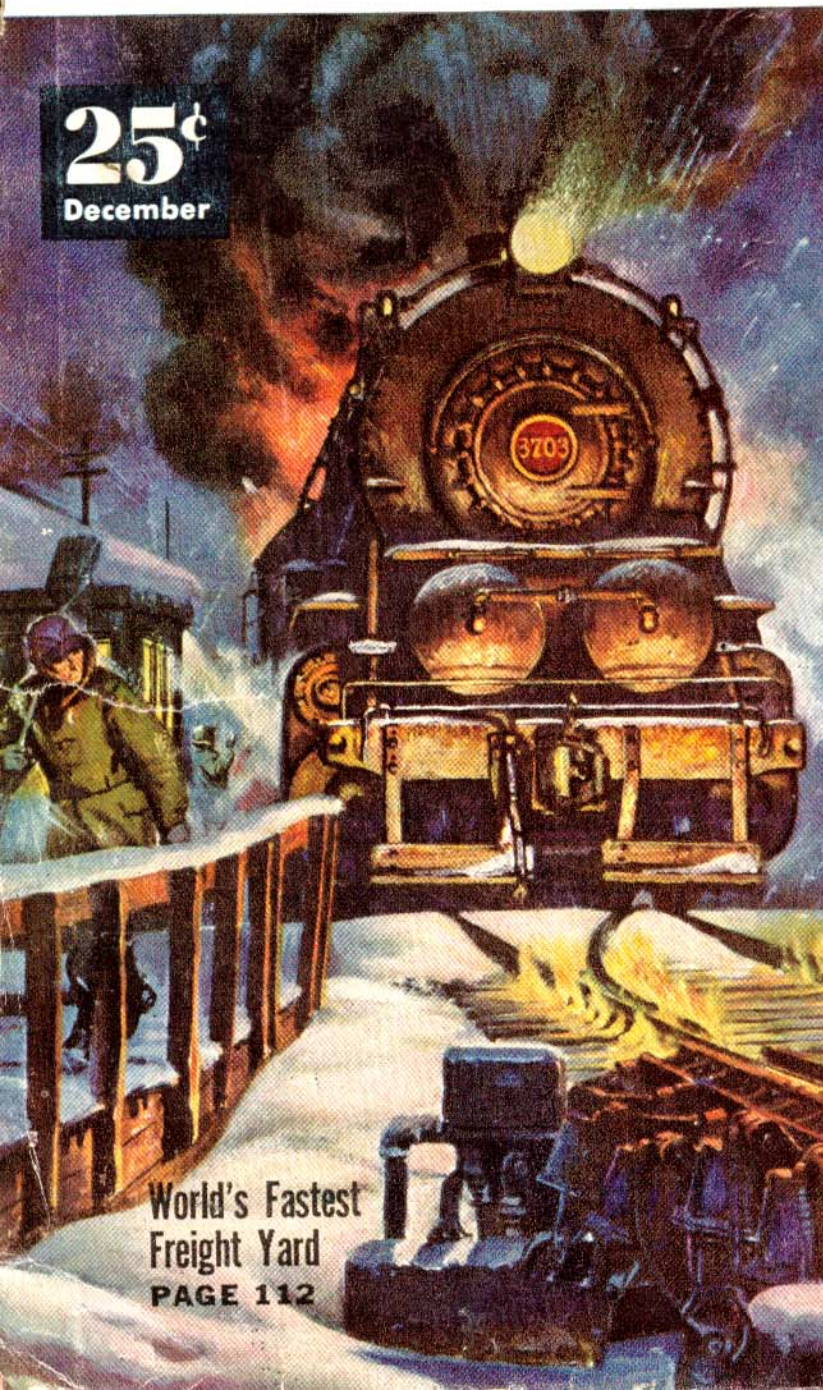


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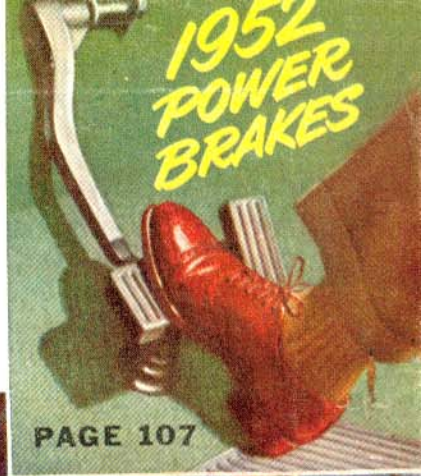
MONTHLY

