

POPULAR SCIENCE

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SOLDERING IRON

POWER DRIVER

PORTABLE SAW

POWER PLANE

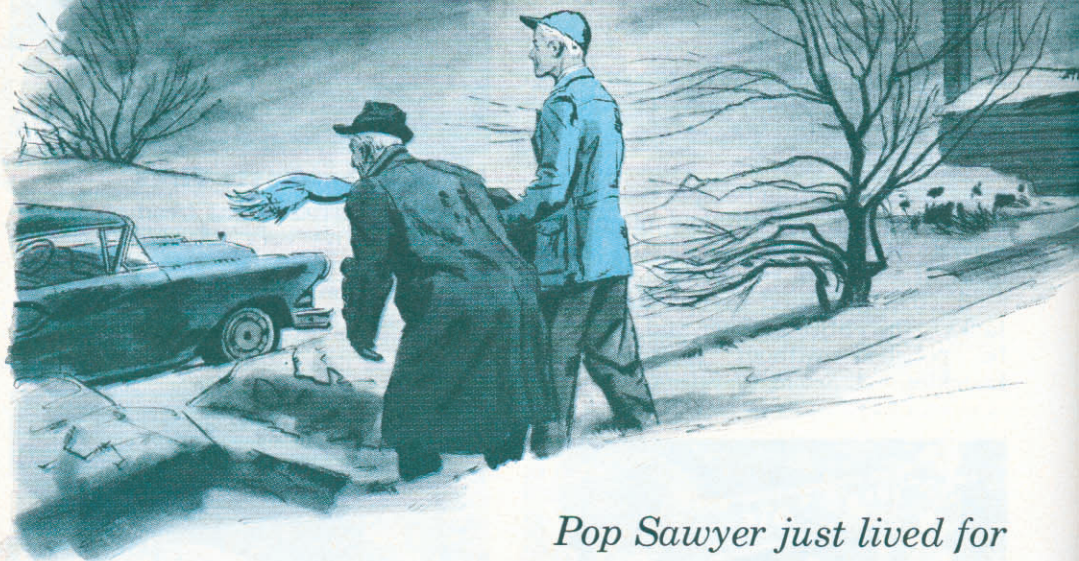
NEW SAW BLADE

NEW FILE

POWER-KRAFT

MIC DRILL

Gus Clears the Way for Christmas



Pop Sawyer just lived for the annual Christmas visit with his family. Why in the world did he refuse to go this year?

By Martin Bunn

THE old man coming down the street toward the Model Garage walked slowly, his back bent as if he were accustomed to carrying a heavy load. It was Pop Sawyer, who had been retired as a mail carrier for many years.

"Hi, Pop," Gus Wilson called, as he hung up a gas hose. "Getting ready for your annual Christmas visit upstate?"

The old fellow turned and straightened up. Blue eyes peered from beneath gray eyebrows. "Mmm, don't know about that, Gus. My bones tell me we're due for some

bad weather. Don't let this mild spell fool you. Probably have a blizzard come Christmas time—and I wouldn't want to get caught driving over those back-country farm roads."

"That reminds me," Gus said. "I haven't seen you driving your car lately. Something wrong with it?"

"Why should there be?" Pop Sawyer snapped angrily. "Can't a fellow walk if he wants to without folks thinking his car's busted?" He turned abruptly away from Gus and ambled down the street, mumbling.

"Grumpy, isn't he?" said Stan Hicks,



As Gus had expected, the old man tossed on his hat and coat and went with Stan.

Gus's assistant, crawling out from under a car.

"No, Stan, that was just his pride showing. I'll bet my bottom dollar his car is laid up and he can't stretch his pension to cover a garage bill."

"But he knows you'd fix his car without charge, just for old times' sake."

"That, Stan, is just why he won't admit there's anything wrong with his car."

"Then why doesn't he take a train or bus?" Stan asked.

"And tip off his daughter and son-in-law that he can't afford to drive a car?"

Stan gave his boss a quizzical look.

"Sure you aren't imagining things, Gus?"

"Pretty sure," Gus said. "Pop lives from day to day looking forward to that Christmas visit with his grandchildren. When he dreams up nonexistent blizzards, he's covering up."

"Well," Stan commented, "there's nothing you can do about it."

"Can't I now?" Gus said. "You may not remember, but Pop Sawyer probably was the only mailman who was never bitten by a dog. Why, folks even used to call him in to doctor their sick pups instead of calling the vet."

Stan laughed. "Going to suggest that

Pop Sawyer make the trip by dog sled?"

"No, but a dog may turn a trick for me. Maybe we can use that old hound dog of yours, Stan."

Stan looked puzzled.

"Listen," Gus said. "Tonight you drive out to Pop's house and tell him that your dog is sick. Sure as shootin', he'll go along to your place for a look. Then I'll slip into his garage and give his car a quick once-over. Probably nothing much wrong with it."

"Sounds dandy," Stan said. "But how are you going to let him know that his car is back in running shape—if you are right about its being broken down—without letting him know you fixed it? And even if you manage that one, how will you explain the automatic fix-it job?"

"That's a bridge I'll cross when I come to it," Gus said. "Now we'd better get back to some Model Garage business."

THAT night Gus had his car parked up the street from the little house where Pop Sawyer lived alone since his wife's death. He saw Stan Hicks drive up, get out to knock on the door. Pop Sawyer's reaction to the tale of a sick dog was just what he had expected. The old man tossed on his hat and coat and went off with Stan.

