of the absent-minded professor. He wore earth-stained sneakers, baggy corduroy trousers, a checkered jacket, and a frayed shirt with wing collar but no

necktie. His lined face, half hidden by an untidy gray beard, was crowned by a rumpled thatch of snow-white hair. His eyes, behind silver-rimmed spectacles, were sharp enough, but there was a dreamy look about them.

Greg Jones—he's only a kid, remember—looked up and started giggling. Gus is lenient with his helpers, but he draws the line at two things—slipshod work and bad manners. A frown from Gus squelched the giggling as he stepped forward to meet this oddly dressed old man. Gus had seen him around town and had heard about him.

"Good morning, Dr. Evants," he said.

"Know me, do you?" Jason Evants replied. "I've never seen *you* before." He looked Gus over carefully and, as though alone, spoke his thoughts. "High degree of mechanical ability. Dependable—very. Ingenious. Even a bit of imagination. Should be able to do it."

Gus smiled at the old man.

"Gabriella," Dr. Evants went on, pointing a sharp finger at the old sedan, "is experienc-



ing some slight mechanical difficulty. The symptoms are spasmodic misfiring, which results in something less than optimum performance on ascending gradients."

"The old gal's having trouble taking the hills," Gus translated to himself. And then to Dr. Evants: "Had the car worked on?"

"No," Dr. Evants shook his head. "I took Gabriella to a repair shop in the city, but the young man I consulted lacked the mechanical, spiritual, and emotional qualifications that I demand in anyone who touches her. Now, at the suggestion of my friend, Mrs. Miller, Gabriella and I have come to you."

### "*Gabriella Warns Me*"

Mrs. Miller, a buxom, talkative woman, goes for fads—especially if they are labeled "modern." She started with Couéism, ran through Mah Jong, modern art, and surrealism, and then heard about Dr. Evants. When he moved into a shabby little house on the edge of our town, she took up both him and his highly peculiar ideas. More than once, when bringing her abused car in for repairs, she had given Gus a sample of her gushing enthusiasm for Dr. Evants.

"Mrs. Miller has told me about your philosophy of . . . er . . .," Gus began.

"My philosophy of Universal Sentientcy," Dr. Evants helped him out. "Possibly you have read my book of that title?"

"I'm afraid it would be way over my head."

"You underestimate your percipience," Dr. Evants smiled. "There is nothing in my philosophy of Universal Sentientcy that is at all difficult for anyone of average intelligence to understand. Why, even Mrs. Miller—but, as I was saying, my philosophy is founded on the easily proved fact that everything in the universe is sentient. That is, that all inanimate objects have feelings and intelligences of their own."

"You mean," Gus interrupted, "that rocks and trees can think?"

"Not only rocks and trees," said Dr. Evants, "but everything. The cars here in your shop, the pipe you are smoking, the tobacco burning in it, this concrete floor—all think and feel. The more complex objects, after they have been in close contact with a particular human being, acquire some of the mental characteristics of their owner. Gabriella, for example, has as warm an affection for me as I have for her. She always warns me . . ."

Stan Hicks, who had edged up behind Gus to listen, snickered loudly. Gus brought the

heel of his shoe down on Stan's foot, changing the snicker to an "ouch."

"Sorry, Stan," Gus said. "Get me the compressometer, will you?"

As Stan limped away, Dr. Evants looked after him. "As I was saying," he continued, "Gabriella always warns me of approaching disaster or trouble. She has her own ways of doing it, and it is because I have learned her ways that I am what the unthinking call 'alive' today."

"Warns you?" Gus said. "How?"

"She has her ways," Dr. Evants calmly repeated. "Do you wish to examine her?"

"Huh?—Oh, yes," Gus stammered, trying to collect his thoughts. "Misfires sometimes, you say, and hasn't any pep on hills. Let's check the compression."

The compressometer quickly told him that there was a compression leak in each of the old sedan's cylinders but that the leakage was much greater in one of them. After testing this cylinder a second time, Gus poured in a spoonful of heavy oil and tried again.

"Valve leak," he told Dr. Evants. "The oil temporarily seals leakage past the piston rings, so if that had been the trouble the compression would have been higher with the oil than without it. I'll have to grind the valves."

"That will be quite satisfactory—provided you do the work," Dr. Evants agreed. "Gabriella is an old and valued friend. Nothing is too good for her."

