

MECHANICS · AUTOS · HOME IMPROVEMENTS

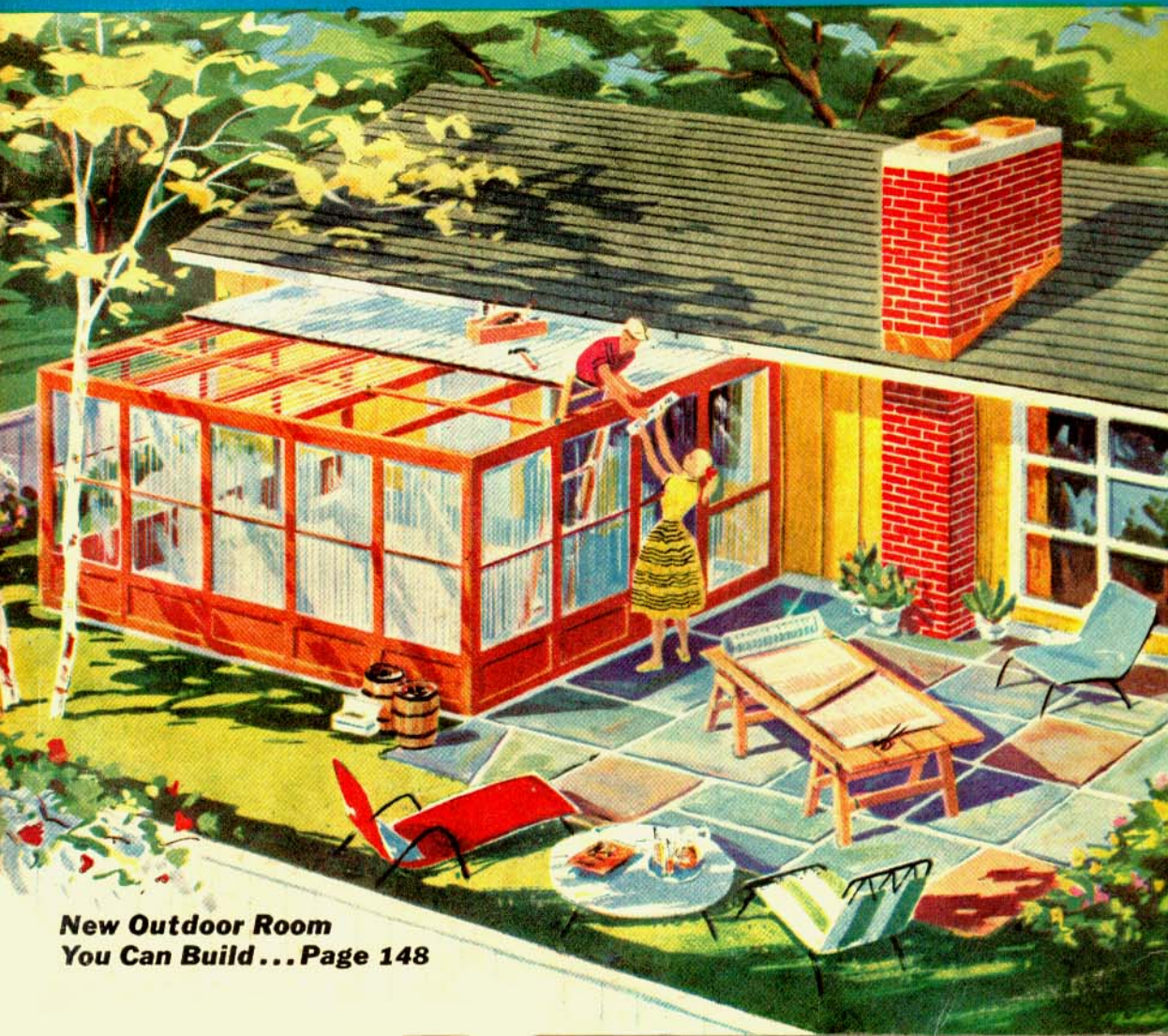
# POPULAR SCIENCE

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MONTHLY

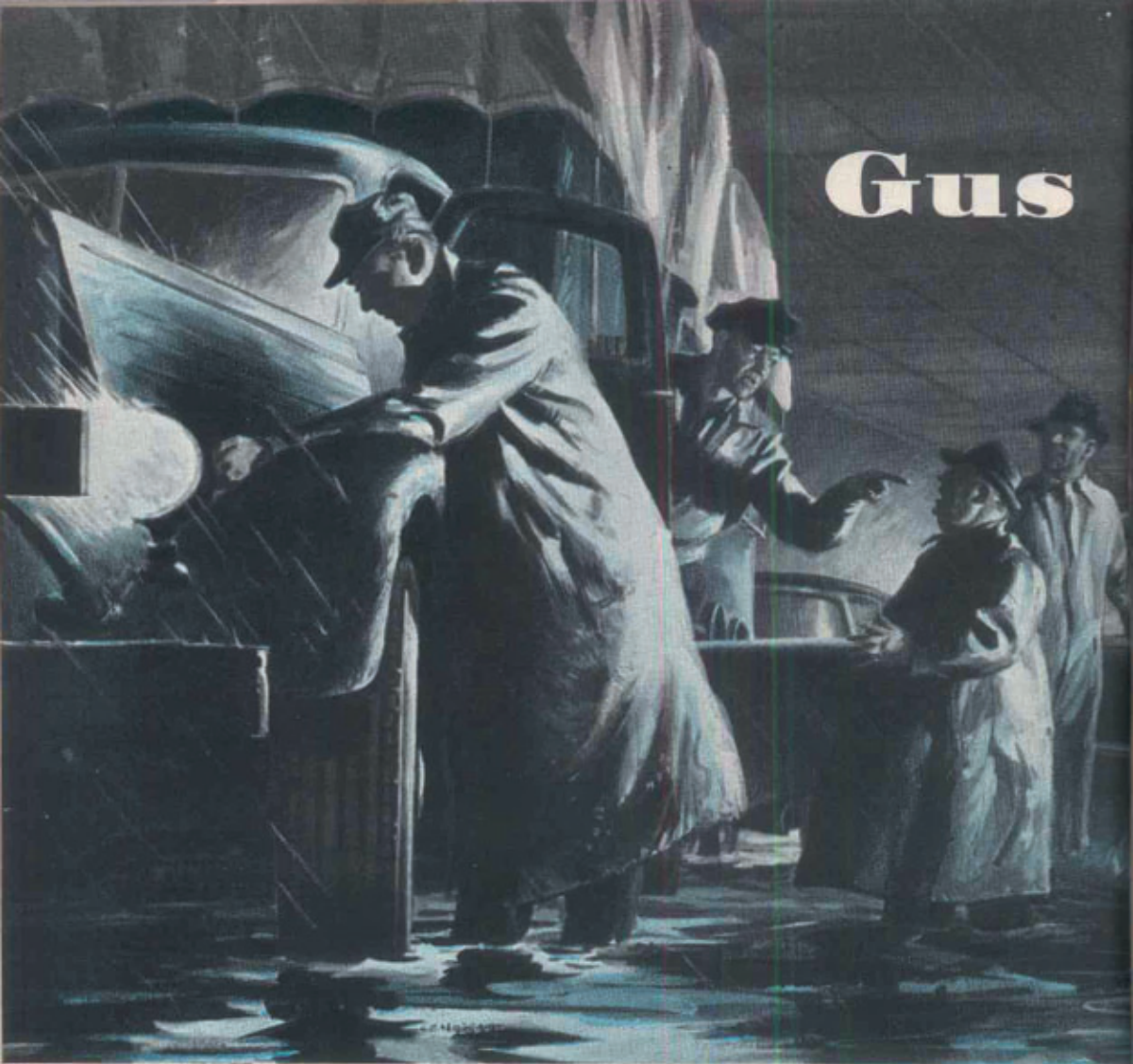
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# Gus



## *Most guys in a spot are glad of a little*

**By Martin Bunn**

**G**US WILSON, burly proprietor of the Model Garage, was driving back to town after spending Sunday in the country with friends. It was a wild night, with a torrent of rain lashing the windshield. As Gus's car nosed down into the concrete-walled underpass beneath the railroad tracks, the green sedan in front of him suddenly flared its stop lights, slewed crazily and shuddered to a halt crosswise of the highway.

Gus tapped his brakes off and on to avoid a spin, had a moment of horror when he glanced into his rear-view mirror and saw headlights bearing down on him from the rear. Coming to an instantaneous decision, Gus swung his wheel over hard toward the graveled shoulder and the concrete wall beyond it. It took delicate timing to swing the wheel back at exactly the right moment, tramp his brakes to slew the rear of his vehicle around, release brakes and shoot down into the underpass, barely missing the

# Meets a Flood of Trouble



*help—but this trucker was a queer one.*

halted sedan. As Gus's car rode into the underpass a wall of water sprang up over his windshield, completely obscuring his vision. He brought the car to a halt and leaped out, flashlight in hand.

