

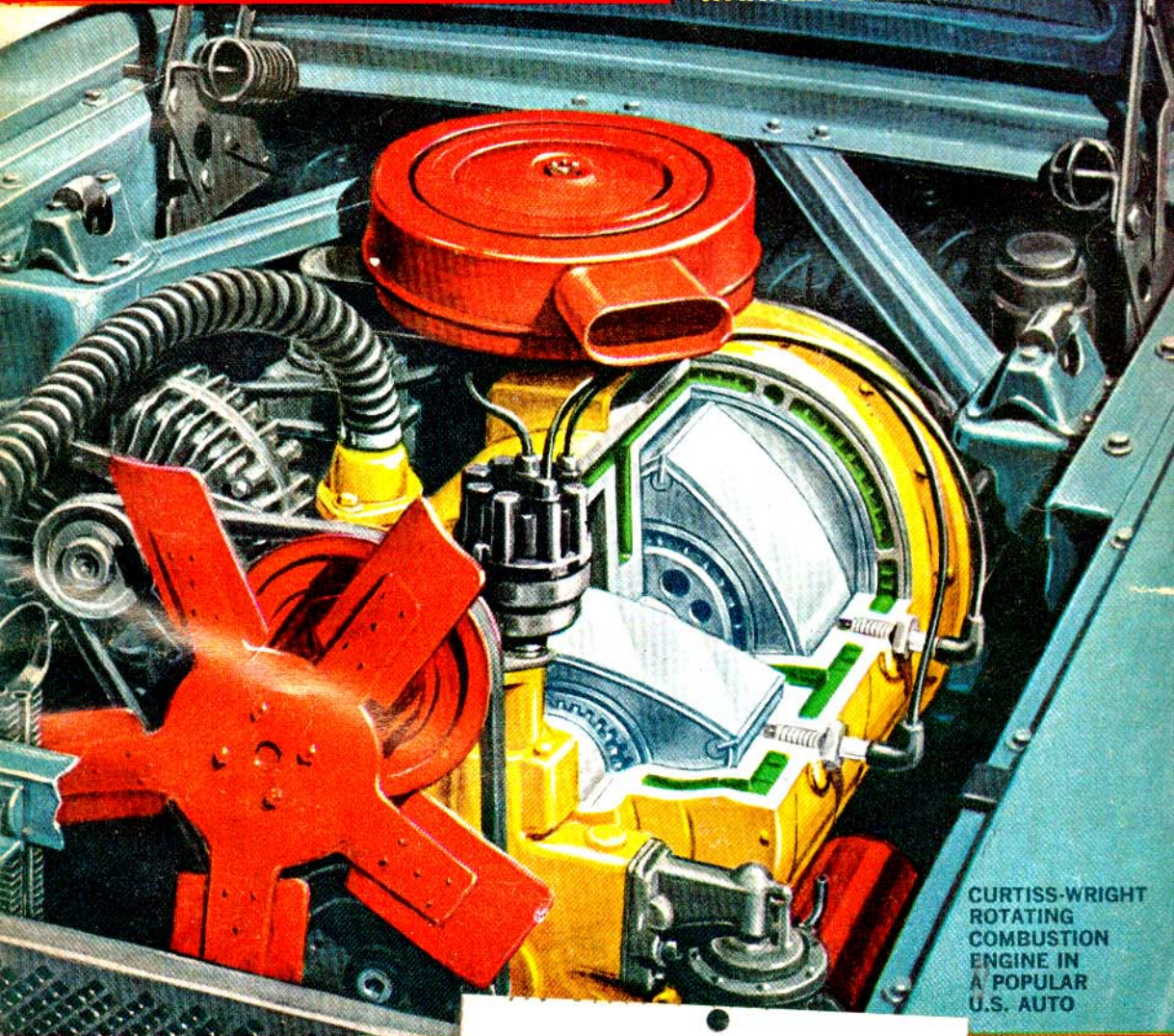
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When the town skinflint tried to blame a neighbor for his flat tires, Gus soon punctured his little scheme

Gus Settles a Case

Gus was having his morning coffee break when Chief Eldon stalked into the office of the Model Garage. The Chief sank unbidden into a chair. His loose-fitting uniform, sad eyes, and sagging jowls gave him, as always, the look of a sleepy but amiable hound dog.