MECHANICS AND HANDICRAFT

25¢
December



World's Fastest
Freight Yard
PAGE 112



1952
POWER
BRAKES

PAGE 107



The two men were standing in the road waving their arms and shouting at each other.

Gus Cracks the Ice for Santa

By Martin Bunn

Christmas looked tough for Tony—his trees late for market, a smashup and lawsuit on his hands. Just the spot for Santa's helper from the Model Garage.

A HEAVY blizzard just after Thanksgiving had snarled up traffic. Subsequent storms added to the snowfall—till now, only a couple of weeks before Christmas, high banks were piled up on either side of the roads.

As a result, most of Gus Wilson's chores at the Model Garage consisted of mending broken tire chains and sending out the wrecker to pull cars out of the drifts. And that sort of work isn't Gus Wilson's idea of the garage business.

It was about nine o'clock one night with the mercury dipping uncomfortably to the zero mark, when Gus and Stan Hicks, his helper, were driving back to the garage from one of the many tow calls. Gus wouldn't have answered the call at that hour if it hadn't come from his old crony Doc Marvin,



who had got himself stuck in a drift on the outskirts of town and had to get back to the hospital to perform an operation.

"Cripes, it's cold," grumbled Stan as Gus maneuvered the wrecker along the white ribbon of road between the snowbanks. "A hot cup of coffee sure will taste good."

"Dan's Grill is the next stop," Gus assured him, "if I don't slide off the road into one of these drifts myself."

Just then a horn blasted and headlights flashed behind them. Gus swerved the wrecker as far to the right as he could, and a big sedan sped by. It kicked up such a swirling plume of snow that Gus had to slow almost to a stop.

A Guy Looking for an Accident

"Darned fool," muttered Gus as he switched on the wipers to clear the windshield. "There goes a guy who's sure looking for an accident."

Gus no sooner had the words out of his mouth than there was a muffled, crunching crash ahead.

"Sounds like he's found it," said Stan.

Gus slowed the wrecker for the hill and curve that he knew were ahead. A glow from headlights told them that the crash was probably just around the turn.

It was an odd sight. The big car that had passed them had plowed into the rear of an open truck piled high with Christmas trees. Through a cloud of churned-up snow and falling balsam needles, Gus and Stan could make out the figures of two men standing in the middle of the road. One was a big heavy-set fellow, the other small and slight. The little man was waving his arms wildly. Both were shouting at the tops of their lungs.

Gus Cools Off a Hothead

"Anybody hurt?" called Gus as he and Stan slid out of the wrecker's cab.

The shorter of the two men ran toward Gus, and Gus recognized Tony Johns, a successful truck farmer with a place a few miles out of town.

"Gus," said Tony, "am I glad to see you! I parked here just a few minutes ago to see what was wrong with my truck and the next thing—whammo—this guy smashes into the back of my truck. Now he says he's gonna sue me!"

"You're blamed right I am," shouted the big man, pulling the collar of his heavy overcoat up around his ears. "You picked a fine place to park on a night like this."

"The truck was acting up so I had to stop. I pulled over to the side of the road as



far as I could without getting into a drift.”

“Well, there’s a law in this state that says when a truck is parked for repairs, the driver must set out flares to warn other drivers.”

Gus hadn’t the slightest idea who the man was. Judging from his car and clothes, he was someone with money and maybe influence—but Gus felt it was about time he stepped in.

“Now wait a minute, mister,” he said. “When it comes to laws, there’s also a law against reckless driving, and I wouldn’t call what you did when you highballed past me back there exactly safe driving.”

“Well, what about my car?” asked the man, cooling off considerably.