To his astonishment he found himself standing in a foot of water. His involuntary grunt of distaste turned to an exclamation of horror as his flash beam pierced the darkness. Something had evidently clogged the drain of the underpass. The concrete bowl was filling with water to create a trap in which several

cars were stalled. Gus began running back, waving his flashlight in warning to any cars that might be approaching.

As Gus came to the green sedan he saw that the car that had been behind his had also managed to miss the stalled vehicle by turning its nose over the shoulder. Even as he recognized the car as Pete Vancourt's, Pete sprang out.

"Gus Wilson!" he exclaimed. "That was a narrow squeak."

"Sure was, Pete," Gus said crisply. "Here comes another car. Better try to

stop it. The underpass is full of water and stalled cars."

"Good Lord!" Pete exclaimed, and then he was running towards the tunnel entrance, swinging a flashlight back and forth to wave down the oncoming car.

GUS was running the other way, intent on warning cars that might be coming out from town. As he went under the shelter of the underpass the downpour of rain went away but the water at its deepest part rose above his knees. Cars shooting into this at high speed had driven such waves of water over the windshields that startled drivers had clamped on the brakes and slewed in all directions. Undoubtedly some motors had also been drowned out. Arriving at the opposite end of the underpass, Gus was relieved to see that some quick-thinking citizen was there before him, halting the cars that were coming from town.

A quick inspection of the underpass drain grate showed Gus that it wasn't clogged where he could clear it. Intent on clearing the highway jam, he got tools, a tire pump, a dry cloth, and a tow cable from his car.

The underpass was a bedlam of sound, magnified to a fearsome bellow by the tunnel. Timid drivers were leaning on their horns and yelling at one another, while the more energetic were wading about in the knee-deep water trying to do what they could. It was a miracle that there had been no serious wrecks or injuries.

The first vehicle in line was a truck with a fully enclosed van body. This truck had managed to ride through the deluge before drowning out. It had swerved obliquely across the highway with its hood thrust out in the downpour. The next two cars, a Ford and a Chry-

ler, had managed to miss crashing into it, but just barely. The Ford had its front bumper against the left wall of the underpass, its rear against the truck's side. The Chrysler had skidded the other way, ramming its snout under the rear of the truck's body, and laid its rear bumper within inches of the right wall. The three vehicles formed a solid barricade behind which several cars were stalled.

Gus took in the situation at a glance. The truck was the key vehicle. Nothing could move until it moved. It couldn't be towed by one of the cars on the town side of the underpass, due to its oblique and car-locked position. It would have to inch around on its own power. A group had gathered about the truck, offering assorted advice to the driver, who was grinding on the starter.

"Need any help here?" Gus inquired. "Better take that battery slow."

The driver, a lanky individual whom Gus had never seen before, climbed down and thrust his light in Gus's face.

"I've had all the advice from you yokels that I want," he said harshly. "How about standing clear and minding your own business?"

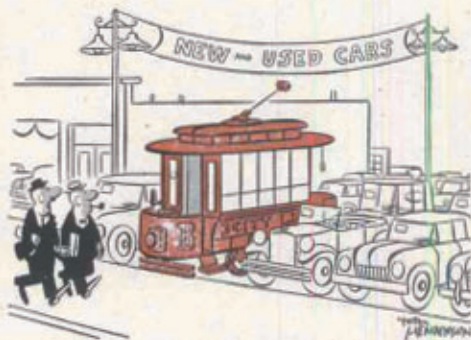
"WHY, you durn fool—" Gus recognized Tom Hanratty's exasperated voice—"that's Gus Wilson you're talking to, mister."

"I don't give a hoot who it is," the driver snapped. "Clear out, all of you. I've started stalled trucks before."

"Yeah," a sarcastic voice called from the group, "and then we'll stay stalled here all night. Come on, men, let's shove the front end of this rig around."

"Get away from my truck," the driver yelled, and his face held an ugly look.

Gus doubted that the group could



"Lots of these places are making fantastic trade-in deals."

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shove the front end around, or push it up the incline if they did, for a glance at the rear springs had told him that the enclosed body was heavily loaded.

"Take it easy, mister," Gus said to the driver. "These folks just want to get home."

"Have them stand clear then," the driver growled.

Gus stood in the shelter of the underpass watching the trucker try to start the motor. He hopped back and forth between the upflung hood and the cab, standing on the starter frantically to no avail.

"You polliwog," the irrepressible Tom Hanratty told him. "Why not let Gus work on the thing—he's the best mechanic in the valley."

"Is that so," the trucker said warily. "Maybe you think you can do better—eh, Wilson?"

