

POPULAR SCIENCE

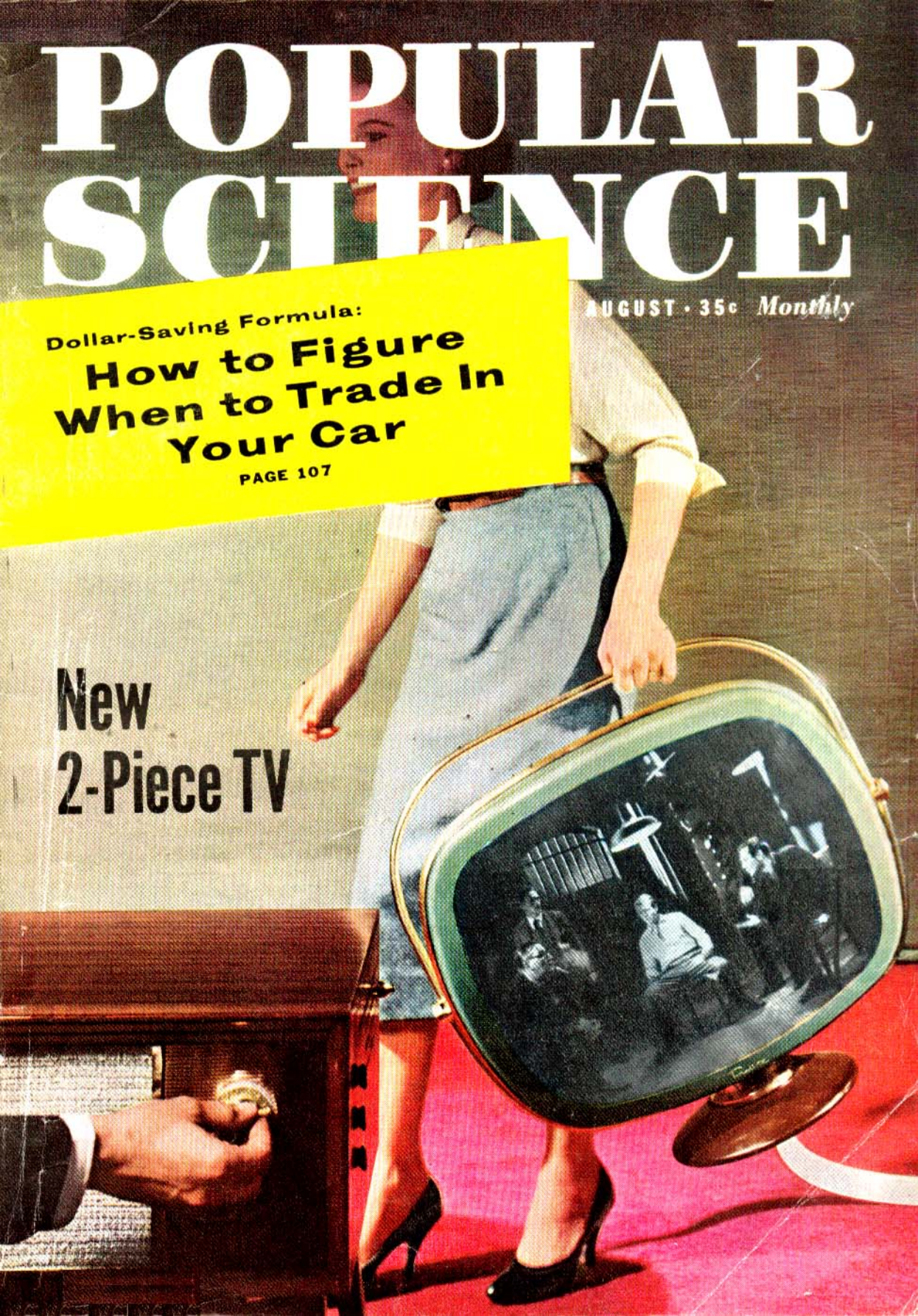
AUGUST • 35c *Monthly*

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"Maybe that mower could beat mine," said the fat man smugly. "But the way things look, you won't even get it rolling."

Gus Takes a Stitch in Time

By Martin Bunn

"DON'T mess around with that mower!" growled the beefy, red-faced man to a group of small boys gathered around the rear of his truck. "Look, but don't touch—or I'll tan your hides!"

Stan Hicks came out of the Model Garage. "Can I help you, sir?"

"Gas up the truck and give me five gallons in that can back by the mower."

"Hot day for mowing," Stan said.

"Might be for some mowers, but this here's a Trail Blazer. Me and it is gonna win the competition at the County Fair this afternoon."