No Great Harm Done

Gus walked over to the big sedan. Judging from the tracks in the snow the car had been braked considerably before plowing into the back end of Tony’s truck. The skid had turned the big sedan slightly sideways and a few extra Christmas trees that Tony had tied onto the back of his truck evidently had helped ease the shock. The angle at which the car hit had saved the radiator. About all the damage Gus could detect was a slightly rumpled right fender.

“Have you tried to start her?” Gus asked.

“No.”

“Well, see if you can, then back her away slowly.”

The big man grunted as he squeezed himself under the wheel. The engine took hold immediately.

“Okay,” called Gus. “Now ease her back.”

Inch by inch the front of the car moved away from the truck and its load of trees.

As it did, Gus followed, looking down at the right wheel and fender.

“No great damage, mister. Set your brake for a minute and I’ll bend this fender up a bit so there’ll be no chance of the wheel hitting it when you make a sharp turn. Then you can be on your way. There, that’s got it.”

Stranger Drives Off in a Huff

Without so much as a “thank you” the big man shifted into first and turned out into the road. He leaned out of the driver’s window and shouted, “You farmers haven’t heard the last of me yet.” And then he roared off down the highway.

Gus laughed. “Pleasant sort of guy to run into on a dark night. Now tell me, Tony, what are you doing out on a night like this?”

“Christmas trees,” replied Tony, waving his arm in the direction of his truck. “Got a new winter business. I buy ’em, cut ’em down and sell ’em in the city. This is my first load and I gotta deliver these trees tonight. But something’s gone wrong with my truck.”

“Engine stalled?”

“No, but right after I left my farm she began to shake. You know,” Tony added, groping for the right word, “she began to . . .”

“Vibrate?”

“That’s right, she vibrated from side to side. And the faster I went the worse she shook. So finally I stopped here to take a look.”

“Umm. Well, there’s no sense trying to find what’s wrong out here. Let’s head for the garage. I’ll drive the truck and Stan can trail us in the wrecker just in case things get worse.”

Gus Gets the Shakes

They hadn’t gone very far when Gus realized that the vibration Tony had complained of was no figment of the imagination. At slow speeds, it wasn’t too noticeable, but when the truck hit about 25 she really started to shake.

“When did you first notice this?” asked Gus, his voice quivering in tune with the vibration of the truck.

“Right after I started out tonight. She always ran fine up to now.”

When they reached the Model Garage Stan, who had gone on ahead in the wrecker when he saw that the truck would make it, had the doors open and the lights on.

[Continued on page 252]



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Gus Cracks the Ice for Santa

[Continued from page 198]

"Keep your coats on, boys," called Stan as Gus and Tony climbed off the truck. "It's almost as cold in here as it is outside. I'm afraid little Stanley forgot to put some coal on the fire when we left to help out Doc Marvin."

"Well, start stokin'," said Gus. "And when you finish that, how about brewin' some coffee on the hot plate?"

"Heat and java coming up."

A Tough Spot for Tony

"Well, Tony," said Gus, "now let's see if we can find out what's causing this truck of yours to shake. I hate to say it, but I'm afraid that maybe the universal on your drive shaft is shot."

"Is that bad?"

"It ain't good," replied Gus as he wheeled a jack under the truck's differential. "If that's the trouble, I'm afraid you won't deliver those trees tonight."

"Don't say that, Gus. I gotta get those trees into the city tonight. No trees tonight, the man said, no business. No business and I'm stuck with a coupla hundred trees."

When Gus had the rear wheels of the truck raised up off the floor he climbed into the driver's seat, started the engine, put the gearshift in high, and walked around to the rear of the truck again. At idling speed, there seemed to be little or no vibration. Without actually getting under the truck, Gus kneeled down, trouble light in hand, and inspected the drive shaft. He couldn't see any side movement.

"Anything I can do while the coffee's brewin'?" asked Stan.

"Yeah, there is. Put two permanent screw jacks under that rear axle. I want to get underneath and have a look while you give the engine the gun."

