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Gus Slices Out of the Rough

By Martin Bunn

GUS WILSON, burly proprietor of the Model Garage, was awakened at five o'clock one Sunday morning by the persistent ringing of the telephone beside his bed. Sleepily, he lifted the receiver.

"My wife's having a baby," an excited voice said, "and I'm in a jam. Can you come right out?"

"Wrong number," Gus said wearily. "You need a doctor, mister, not a mechanic." He hung up and slid back under the covers.

"Brother!" he groaned. "Now they call me for babies."

The phone rang again.

"Don't hang up on me, Gus," the same voice pleaded. "This is Tom Bascom, groundskeeper at the golf club. My wife's having a baby and I was at the hospital with her yesterday and most of the night. The golf tournament is today, and part of the greens aren't—"

"Give me that phone, Bascom," an outraged voice cut in. "Gus Wilson, eh. Well, Wilson, if you don't get out here and fix this blasted mower I'll fire this nitwit, Bascom, baby and all!"

"Be right with you," said Gus, throwing back the covers and reaching for his pants in a single motion. He knew that

young Bascom could not very well afford to lose his job at the club.

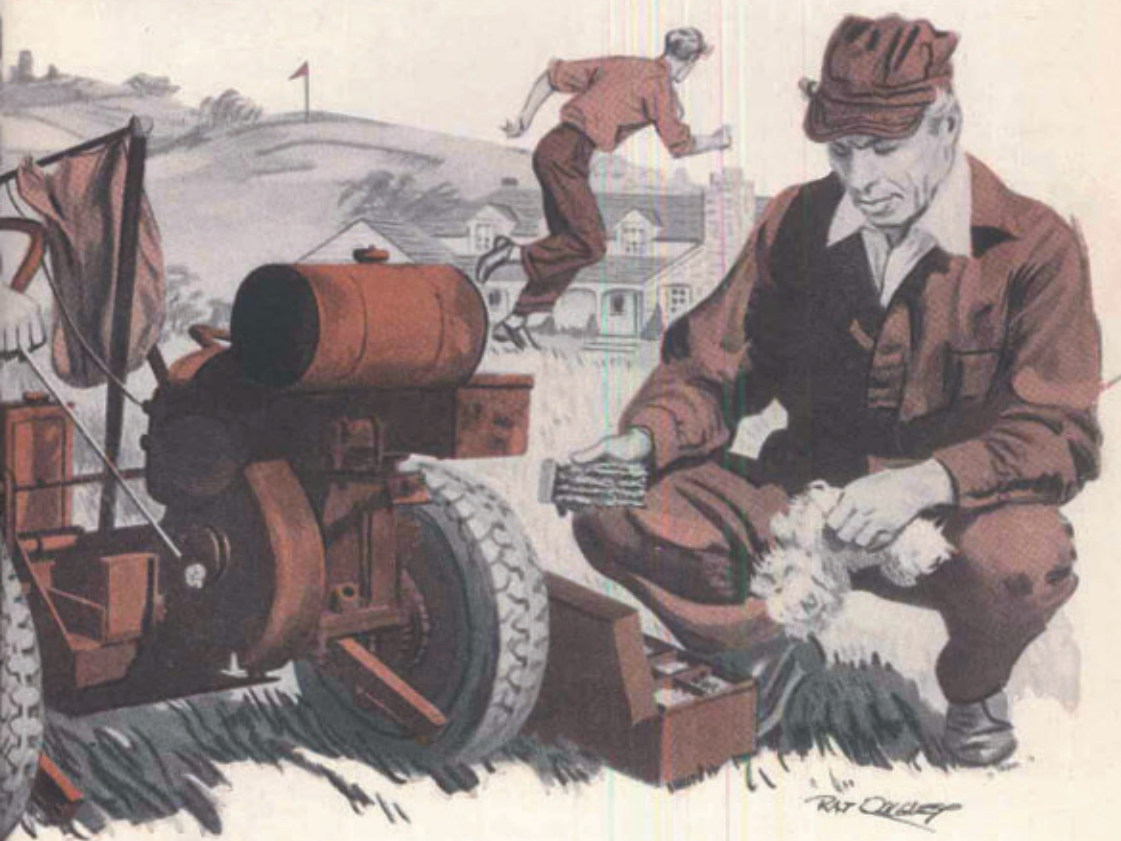
AS GUS swung his car into the circular driveway before the golf club tool house in the early-morning light, he was greeted by an unusual sight. Sam Abernathy, wealthy chairman of the greens committee, tastefully decked out in golfing attire, was heaving on the starter rope of an ancient, gasoline-driven mower. Tom Bascom, a slender, sad-faced young man, stood nervously by.