Stan inserted the hose in the gas tank

and said, "Oh, you mean that Park Commission contest?"

"Yep. Winner gets a contract for nine mowers. That's me. Hop to it, son. Time's a-wastin'."

"All set," said Stan, handing up change for an extended \$10 bill.

"Then away I go," roared the man, settling his belly behind the wheel. "I'm a-headin' for the Fair Grounds! Yahoo!"

SOME hours later Gus came out of the Model Garage office in his good suit, holding a needle and a spool of thread.

"Pulled a button off my coat," he said to Stan Hicks. "I wouldn't go at all if it weren't that Hank Sawyer wants all us Park Commission members to be at the



grounds for the power-mower judging."

"Yeah," said Stan. "I talked to one of the contestants this morning."

"Nice commission for the winner," said Gus. Standing in the light by the open shop door, he poked the thread at the eye. It bent, the needle fell to the ground, and Gus, muttering, "Dagnab it!" stooped to pick it up.

A shabby station wagon pulled up and a young woman stepped out. "May I use your phone?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," Stan said, beaming. "Right here on the desk."

"Oh, thank you. I want to let my mother know that Bill—that's my husband—and I won't be home for dinner. We're giving a demonstration at the Fair Grounds, and it looks like we'll be late."

Stan grinned. "My boss, Gus Wilson," he nodded toward the figure bent over a needle and thread, "was just on his way

to the fair when he lost a button. Been trying to sew it on for five minutes."

The girl walked over to Gus. "Let me do it." She threaded the needle deftly, and had the button in place in a jiffy.

"Thanks," said Gus. "Guess I'm handier with a wrench. Well, I'm off, Stan. Probably see you at the fair, Miss."

"STEP right up, Gus," Ted Miller barked, "and get some real old-fashioned cotton candy."

Gus ambled up and plunked a quarter down on the counter.

"Things sure have changed since we were kids," he mused. "Used to buy this stuff for a nickel."

"I know," Ted agreed as he spun off a generous ball onto a paper cone. "Here, wrap your tonsils around this."

Gus had barely swallowed a mouthful when he began to cough and choke. Ted thumped him on the back.

"I'm too old for this stuff," Gus said, grinning. "Clogged my windpipe." He moved along toward the power mowers.

The display was housed in a large tent at the far end of the midway. Gus sauntered inside, nodded to some friends, and stopped in front of the Trail Blazer.

"If you'll give me just one minute of your time," spied the fat-faced, paunchy salesman, "I'll show you the best rotary mower you ever saw."

"It's a fine-looking mower, all right," Gus agreed.

"Best buy the county can get. Here, I'll give you a little demonstration—on the house." He chortled, poking Gus in the ribs. "I tell you, mister, you better get your order in right now because after I win I'll be short of stock. A small down payment'll hold it for you."

"Well," Gus said, "I'm not exactly in the market for one. You see . . ."

"In that case, Jack, keep moving. Make way for the paying customers."

Two stalls away a young couple bent over a mower that was coughing asthmatically. Gus moseyed over.

"You seem to be having some trouble," he said. They both looked up, and Gus recognized the young lady who had sewed on his button.

"Hello, Mr. Wilson," she said. "I'm Ann Hawkins and this is my husband, Bill." She pointed to the stalled mower. "We just can't get the thing to go." She

explained to her husband, "Mr. Wilson is a mechanic. Maybe he can help us."

"I can fix it myself," said Bill.

"But, Bill, you've been working on it for over an hour." Ann turned to Gus. "Mr. Wilson, Bill just *has* to win."

"Couldn't you get another demonstrator?" Gus suggested.

"Not in time," Bill said. "All the others are in my shop at Vernon."

"You see," Ann explained, "Bill just bought this franchise for the Perfection Mower. We put all our money in it. Honestly, Mr. Wilson, it's the greatest."

"According to that supersalesman of the Trail Blazer, he's got things all sewed up," Gus said.

"That guy!" snorted Bill. "His mouth is too big. Why, this morning he was over, poking around, telling me how much better his mower is. Practically took mine apart finding fault with it."

"What have you looked for?" Gus asked.

"Well, I checked the condenser and there's plenty of spark. I replaced it, just in case. Still no luck."

"These little one-cylinder jobs can be pretty tricky," Gus said. "How about a high-resistance connection? Did you try that?"

"Yes, I did. There's nothing wrong with the coil." Bill checked his watch. "Confound it, we're running out of time!"

"Why not let me give it another check," Gus said. "That is, if you'll let me return your wife's good deed."