"I'll take the best care of the old gal," Gus promised. "If I come across anything else that needs to be fixed . . ."

"Don't touch it!" The old man's voice boomed out explosively. "Don't dare touch it."

"All right, but why not?" Gus inquired.

Dr. Evants shook his head stubbornly. "Gabriella is as intelligent as you are—yes, even as intelligent as I am. With the exception of the valve grinding I have authorized, leave her exactly as she is. Tampering might disrupt the method she has evolved of warning me of the approach of danger or difficulty. Leave her alone."

"Okay," Gus shrugged, "she's your baby. But tell me, how does she warn you?"

### *The Car That Stopped*

"Gabriella has absorbed much of my own perspicacity," Dr. Evants said seriously. "She knows when danger is near, and she refuses to budge when she knows that it would endanger me."

"What do you mean?" Gus asked.





Gus did a careful job of grinding and adjusting the valves.

"Well, one dark night I was driving along an unfamiliar country road. Without warning, Gabriella stopped. While I was attempting to restart her engine, a whistle shrieked and a fast train thundered over a blind crossing not five yards ahead of us."

"You mean she knew that train was coming and stopped just in time?"

"Correct," Dr. Evants said. "If Gabriella hadn't stopped when she did, the train would have struck us. On another occasion I was about to leave home for the day. When I pressed the starter button, the engine refused to start."

"What was it that time?" Gus asked.

"I told myself that Gabriella knows best and gave up my plans for the day. I went back in the house and out on the veranda to look at my white mice. My relaxation from the rigors of philosophical thinking is the study of heredity. Imagine my consternation when I discovered that I had left the cage open! My gratitude to Gabriella was unbounded for sending me back before more than a few had escaped. There have been many similar occurrences. So leave Gabriella alone. Don't touch anything but the valves." The old man turned and strode from the shop.

#### *Gus Disobeys an Order*

After Gus had ground and adjusted the valves of the old sedan, he climbed in and stepped on the starter. Nothing happened.

"Hey, boss," Stan called, "you better duck. The old jalopy's warning you now."

"Darned if I don't believe she is," Gus laughed. He tried the starter again, this time watching the instrument panel. When he took his foot off the button he noticed that

even though the switch was on, the ammeter did not register. He decided the switch was causing the trouble. When he disassembled it, he found both of the contacts badly burned and the rotating switch parts loose. When they slipped enough to let the burned parts touch, the circuit opened and the engine wouldn't start, or stopped if it had been running.

If that had happened while the car was on that railroad crossing instead of just before it got there, Gus thought, old Evants wouldn't be around now. And just to keep that from happening sometime when he isn't so lucky, I'll fix it and not say anything about it.

So thinking, Gus filed the burned spots and tightened the loose parts. This time, when he stepped on the starter, the engine took off instantly.

The afternoon was unusually busy. Gus and his two helpers were up to their necks in work and the shop floor was cluttered with cars when Dr. Evants returned.

"Gabriella's been rejuvenated," Gus told the doctor.

"Excellent, excellent," the old man beamed. "What is my indebtedness to you?"

Gus told him and Dr. Evants handed him a twenty-dollar bill. Gus called Greg Jones, who was busy with an air hose, and told him to get change from the office. Dr. Evants, meanwhile, looked around doubtfully.

"I'm not certain I can maneuver Gabriella out of your shop," he said. "It's so crowded."

"Better let me," Gus offered. "I'm used to turning 'em around." Dr. Evants moved over and Gus slid into the seat. He stepped on the starter but the engine didn't fire.

"Stop! It's a warning! Gabriella knows something!" Dr. Evants cried.

Greg came running out of the office. "Gee," he said, "I heard the starter. It's a good thing you didn't move."

"Why not?" Gus asked.

For answer, Greg hustled to the rear of Dr. Evants' car and removed the air hose he had slung around the bumper when Gus had called him.

Gus whistled. "By golly, I believe you're right," he told Dr. Evants. "Gabriella does know. If I'd moved the car, I'd have ruined the hose or pulled out the air pipe." He stepped on the button again and the engine took hold immediately. Dr. Evants merely smiled.

Several days later Gus saw Gabriella parked on the street. As he passed her, he tipped his hat.

END