"Blast this confounded contraption," Abernathy roared in a voice that startled the sparrows in the trees.

"Morning, Tom," Gus said cheerfully.



"Pull, Mr. Abernathy," said Gus as Bascom ran for the clubhouse. Surprisingly, Abernathy pulled.



"Howdy, Mr. Abernathy—what's wrong?"

"What's wrong!" Abernathy bellowed. "The tournament starts in less than three hours, and this idiot, Bascom, is having a baby—I mean he hasn't mowed the putting greens around the sixth and seventh holes. As chairman of the greens committee, I would be utterly disgraced if . . . Drat it, man, get busy and fix this thing."

"Touchy engines in these old gadgets," Gus remarked, placing his tool kit beside the motor. "I wouldn't blame Tom."

"Not blame him!" Abernathy waved the starter rope excitedly. "Why hasn't he kept the greens in shape?"

"Ever have a baby, Mr. Abernathy?" Gus inquired as he unscrewed the spark

plug from the engine and laid it on the cylinder head. "Sort of unnerves a man, they tell me."

GUS wound the starter rope around the pulley and yanked it. A fat spark jumped across the spark plug points. Gus rewound the rope and whirled the engine again, placing a thumb over the spark plug hole to test the strength of the compression produced.

"Don't piddle around, my good man," Abernathy said impatiently. "Get on with the job—and Bascom, if those putting greens aren't mowed as smooth as a baby's cheek by eight o'clock I'll—"

"Baby's cheek," Bascom said dreamily,

moving toward the clubhouse. "I've gotta phone the hospital and find out what's happened."

"Come back here, you idiot," Abernathy yelled after him, but Gus thrust the end of the starter rope into the chairman's hands and said, "Pull, Mr. Abernathy."

Surprisingly, Abernathy pulled. As the motor spun, Gus noticed that oil was being forced out the bearings of the horizontally hung main shaft ends. Crankcase breather stopped up, he thought.

"Fetch me a pan of gasoline, please," Gus said casually, as he knelt by the mower. "Got to clean out this breather."

"Fetch you a pan of . . . !" Abernathy echoed indignantly. "Look here, Wilson—drat it, what can be keeping that nincompoop Bascom?"

A grin came to Gus's leathery features as he broke out a rag and brush from his kit. The portly and dignified chairman of the greens committee had moved to draw gasoline from a drum into a drip pan.

"Thanks, old man," Gus said.

As a matter of principle, Gus cleaned the air filter as well as the breather pipe and breather screen, checked the gas tank for fuel. Not wanting to take the time to remove the plate covering the flywheel magneto and breaker points, Gus checked the timing by peering into the cylinder with a pencil light. The spark occurred close to top dead center, as it should. Satisfied, he replaced the plug, shut the choke, cracked the throttle and spun the motor. He couldn't get a pop out of the mower engine.

TOM BASCOM now appeared again. "The doctor told me," he said worriedly, "that my wife and baby would be all right—but how do I *know*? Maybe I'd better go to them."

"Of course she'll be all right!" Aber-

nathy exploded. "Go to the hospital? Not on your life. Get your mind on your job, man."

"Tom," Gus asked, "how long will it take you to get those putting greens mowed?"

"A couple of hours at least," Tom said. "And it's nearly six o'clock now."

"Maybe," Gus told him, "you'd better get another mower, and let me take this one to my shop—might save time."

"Another mower!" Abernathy broke in. "Don't you know it's Sunday, with every-

thing closed up? Besides, I doubt if there is another mower in town that could handle this job. I pay Bascom to keep these greens in shape, and by Harry I'll have his hide if—hey, where do you think you're going, Bascom?"