"Came to send you out on a job, Gus," he said. "In fact, I'll drive you to it. You'll need a rotor—for a 1957 Dodge V-8."

"Isn't that a pretty old crate for a slick police department to be using?"

Eldon snorted. "You know it is. Fact is, it belongs to a neighbor of Silas Barnstable. He has no phone, and Silas wasn't offering to use his, so I said I'd let you know. Fact is, I wanted to talk to you first. This situation you'll walk into has more loose ends than an octopus."

"With Silas in it, that figures."

"Uh-huh. Well, Silas called me into it, and I'm going to see he doesn't pull any fast ones. He has an eviction hearing on this morning's court docket. The tenant's a Cuban refugee who came up from the Mi-

ami area. This man Ortiz leased a house from Silas and began looking around for work. He's a dental technician, and he's wangled some small jobs to do at home to prove his skill.

"The house he rented is next door to Silas's own house. Of course, Silas spotted Ortiz busy in the cellar workshop he'd set up, and Silas ordered him to quit using the house for commercial purposes."

"Silas always has been a big noise with a short fuse," remarked Gus.

"The worst comes later," said Chief Eldon. "Get in my car and I'll tell you about it while we drive there."

Taking a tool kit and the rotor, Gus got into the police car.

"Ortiz did stop doing work at home," the Chief went on, setting the car in motion. "And he got a job, starting next week. But meanwhile, Silas filed for eviction, charging Ortiz with malicious mischief and being an unruly tenant. There's one double garage for the two houses. Four times in



Leaning on Silas's car, Gus pushed it forward about one foot.

Out of Court

By MARTIN BUNN

two weeks, Silas claims, his left-front tire's been nearly flat in the morning. Last time, he made me come to see it.

"So Silas is charging Ortiz with flattening the tire to get even for not being allowed to work at home. But I did some snooping and I found that Silas got an unexpected offer for that house—which he can't sell while Ortiz's lease holds."

"I don't see where this distributor rotor comes in," remarked Gus.

Chief Eldon grunted. "That's the latest loose end. The eviction hearing's an hour from now and Ortiz's old car is blocking the steep driveway from the garage to the street. Soon as that happened, Silas hollered for me to come see how Ortiz is trying to keep him from court. Of course, he could take a taxi—he's just using this to build a stronger case against Ortiz."

The police car stopped before two small houses with a driveway between them.

"Want me to try to find out whether that tire went down by itself?" Gus asked.

"That—and whether Ortiz could have

staged that car breakdown in the driveway," added the Chief. "I won't protect Ortiz if he's guilty, but I'd hate to see him framed just for Silas's benefit. It could cost him his new job, besides making it tough for him to find another place to live."

The Chief led the way down the driveway. Near its bottom stood a dowdy black sedan, its rocker panels rusted out, its body paint lusterless. In the turn-around area was Silas's sport coupe.

From one of the houses scurried a small man with a round face, a shoe-brush mustache, and thin gray hair.

"I am Bernardo Ortiz," he introduced himself. "I speak not much English. You fix my car?"

"This is Gus Wilson," said Eldon. "He'll see to your car in just a minute."