Gus Goes Looking for Trouble

When Stan had put the two jacks in place and had climbed into the driver's seat, Gus stretched out on his creeper and wheeled himself under the truck.

"Stan," he called. "Give her the gas until she starts to shake, then ease off. Remember I'm under here, so don't push her too far. She might wiggle herself off these jacks and I don't want to be under here if she does."

"Okay, Gus, here she goes."

Stan repeated the process of speeding up

[Continued on page 254]



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Gus Cracks the Ice for Santa

[Continued from page 252]

the truck's engine and then letting it slow down several times. Finally, from under the truck Gus's voice told him to shut the engine off.

"Find anything?" Stan asked when he joined Gus at the rear of the truck.

Truck Shimmies Like Gilda Gray

Gus shook his head as he wiped his hands on a batch of waste. "Not a thing. There's not a sign of anything the matter with the drive shaft, yet every time you gunned the engine the old chassis started to shimmy like Gilda Gray."

"Like who?" asked Stan.

"Forget it," said Gus. "I guess she was before your time."

"Well, at least the heat's coming up," Stan announced, shedding his coat. "What's the next step?"

"Think you can fix her, Gus?" chimed in Tony.

"I think so," Gus lied.

Then Gus did what he always did when some repair job had got him down. He perched on his bench and began thumbing shreds of tobacco into his pipe. He was just about to put a match to it, when he stopped, blew out the match, and slid down off the bench. A moment later he was on the creeper and had disappeared under the truck again.

Tony looked at Stan and shrugged.

A Quick Hunch Pays Off

A few seconds later, Gus's graying head popped out from under the truck. "Stan, get me a cold chisel and a hammer, will you?"

When Stan had handed him the tools, his head popped in again and presently Stan and Tony heard some dull thuds followed by a metal-against-metal clanking. Finally the noise stopped and Gus, still on his back on the creeper, slid out. He looked up at Stan and Tony and grinned.

"Let's try her again. Tony, I think we've found the source of your wiggle."

Stan clambered up into the cab again while Gus and Tony watched. Stan fed the gas slowly at first. No vibration. Then he really tramped down on the pedal. Still no shakes or shimmies other than the normal vibrations that were set up by the racing engine.

"She's fixed," shouted Tony gleefully.

[Continued on page 256]

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Gus Cracks the Ice for Santa

[Continued from page 254]

clapping Gus on the back. "What did you do?"

"Tony, where did you park that truck this afternoon?" asked Gus.

"Same place as always. In the yard outside my house."

"Much snow there?"

"Sure, plenty. Maybe two feet, maybe more."

"Well, you evidently scooped up quite a hunk of it on the flange of your emergency-brake drum that's mounted on the drive shaft," explained Gus. "It froze there. Then as you drove along it picked up dirt, sand and more ice from the snow kicked up by your front wheels."

Tony still looked a bit puzzled.

"You see, Tony, that hunk of ice and dirt added considerable weight to one point on your emergency-brake drum and when the drum, mounted as it is on the drive shaft, turned at high speed, it set up quite a vibration. It was out of balance."

"But how did you spot the trouble?"

"While I was sitting up there on my bench trying to think what might cause it, I happened to spot that little trickle of water coming out from under the truck," Gus explained, pointing down at the floor. "That gave me a hunch what was wrong. Then I looked and found that glob of ice and dirt on the brake drum. It had started to melt as the shop warmed up."

Gus Gets a Christmas Tree

Later, when Tony had paid his bill, had insisted on leaving one of his Christmas trees so that Gus and Stan could decorate the garage for the holidays, and was backing out of the shop, he suddenly stopped and poked his head out of the driver's window.

"Say, Gus," he called out, "do you think that big ape really means to sue?"

"Not a chance," grinned Gus. "After all, there were only two witnesses—and they're both on your side. Merry Christmas to you, Tony." END

Next Month: Gus delves into the mystery of the car that wouldn't turn left.

Asphalt Shingles Give Car Traction

A FEW asphalt roof shingles carried in the car trunk will help you move out of a slippery spot.
—Richard Grey, Bethesda, Md.