"Maybe so," Gus told him, stepping forward. "Maybe not."

Looking at the motor with his flash beam Gus realized that he was going to have a time getting it started. The spark-plug depressions were brimful of water.

Water glistened at spark plug, coil and distributor terminals. What worried Gus the most was the cracked and weathered condition of the old ignition cables.

HE BLEW away all the water he could with his tire pump, made a mental note of the positioning of No. 1 wire in the distributor cap and then yanked the wires loose. He carefully wiped the primary and secondary wires as dry as possible, forced a dry corner of his cloth down into terminal connection cups on plugs, coil and distributor cap, wrung it around with a small screw-driver blade. Fearing condensation, he held the flame of a match inside the distributor cap itself. Replacing the wires in proper firing order he backed out from the hood. He moved swiftly and was behind the wheel, reaching for the ignition key before the trucker realized it.

"Climb out of there," the trucker

snapped at Gus. "I'll try her myself."

"It's your baby," Gus said, shrugging his shoulders and getting down.

When the motor didn't start, Gus lifted the hood with his light off. He saw a tell-tale wriggling of spark flame at the distributor cap and where the wires went through a bracket at the block. A man could work on this motor all night in this rain, he told himself grimly, and not get it dry enough to start.

"So," the driver said, coming down out of the cab to waggle a finger under the startled nose of Tom Hanratty, "this Wilson character is so good? Now both of you clear out before I—"

"You blue-nosed idiot," Hanratty yelled. "Why don't you keep your fool trap shut long enough for Gus to think?"

FOR a moment there, Gus thought that the trucker was going to commit assault and battery on the irate old codger. Gus hesitated long enough to see that he wasn't and then ducked under the hood again. Let's see now, he thought, electricity always follows the least line of resistance. That spark jump at the wires indicates it is finding it easier to jump there than across the gap of the spark-plug electrodes. There's no chance of getting the wires any drier. Now how about reducing the spark-plug gap to make it easier for the spark to flow there? It seemed a good thought to Gus, so he took out the plugs and reduced the gap from the factory-recommended 25 thousandths of an inch to a bare eight or ten thousandths.

"Try her now," he told the trucker, after replacing the plugs.

The motor turned a few times, back-fired, ran raggedly, then settled down to work.

"Now," Gus said, and his words carried a note of command, "if you can weasel her out, we'll pull the Chrysler out before you take off."

By the time the truck driver had the truck lined out Gus had his tow cable

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### Mite Puts Out 10,000 R.P.M.

HITCHED to flashlight batteries or to a 1.4-volt dry cell, this midget Japanese motor will deliver up to 10,000 r.p.m. to run hobby models, games or displays. Moen Trading Co., 225 West 34th St., New York City, prices it at 89 cents.



### Plane Shadow Blueprints House

AS HE was flying in an airliner some years ago, Talbert Abrams of Lansing, Mich., watched the plane's shadow speed over the ground. "What an idea for a house," he mused. Today it is a reality. It even has curved plastic windows.

### Gus Meets a Flood of Trouble

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attached to the Chrysler, so that the trucker had no choice. The Chrysler started as it was towed out, and a few minutes later was on its way toward town. The Ford started under its own power. Soon the remaining cars were easing through the two feet of water and a highway crew arrived to take over the situation.

WHEN Gus came to the first street lights of town he saw that the truck had been stopped by Jerry Corcoran's police car. As Gus pulled up, Corcoran greeted him with a smile.

"The Chrysler driver," he told Gus, "gave me your message. What gets me, Gus, is how you knew that this truck had been stolen."

"I didn't know," Gus told him. "In fact, I wouldn't have even suspected it if the driver hadn't acted so peculiar. When you do a man a favor you expect him to be sort of appreciative. When he isn't, something smells suspicious. When I nosed around and found a jump wire on the primary circuit and no key in the ignition switch, I thought maybe you'd better take a look at it. What gets me, Jerry, is why should a man bother to steal an old-model truck like this?"

"That's easy to answer," Corcoran said. "The truck isn't worth stealing, perhaps, but the cargo is. That van is loaded with expensive electric appliances from an upstate wholesaler, on their way to market."

"What do you know!" Gus exclaimed. "And this character would have gotten away with it if he had just thought to use a little courtesy."

"And I suppose," the trucker said sarcastically to Gus as Corcoran slipped the handcuffs on him, "you're always courteous."

"You said a mouthful then, mister," Corcoran told him. "You look awfully wet. Suppose we take a ride down to our nice, dry jail. We've been on the lookout for you for some time." END

*NEXT MONTH: Gus cools off a hot rodder.*