When the car turned a corner, Gus drove around to the back of Pop's place, slipped through the yard into the unlocked garage, tool kit in hand. He got behind the wheel of Pop's vintage sedan, threw the ignition switch, stepped on the starter. The motor turned over briskly, but didn't start. With the beam of his flashlight on the dash, Gus noted that the gas gauge read half full, but that there was no flicker of the ammeter needle as the engine turned over.

"Just as I thought," he mused. "Nothing wrong here but fouled ignition points."

Gus put up the hood, removed the distributor cap, put the car in gear, and rocked open the points on a lobe of the cam. After he had filed and set them to proper gap, he rocked the car to close the points. Then he pulled the secondary, high-tension wire from the center of the distributor cap, held it close to the block, and snapped the ignition points open with his thumb. No spark jumped from the coil wire, indicating a faulty condens-

er or coil. Gus broke out his tester, flashed his light about, looking for an electrical outlet; there wasn't any. With his tester useless, he'd have to take other measures.

He removed the primary ignition wire from the side of the distributor and, with the switch on, flicked it against the block. Again there was no spark. Now Gus knew he had the problem tied down. It could be a faulty ignition switch, a loose or corroded connection in the primary ignition wire, or a faulty wire itself. Working fast, he thrust his head under the dash, played his flashlight on the ammeter post where the primary wire led off to the live side of the ignition switch. As he shorted the post to the metal dash with a screwdriver, there was a shower of sparks. He quickly attached a jumper wire across the ignition switch, cutting it out of the line in case it was faulty. Then he got out and struck the distributor end of the primary wire against the motor block.

"Hah!" he grunted when no spark came. A faulty wire from switch to distributor needed replacement.

Gus unwound a length of primary wire from a coil in his kit, and was just about to cut it off when he noted how the new wire stood out, red and brilliant in his flash beam. Pop Sawyer would be sure to note the new wire, in contrast to the old and grease-blackened primary. He would have to find the break in the old wire and make the repair so that it wouldn't stand out like a sore thumb. Thrusting his head and shoulders under the hood, he was following the wire with his flash, when something hard was poked into his back.

"Get your hands up, mister!" ordered a crisp voice. Gus obeyed, dropping his light. "Now, back out of there slowly and no tricks. That's a gun in your ribs."

The chill went out of Gus's spine as he recognized the voice of his friend, State Trooper Jerry Corcoran. "Take it easy, Jerry," he said, twisting around so that his face came within the beam of the officer's flashlight.

"Well, I'll be—" Corcoran exclaimed. "Gus Wilson! I thought you were a burglar. What are you doing prowling around Pop Sawyer's garage at this time of night?"

"Put that bazooka down and stop asking questions." Gus stooped down and examined the flashlight he had dropped. It

wasn't working. "Here, Jerry, shine your light along this wire. Hurry, now. We've got to get this car fixed before Pop comes back and catches us in the act."

"What act—say, what's this all about, Gus?"

"Never mind. Just run your light along here. Ah-ha, there it is! I'll just cut the wire at the break, splice it, and hide the tape behind the block." Gus looked up. "Get me a pair of cutters and a roll of tape out of my tool kit over there."

"What the heck—" began Corcoran. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, what's the use?" He played his light into the tool box. "Here's your tape and pliers."

"Thanks. Now aim your light down here."

As Gus got to work, staccato blasts from a car horn came from up the road. Corcoran tapped Gus on the shoulder. "We'd better get out of here. I don't want to be caught aiding and abetting a criminal."

"That's just Stan bringing Pop back. Keep your light steady." Gus cut the wire, bared the ends, twisted them together and applied tape. Then he shoved the repair job behind the block.

"I hope that does it," he announced. "Put that light out and let's scam."

Just then a car pulled up in front, and as they slunk away like two conspirators, Stan's over-loud voice broke the stillness, "Sorry I got you out for nothing, Pop, but thanks."

THE next morning, which was the day before Christmas, Gus was careful to be in front of the Model Garage, loading his pipe casually, as Pop Sawyer took his usual stroll.

"Hi, Pop," he said. "I asked you about your car yesterday because the last time you drove in here for gas I heard a sort of snapping noise. Been thinking about it ever since."

Pop looked up, quick interest in his eyes.

"Yeah," Gus continued. "Sounded as if the wire in the top of your coil was out of the terminal socket a bit so the spark had to jump a gap. Better take a look at it. Thing like that could cause you trouble some day."

"You wouldn't be kidding me, would you, Gus?" Pop Sawyer's veined hand shot out to grip Gus's arm. "No, I guess you wouldn't kid a man about a thing like that—not at Christmas time. I'll look into it, right away."

He turned to retrace his steps toward



"I wonder what this button does."

home, spring once more in his step, hope glinting in his eyes.

Less than an hour later Pop drove up in his car and parked in front of the pumps. "Fill her up," he said as Stan came out of the garage. "And better check the oil, too. It's a long drive up to my daughter's farm and I don't want to stop for anything on the way."

As the old man pulled away, Gus joined his assistant. "How come he didn't suspect anything?" Stan asked.

"Nothing to it," Gus said. "Just before Jerry and I scrambled, I jerked the high-tension wire a bit out of the coil terminal socket. He couldn't help but spot it after I gave him a hint."

Stan grinned. "Bet I know what you're gonna ask Santa for Christmas—a new set of burglar's tools." **END**

Next Month: Gus rescues a rookie cop.