"Please, Bill, he might just find something you missed," she pleaded.

"What have I got to lose?" Bill said.

"You guys might as well save yourselves a lot of trouble." It was the fat Trail Blazer man, a smug grin on his face.

"You seem pretty sure of yourself," Gus said. "The battle isn't won before it's started, you know."

"Don't *you* be too sure," he sneered. "Maybe that mower *could* beat mine, but the way things look you won't even get it rolling."

"Sounds like a challenge," Gus said as the man walked away. "How about the points, Bill?"

"Okay, but let me try again now that it's rested." He pulled the rope. A couple of splutters—then *pfft!*

"I see you put in a new plug," Gus said. "The way I figure, a gas engine has

to run if it's got enough gas and enough spark." With that he plunged in with both hands. "The carburetor screens and jets are clean." He checked timing, camshaft and gears.

"I'll run through the valves. Four-cycle engines sometimes balk."

"Gosh, Mr. Wilson," Bill said, "we've only got 15 minutes. What'll I do?"

Ted Miller walked by with a cone of cotton candy. "Have another, Gus," he invited, "or is your windpipe still clogged?"

Gus looked up and scratched his head. "By golly," he said, "maybe that's it." He stooped down and disconnected the muffler. Then he grabbed the starter rope and yanked. The mower engine exploded

just as a loudspeaker was announcing: "And now, folks, the final demonstration, the Perfection Power Mower."

Bill got his machine down and pulled the starter. As the motor purred, he described its features over the public-address system. Then he put it through its paces, finishing his cutting right in front of Gus and Ann, in the grandstand.

A FEW minutes after Gus returned from the Park Commission meeting, the announcer's voice came over the air. "The judges have reached a decision. The contract goes to"—he paused and looked down at a piece of paper—"to the Perfection Power Mower."

"We're made!" shouted Bill as he hugged Ann and clapped Gus on the shoulder.

"You did a good job, Bill," Gus said. "And now I've got to see a man about his conscience."

At Ted Miller's stand he bought a double-sized ball of cotton candy, and headed toward the power-mower tent. The disgruntled Trail Blazer man was packing his gear.

"Say, mister," Gus said, "I think you deserve a consolation prize." He thrust the candy into a flabby hand. The guilty expression on the man's face cleared up any doubt Gus might have had as to how the wad

of cotton waste had gotten into Bill's mower.

"I don't get you," the man said.

"I think you do," Gus snapped. "You've got a nice clean mower there. Why play dirty with it?"

He turned and walked back to Bill and his pretty wife. Ann took his hand.

"How can we ever thank you, Mr. Wilson? You know . . ."

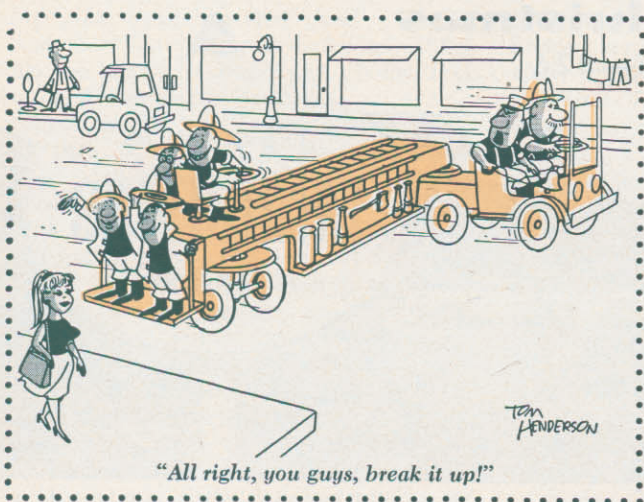
Gus interrupted her, a twinkle in his eyes. "All this somehow reminds me of an old saying."

"What's that?"

Gus stroked the button on his coat. "A stitch in time saves nine. In this case the stitch saved an order for nine power mowers."

END

Next Month: Gus makes the right contact.



"All right, you guys, break it up!"

into life like a hundred eager firecrackers.

"Bill," shouted Ann, "he's fixed it!"

"I haven't, but *you* can easily enough," Gus said, holding the muffler up to the light for Ann to see.

"My heavens," she gasped, "what do you know about that!" She took up a screwdriver and poked a wad of cotton out of the muffler.

"If that doesn't beat everything," Bill said. "Now, whatever made you think of that?"

"Guess it was that cotton candy I choked on that gave me the tip. But we'd better get that muffler back on if you want to make the competition."

As Ann hopped into the station wagon Bill and Gus lifted the mower into the back. They got to the demonstration area