

Gus Solves Mysterious Car Troubles

By
MARTIN BUNN

GUS WILSON slammed the telephone receiver back on its hook and turned to his partner with a grin. "Well, Doc says they're biting up there at the lake, at last. I think tomorrow I'll take that day off I've been talking about so long. Think you can hold the fort without me, Joe?"

On the other side of the Model Garage office, Joe Clark looked up from his ledger. "Sure, Gus," he said. "That new man, Harry, can handle any rush repair job that may come in, and if he's too busy to take care of the service end, I'll see to it that nobody drives off with his money in his pocket and his gas tank empty."

Early next morning, Gus rolled happily away toward the lake, sixty miles distant, where he liked to spend his infrequent holidays fishing for bass. All morning and most of the afternoon, Joe busied himself in the office. In the shop, Harry sang "You're A Sweetheart!" in a voice that ranged uncertainly from deep bass to high tenor, as he worked at a leisurely pace over a valve-grinding job, occasionally interrupting his efforts—but not the vocal effects—to answer the summons of a horn honking out by the gas pump.

Up to six o'clock, the biggest repair job that had come their way had been putting a new fan belt on a cigarette salesman's sedan. But then Prof. Thomas Clapp, the principal of the local high school and the town's prize grouch, drove his four-year-old coupe up to the repair-shop door, and peace and quiet departed from the Model Garage.

"See what's the matter with this diabolical car, young man!" the customer snapped at Harry. "It's been driving me mad all day. Sometimes it starts as easily as it ever did, and sometimes it takes me ten minutes to get it going. It will run smoothly for a few miles, and then the motor will start coughing and sputtering, and sometimes stop. It just did that a mile down the road, and I've been fifteen minutes get-

ting here. Be quick, young man—I have important business this evening!"

Harry checked the high-tension coil, the distributor points, and the carburetor adjustment. Then he cleaned the spark plugs. Everything seemed all right. When he stepped on the starter, the engine took off promptly, and idled smoothly as he climbed out. "She's O.K. now," he assured the impatient customer.

Growling "put it on my bill," Clapp backed out of the shop. Harry watched him as he drove up the road without the engine missing a beat. Then, just as the mechanic was turning back into the shop, he heard the coughing start again, and saw the car head in to the side of the road. Cutting across a vacant lot, he arrived just in time to meet the professor as he got out, very red in the face and snorting "Incompetent!" and various other epithets highly uncomplimentary to the Model Garage.

