

POPULAR SCIENCE

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MECHANICS AND HANDICRAFT

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*Wilbur Shaw's
Report on
Chevrolet*

PAGE 118

How to Help
Build a House

PAGE 151



By **Martin Bunn**

GUS WILSON had never worried too much about competition. Most of the people in town just naturally brought their cars to the Model Garage when they needed repairs. So Gus and Stan Hicks, his helper, ordinarily had more work than they could comfortably handle.

Then, one morning not long ago, something happened that set Gus to thinking. He had arrived at the garage a little earlier than usual and was working on a tune-up job when Stan Hicks came hurrying in, all out of breath.

"Gosh, Gus," Stan said excitedly, "have you heard the rumor?"

"Lots of them. What's the latest?"



Gus Bets on a Long Shot

Those rumors about a de luxe service station opening right next to the Model Garage didn't worry Gus much—only \$500 worth!

"Gee, I sorta hate to tell you. But I had breakfast at Dan's place this morning and he told me something I guess you oughta know."

"What's that?"

"Well, Dan says two strangers came into his place for dinner last night and he heard them talking about garages. They looked like a couple of businessmen from the city and they were discussing some sort of a deal to buy that land down here on the corner for a big new service station. You know, one of those super, glamor jobs with all kinds of equipment and a flock of attendants in white coveralls. It sure could be tough on us."

"Probably just a rumor," Gus said and turned back to his test panel.

Gus Spends a Sleepless Night

But if Gus thought that his nonchalance had fooled Stan, he was wrong. And if he thought he was successfully kidding himself, he was wrong again. The rest of that



day and most of the night, Gus thought a good deal about what might happen if some big service station and garage did move in practically next door. Sure, he told himself, a lot of the townspeople would continue to patronize the Model Garage, but he also knew that a flashy front and high-pressure selling have put more than one small outfit out of business.

He was still worrying about it when he showed up at the garage the next morning.

"Hi, Gus," Stan greeted him. "Some guy in a convertible stopped by about 15 minutes ago. Had a bad engine miss, but



*"Here's your money, Mr. Kell,
and thanks for a nice deal."*

wouldn't leave his car. Said he didn't want anyone but you to touch it. He'll be back."

"Someone we know?"

"Never saw him before. But he said he'd heard about you."

Gus felt a little better after hearing that. Maybe the Model Garage's good reputation would be insurance against any competition that might come into the neighborhood. He was just about to go to work when he heard a car pull up outside.

"Here's that guy with the convertible," called Stan.

Gus walked toward the parked car.

"Something I can do for you?" he asked the man behind the wheel.

"You sure can if you're Gus Wilson."

"Well, that's me."

"Mighty glad to know you, Mr. Wilson. My name's Kell, Stanley T. Kell. From all I hear you're quite a guy when it comes to fixing cars."

"Thanks, Mr. Kell," grinned Gus. "What seems to be ailing yours?"

"Well, every once in a while she begins missing a beat. Runs fine one day and acts up the next. Right now, she's acting up. Here, listen." Kell pushed down slowly on



the gas pedal. There was little doubt that the engine wasn't perking on all cylinders.

"I've had it to a half-dozen places. Fakers, all of 'em," Kell grumbled. "They've practically rebuilt the engine and the miss still comes back."

Gus listened to the engine for a few moments. "Okay. Drive her inside and we'll see what we can find."

Stranger Rubs Gus the Wrong Way

Kell was a short, wiry man, nattily dressed in expensive clothes. His whole manner exuded self-confidence. "Small place you've got here for such a big reputation," he commented. "Little cramped for space, aren't you?"

Gus concealed his irritation. "Oh, we manage. . . Now, Mr. Kell, it may take a little time to track down the trouble, so if you've got some business downtown why not drop back in an hour or so? I'll try to have your car ready."

Kell glanced at a gold wrist watch. "Oh, I've got plenty of time. I don't have to be downtown until lunch time. Then I hope to settle a real-estate deal."

Gus looked at Stan and Stan looked at Gus.

"Funny thing, too," Kell went on, as he perched himself up on Gus's stool and lighted a cigarette. "It has to do with a piece of property right down the road here—a corner lot. I happen to hold a small option on it. Some folks want to buy it and they'll have to pay me off if they want the land."

Gus said nothing as he went about check-

ing the engine. He was pretty sure from the sound that the trouble was in the ignition system. Kell hadn't been kidding when he'd said that the other garages had practically rebuilt the engine. It had a new distributor, new coil, new carburetor, new spark plugs.

Kell talked on. Gus, with one ear cocked at Kell and the other at the engine, soon learned that his visitor was a real-estate operator who made most of his money buying up long-term options and gambling that someone else would want to buy the land before his option ran out.

Stan Neglects His Work

While all this was going on, Stan Hicks was working on a car on the grease rack. Actually, he wasn't getting much done. He was listening and wondering what was going through Gus's mind. Kell obviously held the key to the whole deal that the two men in Dan's place had talked about.

"Gosh," thought Stan, "I hope the boss can think up some way to delay this guy."

Just then Gus's head popped out from under the hood of the car. "I think I've found your trouble, Mr. Kell."

Gus started the engine and moved the throttle lever at the carburetor. She took the gas easily without a skip.

"There was a worn spot on the ignition wire leading to the second cylinder and the wire was shorting out the plug. I taped it so it shouldn't give you any more trouble."

"Well, that certainly was fast service." Kell reached into his pocket and pulled out some folded bills. "I can see why you don't need a bigger place. You turn 'em out fast. What do I owe you?"