The little man bobbed his head in an abbreviated bow. Gus and the Chief walked around to the left-front tire of Silas's car. It looked fully inflated. Gus removed the

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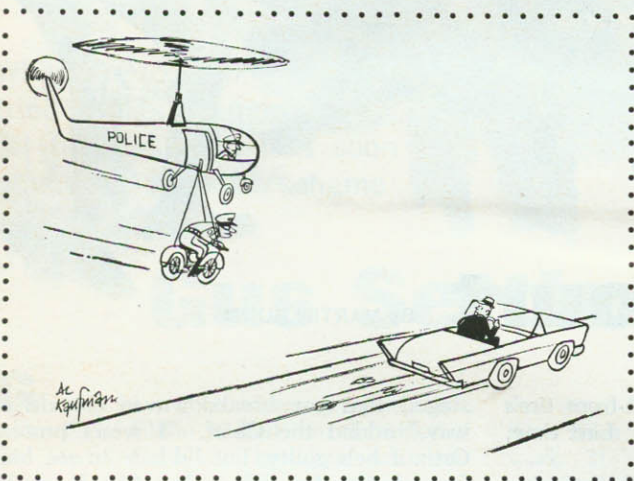
valve cap and put a little saliva on the stem. No bubble appeared. He let his eyes travel slowly around the rim.

"I never asked you to snoop around my car, Gus Wilson." Silas Barnstable, his skinny frame draped in a rumpled black suit, strode indignantly up to Gus. "And I ain't payin' for this call neither. It's that Cuban feller who'll have to."

"Well, now, I heard this tire's been going flat, and as you're an old customer I thought I'd have a look at it. It's a tubeless, I see. You got a tube in it?"

"No, I ain't. Why waste money for a tube it don't need? 'Tain't goin' flat—it's bein' sabytaged, and I know by who."

"Maybe it has a cut or a puncture."



"Nope. First time it went flat, I pumped it up. Used the car all day, and it stood up three days after. Four days, last time. Wouldn't do it if there was a puncture. Now get that other car out of my way."

"As soon as I've checked the pressure," returned Gus. Leaning on the car, he pushed it about a foot, then applied an air gauge. After making the saliva test again and replacing the valve cap, he showed Silas the gauge reading. It was 26 pounds.

Silas growled under his breath. As Gus walked back to the Dodge, Ortiz scurried ahead of him to open the hood.

"It is like twice before," the little Cuban said anxiously. "Three times it breaks that thing inside the dis . . . dis . . . but I do not do this myself, not on purpose."

The distributor cap dangled from its cables. On the distributor shaft was part of a rotor. Fragments lay inside the shell.

Gus painstakingly lifted them out, making sure none remained. Then he shook the distributor shaft. It had no more side play than normal in a car of this age. He inspected the cap. There were no visible cracks or carbon traces, but all eight contacts inside it were pitted and blackened.

"One day when we are coming from Miami," said Ortiz, "the engine did not run good. So a man fixed. Two days after, it stopped. Inside are pieces like this. Two weeks ago it makes noises, and again that thing inside is broke. But I do not do this thing myself."

"Sure you done it," growled Barnstable.

"Now, hold it, Silas," said Gus mildly. "Did you see Mr. Ortiz stop the car here?"

"Heh! I sure did," cackled Barnstable. "I thought he'd try something this morning, so I watched. He druv a little way up the driveway, then the engine spit and quit, right where it would do him most good."

Gus looked at Eldon. "He couldn't break that rotor from the driver's seat. But there has to be some reason three rotors broke, and I'd better find it before putting on a new one."

There were no burrs or deformations on the shaft to account for the trouble. The new rotor fitted perfectly. The edges of the distributor

case and the cap were clean and undamaged. Puzzled, Gus set the cap in place and snapped on the spring clips that held it. Then he tried to twist the cap to make sure it was properly seated.

To his amazement, it moved from side to side a visible fraction of an inch. Only the clips kept it from moving farther.

"Something's wrong," said Gus. "I'll have to call Stan to check a part number. Okay to use your phone, Silas?"

With a grunt of annoyance, Silas led Gus into the house. Eldon stalked to the police car and made a radio call.

Only on the third dialing did Gus get through, and then it apparently took Stan several minutes to find the proper parts book. Silas grumbled loudly over the delay. As he and Gus returned to the Dodge, they found Chief Eldon back also.