With some difficulty Harry got the engine started and nursed the car back

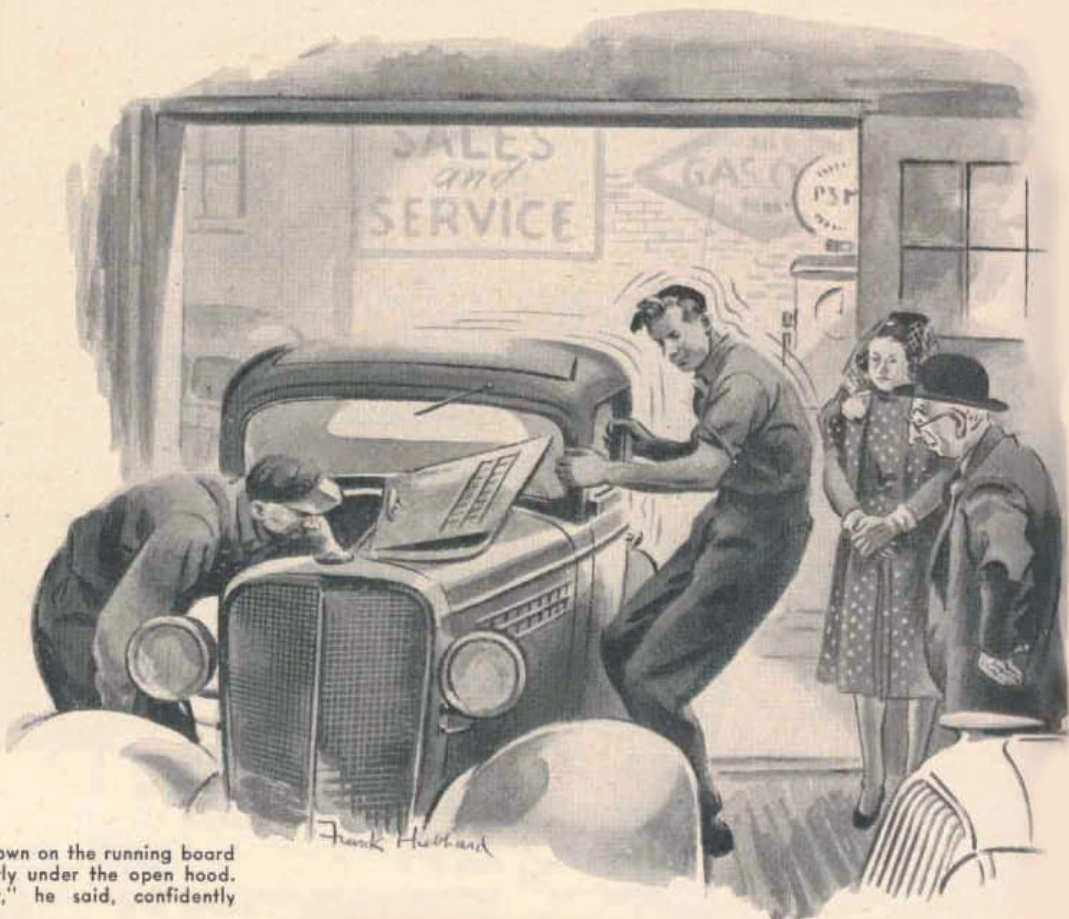
into the shop. He made another check that disclosed nothing wrong. In the shop, the engine ran sweetly.

At this critical point, Joe came into the shop to try to get an oil slick on the troubled waters by assuring the exasperated customer that Harry soon would locate and remedy the trouble. Harry, however, scratched his head and stared at the car helplessly. "Just like taking a kid to the dentist," he said, with a puzzled grin. "Soon as you get her there, the tooth stops aching."

"Spare me your pitiable attempts at humor, young man!" Clapp barked. "And get my car started!"

"Guess the valves must be sticking," Harry suggested, none too hopefully. With his fingers all thumbs under the professor's baleful glare, he took the engine head off and started to check the valves.

While this was going on, another horn honked outside, and an excited woman fluttered into the shop. "Oh, Mr. Clark!" she cried. "The strangest thing has happened! I do think that this used car that my husband bought yesterday is bewitched! It runs beautifully, except when I make a right-hand turn—(Continued on page 108)



Harry jumped up and down on the running board while Gus peered intently under the open hood. "It's in the distributor," he said, confidently

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Strange Car Troubles

(Continued from page 62)

and then the motor falters and sputters, and on one wide curve it absolutely stopped! But I'm sure that Mr. Wilson will be able to fix it—my husband always says that Mr. Wilson is so wonderful!"

"Gus isn't here just now, Mrs. Miller," Joe told her. "But Harry, here, will fix up your trouble as soon as he has Professor Clapp's car in shape. If you would come back in an hour or so—"

"Oh, I've had supper, and haven't anything particular to do," Mrs. Miller assured him. "I'll just wait around, if you don't mind."

So Mrs. Miller waited around, keeping up a continuous flow of conversation, while Harry puzzled and sweated, and the professor fumed and snorted.

JOE CLARK was in a dither when he went back into the office to answer the summons of the jingling telephone bell.

"Model Garage?" Relief flooded into Joe's mind as he heard his partner's voice at the other end of the wire. "Say, Joe, I'm laid up about fifteen miles up the highway. You'll have to send Harry with the wrecker to tow me in."

"What's—what's the matter?" Joe sputtered, aghast at this new complication.

"Darned if I know!" Gus said disgustedly. "My engine heated up, and I stopped to see what was the trouble. Then my flash light went dead, and I can't get going again. It's got me stumped. Get Harry started!"