Option Comes Up Again

"Oh, I guess a couple of dollars will take care of the labor. By the way, where did you say that property was?"

"Right down the road here. Corner lot. Say, you know that spot would make a swell place for you to put up a new garage."

"Could be," said Gus thoughtfully. "Guess maybe it might. What's it worth?"

"Dirt cheap." Kell snapped his fingers. "The owners only want two thousand for the land and I'm willing to let my option go for five hundred."

"But what about the other people?"

"First come, first served, I always say," Kell said briskly. "I've made no binding deal and your money's as good as theirs."

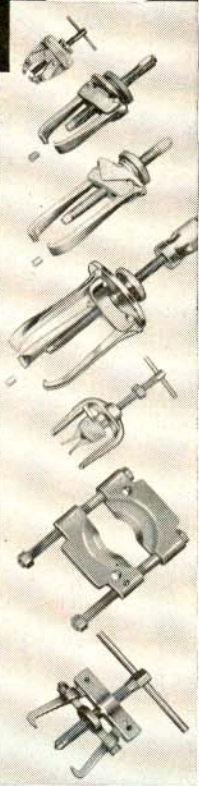
[Continued on page 248]



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Gus Bets on a Long Shot

[Continued from page 196]

Gus thought for a moment. "Well," he said finally, "I haven't got that much ready cash on hand. Can you wait until I go to the bank and draw it?"

Kell looked at his watch again. "Ten past 11," he said. "Well, sure. You ought to be able to get back here in time for me to call the other folks before noon and tell them the deal's off."

"I'll get back as fast as I can." Gus pulled his coat on over his coveralls. "Stan, make Mr. Kell comfortable until I get back."

Gus Closes the Deal Fast

Gus got back to the garage at about a quarter to 12. "Here's your money, Mr. Kell," Gus said, as he handed over five crisp 100-dollar bills. "And thanks for a nice deal." Five minutes later the transaction was completed. Kell had his five hundred, Gus had Kell's option papers duly signed over and Stan wore a big grin.

"Mind if I use the phone?" asked Kell. "Help yourself. I'll get back to the shop and get your car ready for you."

Gus was just about to slam down the hood on the car when Kell appeared. "Well, that's that," he said, rubbing his hands together. "And much obliged to you, Mr. Wilson. When you get that new garage built I'll have to come out and see it."

As Kell backed his car out, Gus turned to Stan. "Hope I've done the right thing."

"You've got the option, haven't you? Now those other lugs can't move in on us. I can see it now—a brand-new Model Garage down on the corner."

Gus chuckled. "We'll see."

Gus's Long Shot Romps Home

About 10 minutes later Stan heard Gus answer the phone. He didn't talk long and shortly walked into the repair shop with a mile-wide grin on his face.

"Stan, it worked."

"What worked?"

"They nabbed all three of them."

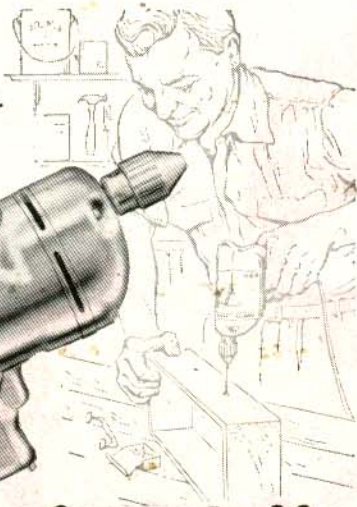
"All three of who?"

"Why, our old friend Mr. Kell and the two talkative fellows who had dinner last night at Dan's place. Sergeant Jerry Corcoran of the State Police just picked them up down at Terry's Grill. They were busy dividing up the loot."

"Whoa, slow down, boss," put in Stan.

[Continued on page 252]

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252 POPULAR SCIENCE

Gus Bets on a Long Shot

[Continued from page 248]

"You lost me going around that last turn."

"Well, first of all, when I finally found what was causing Kell's engine to miss I realized it was no accident. Someone had deliberately cut the insulation on the wire so that it would short-circuit on the metal ignition-wire conduit."

"You mean he wanted something to be wrong with his car so he'd have an excuse to come here and talk to you?"

"Right. Then when I suspected that, his whole story began to sound awfully pat. Finally, when I went down to the bank I asked them about the property. It turned out they're handling it and no one's ever held an option on it."

"But what about your five hundred bucks?"

Gus Thinks of Everything

"Right now, it's safe in Jerry Corcoran's pocket." Gus chuckled. "They're marked bills and the bank has a record of the serial numbers."

"But gosh, what a gamble you took," Stan protested. "That guy might have scrambled with your money before he was caught."

"It wasn't really much of a gamble. I called Jerry from the bank and by the time I got back he was parked up the road here ready to tail Kell the minute he left."

"And just to make sure," Gus added with a wink, "I stuffed a wad of waste soaked in gasket cement into the end of the exhaust pipe on Kell's car. He couldn't have got very far before that cement would have hardened and the back pressure would have killed his engine."

Swindlers' Scheme Backfires

Gus fired up his pipe and blew a couple of smoke rings. "According to Jerry, this bunch of swindlers has been pulling the same game in four states. Haven't varied it a bit—the same pitch within earshot of someone they knew was a good friend of the intended victim and would tell him."

"Gosh, and here all morning I've been dreaming about a new Model Garage," sighed Stan.

"This place is kind of small, isn't it?" Gus mimicked the dapper Mr. Kell.

"Yeah," said Stan, laughing. "And, boy, what a reputation. I'll bet Kell will remember it for a long, long time." **END**

Next Month: Gus tackles a flat-tire mystery.