"Sorry," Bascom mumbled as he ran toward the clubhouse.

"Better phone again."

"There are some things, Mr. Abernathy," Gus said dryly, "that you can't buy, on Sunday or any day. Now about this motor. I'll do my best to fix it without taking it in to my shop."

"All right, all right," Abernathy said plaintively. "But hurry."

"When a man gets in too much of a hurry," Gus said, digging out his pipe, "his brains take a vacation."

NEVERTHELESS, he told himself, I'd better get a move on and get this contraption popping before Abernathy's golfers show up and begin belting rabbits out of the tall grass around those putting greens. Now I know I've got a good spark here, timed about right. If I've also got a gas mixture, I'm bound to have an explosion—so, I haven't got a good gas mixture.

Thinking about this, it dawned on Gus that when he cranked the motor with the choke closed, it didn't have the wheezy

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"Out of gas . . . mind giving it a little push?"

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sound it should have if gas was plentiful. He pulled the gas line and found a screen at the tank which was clogged with grass cuttings. With this screen and the carburetor cleaned, the motor started with the first turn. But it only fired a few times and died. Gus found himself frantically winding the starter rope around the pulley and yanking, while he fiddled with various adjustments. This thing, Gus told himself, has more tricks than a Toonerville Trolley—what's wrong with it now? He glanced at his watch. Six-thirty.

"Gosh-darn it," Abernathy complained, "you've got it running—keep it running. We'll be playing competition golf here in a little over an hour. Where is that fellow Bascom? I'm going in there and boot that telephone off the wall."

"Spin the engine for me, will you?" Gus said calmly, handing him the end of the starter rope.

ABERNATHY looked about despairingly, took the starter rope and pulled. Gus touched the top of the spark plug with the tip of a neon-tubed screwdriver. Brilliant flashes of hot spark shot through the tube as the motor fired several times, wheezed for several more revolutions and died.

"Ah!" Gus grunted. "I knew it had to be something tricky."

Bascom thrust his head out of a window of the clubhouse. "The doctor hung up on me," he announced loudly.

"Come out here, you nincompoop!" Abernathy bellowed back.

Like trying to concentrate in a madhouse, thought Gus, his eyes wary now. He had noted that the spark flashes in the neon tube had appeared only while the engine was actually firing. They had vanished as it wheezed to a halt. It seemed as if the spark had disappeared simultaneously with the last turn of the starter rope, as it left the starter pulley.

Gus took a look at the crankshaft bearings and found that they were badly worn and loose. As the breaker cam was

on this shaft, the looseness, coupled with a worn cam follower, caused the points to open only when the upward pull on the starter rope raised the crankshaft up to the limit of its top bearing wear. As soon as the starter rope unwound from the pulley, the shaft dropped down to the bottom of the bearing wear, bringing the cam too far from the follower to open the breaker points. Thus, the motor fired only during the time when the starter rope was being pulled, exerting its upward pull on the shaft.

An over-close setting of the breaker points brought about a temporary repair. Gus quickly reassembled the parts, gave the engine a spin. It ran smoothly.

"All okay for now," he said.

"Thank heaven," said Abernathy.

AT THAT moment Bascom burst out of the clubhouse. "It's a boy!" he yelled. "Weights eight pounds."

"That's wonderful!" Gus wrung Bascom's hand warmly.

"Congratulations!" Abernathy actually sounded as if he meant it. "Now would you please get this mower out on the greens before the boys begin to show up, Mr. Bascom?"

"I never expected," Gus told his helper, Stan Hicks, when they opened the Model Garage on Monday morning, "to hear Sam Abernathy call Tom Bascom 'mister,' or to say 'please' to anyone. That mower certainly had the old boy up in the air and all spraddled out."

"I'd like to have been there," Stan chuckled. "I hear Bascom called him out to the club at four o'clock. And he's got a temper like a caged wildcat."

"The best part of it," Gus said, "was that the more he howled and yelled the less attention Tom paid to him. He had about as much chance of competing with that baby as he would with a San Francisco foghorn. That darned lawn mower was as tricky a job as I've struck in a long time. I suspected everything but the main bearings." END

NEXT MONTH: Gus takes to water.