Joe Clark will never forget the hour he waited while Mrs. Miller babbled about her bewitched car, and Professor Clapp paced the shop floor and growled his opinion of automobile mechanics in general and the staff of the Model Garage in particular.

AT LAST, the wrecker stopped before the shop door and Gus came in, his nose a fiery red from sunburn, and a grin on his face. "Evenin', Mrs. Miller. 'Evenin', Professor Clapp!" he greeted them cheerily. "Guess I picked the wrong day to go fishing! Now, Harry, get the head back on that engine, and I'll take the professor's car out for a little spin, and see if I can spot the trouble."

He backed the car out, and returned in less than two minutes. The engine was missing badly as he turned in at the door, but ran smoothly as soon as he stopped the car in the shop. "Let her run," he directed Harry. "Now, you give her 'road conditions' while I take a look." Harry jumped up and down on the running board while Gus peered intently under the hood. In less than a minute he cocked his head, listened closely, and signaled Harry to stop the engine. "It's in the distributor," he said, confidently. "Now we'll soon have her licked!"

Quickly but methodically he began to

(Continued on page 110)

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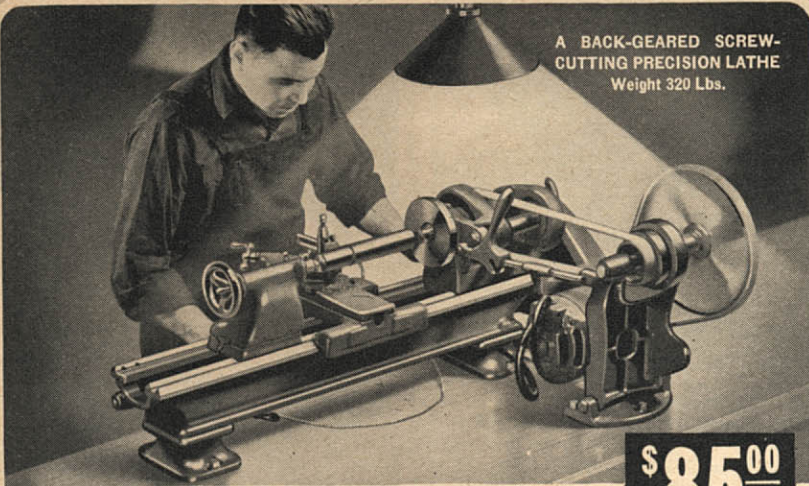
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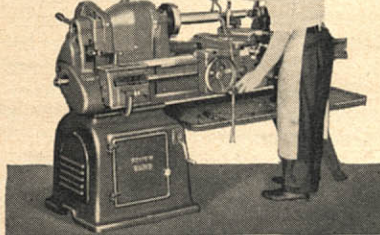
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Strange Car Troubles

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take the distributor apart. "Here she is!" He took out the post to which the high-tension and condenser wires were connected, and held it up for them to see. "Notice that fiber washer that is supposed to insulate the post? Part of it is gone, and what's left is cracked and so darned soaked with grease and oil that it shorts through part of the time—specially when the car hits a bump."

He replaced the damaged washer with a new one, reassembled the distributor, and turned to the professor.

"Ten cents for material, and about three hours of Harry's time," he said. "But you won't find the time on your bill. We'll charge that up to experience."

PROFESSOR CLAPP got into his car. Then he pointed a trembling finger at Harry. "That—that incompetent bungler—" he began.

Gus laughed. "Harry's doing all right," he said. "Everybody's got to learn. I had to, professor—and so did you!"

He turned to Mrs. Miller. "Now what's all this I hear about you having a bewitched car?"

For the eleventh time, Mrs. Miller told her tale of woe. "Guess I'd better take another little spin," Gus said, climbing into her car. This time he was gone for ten minutes. When he got back he drove into the shop. "You're right, Mrs. Miller," he said. "She runs fine as silk on the straight, but falters every time you take a right-hand turn. Well, Harry—what do you make of this one?"