"It's the right cap," reported Gus, after taking it off and inspecting it carefully. He replaced it, and once more moved it from side to side. Suddenly he bent closer, exclaiming in surprise.

"This must be it. Look, Chief. See that lug on the distributor cap? It's supposed to fit into the slot in this spring clip. But somebody bent the clip to hold the cap on tighter. That bowed out the part with the slot in it, so the lug didn't engage.

"Free to shift, the cap threw off the timing. That made the engine cough and spit, besides burning the contacts. Whenever it shifted more, it broke the rotor."

Carefully Gus bent the spring clip to its original shape. Snapped into place, its slot engaged the cap lug securely. The engine started promptly and kept running.

Ortiz smiled. "I don't understand all, but I think this thing will not break now?"

"The rotor won't break," said Gus. "But you better get a new distributor cap some time. The contacts in this one are bad."

"I thank you. Now I must pay."

"Hurry it up," grumbled Silas. "Get this car out so I can tend to business."

Ortiz paid the bill, then drove into the street. Silas headed for his car.

"Just a second," called Gus after him.

With Silas standing impatiently by, Gus unscrewed the valve cap and applied the gauge so expertly that no air escaped. He looked at it, then showed it to Silas.

"It's a trick!" bellowed Barnstable.

Gus handed the gauge to Chief Eldon.

"I was careful not to lose any air. It's lost a pound of pressure since last checked,

and Ortiz hasn't even touched Silas's car."

"No, he hasn't," agreed Eldon. "I kept an eye on him while at the radio, too. But are you sure about this, Gus?"

"I made sure when I rolled the car a little way. See how the tire rim's dented up a little from hitting a stone or curb? That spot was up when we came. I moved the car to bring it down to the bottom."

"Knew it! You tricked me!" bellowed Barnstable. "You made it lose air."

"I did," confessed Gus. "Exactly the way it lost air every time it went flat. A tubeless tire will leak if it doesn't seat perfectly all around the rim. That rim dent is too small to matter most of the time. But whenever the car stands with the dent near the bottom, where the tire bulges under the car's weight, the bead pulls away from the deformed rim slightly. Then it leaks enough to go flat in a few hours."

There was a brief silence.

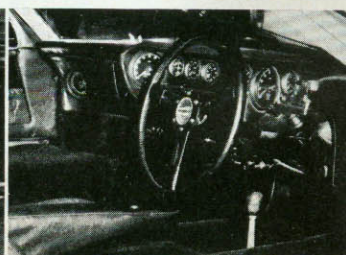
"Suppose you two'll swear to this in court, hey?" demanded Barnstable.

"Not yet," returned Chief Eldon. "I'll ask the judge to impound the car overnight. If the tire goes down with that dent at the bottom, Ortiz will have a false-charge complaint of his own."

"I'll drop the case," said Silas in a strangled voice. "Gotta phone my lawyer." As Silas went inside, Gus and the Chief walked toward the police car.

"I had to stall for time," said Gus, "to let that tire lose a little air. But I think Silas really believed Ortiz flattened it. He just has a suspicious nature."

"I guess it's lucky," said Eldon with a rare grin, "that I have, too." P.S.



As handsome inside as out, Ford GT cushions driver and passengers in semi-reclining seats with perforated upholstery that circulates cool air. Windshield is heated electrically. Controls are fitted to driver.

British Ford GT is fastest, costliest

Built by Ford Advanced Vehicles, Ltd., near London, this Ford GT is as handsomely custom-tailored as a Saville Row suit, hits 148 m.p.h.,

rated upholstery that circulates cool air. Windshield is heated electrically. Controls are fitted to driver.

is priced at \$15,500 before tax. A docile road version of the Le Mans racers that broke lap records at the French track, the 289-cu.-in. rear V-8 is detuned to 335 hp., but will still make 58 m.p.h. in the first of five gears.