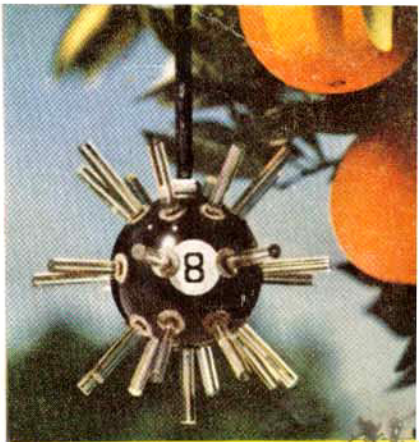


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# Gus Defies the Elements

By Martin Bunn

BLACK thunderheads were piling up on the horizon, blotting out the late sun of an April afternoon, as Gus Wilson tossed his tool kit into the back seat.

He wished he could send Stan Hicks, his young helper, on what promised to be a routine but uncomfortable job: a truck stalled in the hills with ignition trouble. But Art Robler's truck line was a new outfit in town and a prospect for considerable steady business. Gus wanted the Model Garage to make a good first impression.

He drove with a wary eye on the sky. Outside of town, a sudden torrent of wind-driven rain lashed across the windshield. Gus finally came down into the narrow canyon that held the torrent of Rolling Rock Creek, to find the truck, attended by one of Robler's drivers, a slender, youthful fellow in wet dungarees. The front wheels of the truck had sunk into the soft shoulder of the road until the pan rested on the ground.

## *Truck Is Still Partly on Road*

Gus found himself regretting that he hadn't brought his tow truck, until he noticed that the dual rear wheels of the truck were still on the road. They'd have no trouble backing the outfit onto the highway, once the motor was fixed.

"I'm Gus Wilson of the Model Garage," he told the driver as he got out of his car, tool kit in hand. "Robler phoned me that you were having trouble up



*The truck driver was hanging on to Gus's arm, shaking it. "We've got to get out of here!" he cried.*

## *With flood water swirling at*

here. Looks like a nice day for ducks."

"Ducks is right," the driver agreed, grinning. "Holloway's the name—Steve Holloway."

"Glad to know you, Steve," Gus said heartily. "Now what's your trouble? We'd better move fast; this storm's turning into a real cloudburst."

"Nothing much wrong," Steve assured Gus. "The stud that holds the distributor shaft came loose, and the thing worked up out of gear. I tried to put it back but didn't have much luck."

"We'll fix that in a hurry," Gus said, lifting one side of the hood and placing



*his feet, Gus finds a magic wand in his own tool kit.*

it on his broad back to shield the ignition wires from the rain while he peered at the motor.

This was going to be easy, Gus told himself. The driver had pulled the distributor, shaft and gear completely out of its recess hole in the block, first disconnecting the attached automatic spark vacuum-control tubing. Gus thrust his screwdriver blade into the flywheel-timing hole, prying the flywheel around by its teeth until No. 1 firing indicator showed, so that he could time the motor quickly when he shoved the distributor back in gear. Below the gear there was

a keyway that slipped into a key on the oil pump below. All he had to do, Gus thought, was to drop the shaft back in with the gear set for No. 1 firing, wiggle it to engage key and keyway, and put the retaining stud back in.

Such retaining studs normally had short-coiled springs, held down under a flat washer, so that the distributor could move back and forth in the retaining-stud slot, for manual spark control. Before attempting to put the distributor shaft back in its foot-deep, inch-wide recess hole, Gus used his pencil light to look for the five-sixteenths retaining

stud and its spring, hoping to find them lying on the splash shield.

He quickly found the stud, its washer still on it, but couldn't locate the spring. Oh, well, he thought, he'd just put on a lock washer and lock the distributor in advanced-spark position.

#### *Assembly Won't Go Down*

Gus picked up distributor and shaft, attempted to thrust it down in and seat it. But the assembly wouldn't go fully down on its seat on the crankcase. The shaft had a resilient, springy feel. The thought came to Gus that he had located the missing spring. Sure as shooting, it had dropped down into the shaft hole when the driver had lifted out the assembly.

"How're you coming?" Steve Holloway yelled above the drumming rain.

"Not so good," Gus shouted back. "A little spring has dropped down there on top of the pump shaft. I've got to get it out some way."

Gus backed out from beneath the hood to stand in thought beside the truck. His eyes moved to the waters of Rolling Rock Creek, which were rapidly rising to an angry, raging torrent with the rain.

If it was raining this hard here, Gus knew it was probably coming down in solid sheets higher up. The creek would be over its banks in 10 minutes. There was plenty of loose timber slash above, from logging operations, that would come drifting down like battering rams. If they were still here then, anything could happen, with the truck so close to the stream bank.

Even as Gus stood there, he saw a tangle of driftwood come down the white-maned stream with the speed of an express train. Cold chills ran up his spine as he turned his attention back to the disabled truck.

He grabbed a long-shafted screwdriver and began probing for the offending spring. If it were standing on end, he thought, he could get the driver blade inside it, and by side pressure ride it up to the top.