"Fuel line?" guessed Harry. "Distributor points? Wiring system?"

"Might be any of them," Gus agreed. "But why should making a right-hand turn affect them? My guess is that it's the carburetor. Let's have a look."

HE TOOK the carburetor apart, examined the float carefully, and held it up. "Here's your witch, Mrs. Miller. See that mess of solder on the float? The original owner of your car had the float soldered, for some reason. He did the job himself, or had it done by someone else who was a sloppy workman—anyway, there was quite a lot of excess solder left on the float. That weights it down a good deal, but not enough to cause any trouble while the car is running straight. But your carburetor is mounted on the left-hand side, so that whenever you make a right-hand turn, centrifugal force pulls the gas in the carburetor toward its front. Then the extra weight on the float makes it sink down so far that it chokes up the carburetor, and your engine misses. On a long curve, sometimes, it stalls. Get a new float, Joe."

"I think you're just too wonderful, Mr. Wilson!" Mrs. Miller cooed, after Gus had backed her car out and headed it toward the road for her. "Centrifugal force—I'll have to try to re-

(Continued on page 111)

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Strange Car Troubles

(Continued from page 110)

member that, so I can tell Mr. Miller what the trouble was!"

As she drove away, Joe breathed a deep sigh of relief. "Whew!" Harry whistled. "I could have done a lot better if I hadn't had to listen to that line of chatter. And, as for the professor, he ought to change to anti-knock."

"That's all in the day's work," said Joe. The little bookkeeper turned to his partner. "Hey, Gus, what's the matter with *your* car? Never knew *you* to get hung up on the road before!"

"And is my face red!" Gus said. "Haul her in, will you, Harry? As I told you, I was driving along at about forty-five when I noticed that my engine was heating up mighty fast. I stopped to see what was wrong, and before I'd found the trouble my flash light went dead. And then I couldn't get started again. All right, Harry, let's give her the once-over."

THEY quickly checked the battery, ignition, spark plugs, wiring, and fuel line. Everything seemed to be in order. But the engine was dead.

As Gus leaned over with his head half under the hood, his nostrils twitched, and he sniffed several times. Then he walked to the rear end of the car, unscrewed the cap of the gasoline tank, sniffed again, and began to laugh.

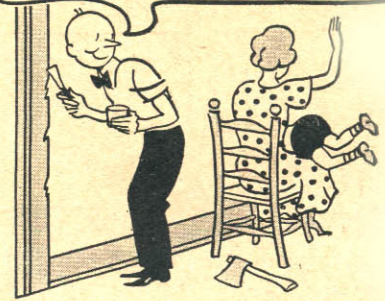
"Well," demanded Joe, considerably mystified, "what's the joke?"

"The joke's on me!" Gus said, still laughing. "Kerosene. Kerosene in my gas tank! Let's see, now—sure, that's how it happened. Old Doc Brown, up at the lake, told me that he was short of gas for his gasoline cook stove, so I siphoned a few gallons out of my tank for him. Then, on the way down, I noticed I was getting pretty low. I was taking a short cut over a dirt road, so I stopped at a crossroads general store where I'd got gas once or twice before. They haven't got a pump—keep their gasoline in a barrel under a shed back of the store, and pour it into your tank out of a gallon measure. A boy came out to wait on me, and now I remember that he seemed new to his job. I told him to put in just two gallons, because I didn't want to sit there while he made five trips back to the barrel.

"**S**EE what happened? They had a barrel of kerosene next to their barrel of gasoline, and he tapped the wrong barrel! My engine started all right on the gasoline in the carburetor. And it kept on running—only when it got to using the mixture of gasoline and kerosene it heated up in a hurry. When I stopped the engine to try to locate the trouble, there wasn't enough gasoline in the mixture of gasoline and kerosene in the carburetor to get it going again. No harm done—except that I'll have one sweet job cleaning out the kerosene in the morning. Right now, I'm going to call it a day!"

"Me too," said Joe. "And *what* a day!"

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