Or if it were on its side, he could just poke the screwdriver blade between its coils and lift it out.

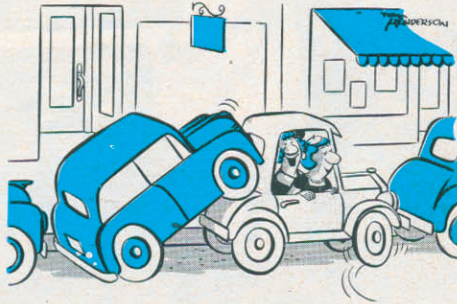
It sounded easy, but it wasn't. The spring was lying on its side but fitted so closely in the bottom of the distributor-shaft hole that when Gus drove the screwdriver blade between the coils, the spring opened to wedge tightly against the recess walls. He tried to turn it with the end of the driver blade, and found that he couldn't. It was an exasperating deal. He worked carefully and slowly, fighting rising apprehension.

A low rumble started up the creek, gaining in crescendo, and the ground beneath Gus's feet shuddered. The big, round boulders at the creek bottom were being rolled thunderously by the rapidly rising water. Great fallen logs came down, creating dams in the narrow canyon that flooded the road. He had seen this spot where they now stood, Gus thought, running four feet deep with water and whirling driftage. Nearly every year the highway crew had to come out and clear it after the flood receded.

#### *Holloway Warns Gus*

Gus felt cold water run over the tops of his shoes, and he jerked his body from under the truck hood just as the driver catapulted from the cab where he had taken shelter and grasped Gus's arm.

"We'd better be getting out of here before we get drowned," he shouted. "Water's coming up over the road. A log . . ."



"For a minute I thought this space wasn't gonna be big enough!"

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## Gus Defies the Elements

[Continued from page 160]

"I know," Gus said, his eyes sweeping over the landscape.

The usually peaceful canyon had been transformed in a few minutes to a scene of wild turmoil. The trees along Rolling Rock Creek leaned far over under the force of the wind, and sheets of rain lashed at their branches. A long drift log had wedged across the stream a little way below the truck. Drift had piled against it to form a dam.

### *The Flood Creeps Closer*

Even as Gus watched, a giant uprooted tree rushed at the dam, struck it with the power of its tons of driven weight, and rose 20 feet into the air, quivering there like a shaken bush. The entire tree had become part of the dam.

The water now lapped at Gus's knees. Piled up behind the dam, it was two feet over the stream's normal banks. Near the truck, sections of the bank had begun to crumble away and topple into the current. The truck driver was hanging on to Gus's arm, shaking it, and his voice was shrill with terror.

"We've got to get out of here!" he cried.

Gus turned to face him, his gray eyes calm and level. His big, work-worn hands fumbled with his pipe, tamping in tobacco with a wet thumb.

"Don't panic on me, man," Gus said. "If we leave that truck here, within the hour it'll be lost, toppled into the drink, cargo and all."

"But we can't do anything by staying here," the driver protested, "except get drowned ourselves."

"Maybe," Gus said, his eyes suddenly narrowing with thought.

He moved swiftly now, stooping to open his tool kit and bring out a coil of primary ignition wire. With his knife he quickly stripped off the insulation, and with three feet of soft copper wire in his hands, began wrapping it again and again around the long blade of his screwdriver. At the other side of the truck, Gus raised the hood, stooped to place

one end of the copper wire on one battery terminal, while he rapidly struck the other end back and forth across the opposite battery post. Blue sparks flew, and the scent of ozone drifted off on the wind.

A moment later, Gus was on his way back to the first side of the truck, stripping the wire from the screwdriver blade as he went. He reached down into the deep distributor-shaft recess with the blade, withdrew it with the troublesome spring clinging to the end. With a few deft movements he rammed the distributor in gear correctly, slipped the spring on the stud below the washer, tightened it in place, connected the spark vacuum-control tubing, slammed the hood down and latched it.

"Get under way, Steve," he yelled. "Back her out on the road, away from that creek bank. Quick, man! That bank's about to give way."

A half-hour later, Gus drove his dripping car into the Model Garage. Steve Holloway pulled the truck up under the canopy of the pumps and leaped out to enter the garage.

### *Gus Describes Screwdriver Magnet*

"Brother!" he exclaimed. "That was a close one. How'd you get that spring out of there so quick, Gus?"

"Always remember," Gus told him, "what I darn near forgot up there in the hills. You can make a strong magnet out of a screwdriver blade, provided it's of good steel, by wrapping it with wire and making and breaking juice through it from a battery. I should have thought of it sooner. Guess I'm getting absent-minded in my old age."

"You sure are, Gus," Stan Hicks called from the grease rack. "Dump your shoes. Don't you know they're full of water?"

Gus looked over to his helper and grinned as he scratched a match on the bench and applied it to his pipe. Come to think about it, he'd forgotten to light up when the thought about the magnet finally struck him.

END