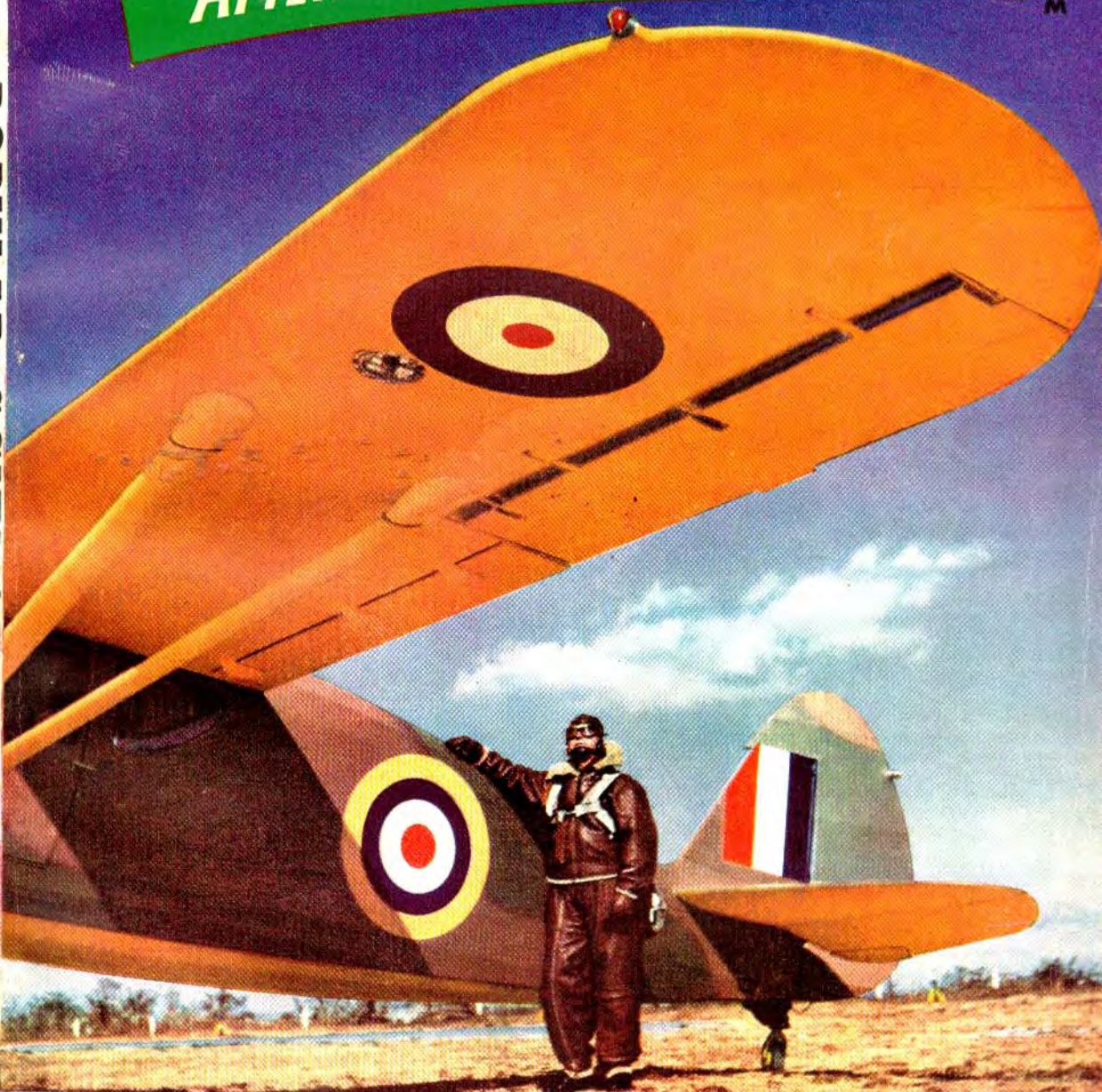


POPULAR SCIENCE

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He took three large tablets and dropped them into the gas tank. Then he got into the car and stepped on the starter. The engine took off

Trouble comes double

But some people, Gus Wilson believes, deserve it. Especially if they neglect their cars and likewise play practical jokes

By MARTIN BUNN

IT was getting close to four o'clock, and Gus Wilson, who had been busy all day, admitted to his Model Garage partner Joe Clark that he was just a little bored. "Plenty of work," he told him, "but it's all run-of-the-mine keep-'em-rolling jobs."

"Yeah," Joe said scornfully, "I know just the kind of job you'd like to have someone bring in here—something you could spend an hour fooling with, and then charge the customer for ten minutes' time and a quarter's worth of materials. You ought to be running an experimental laboratory,

not what's supposed to be a money-making business!"

Gus grinned at his partner. "Speaking of money-making business," he said, "someone's been honking his horn out at the pump for the last couple of minutes. You'd better get out there and collect his pennies!"

Joe growled something under his breath and hurried out. But after a minute or two he stuck his head in at the open shop door, and Gus was astonished to see that there was an expression of something that looked like awe on his bespectacled face.

"Ps-st!" Joe warned. "Come on out here—step on it! That fellow at the pump asked for some water, and when Wally gave him a can of it he emptied it into his *gas tank*. Then he dropped in three yellow tablets. And then he asked me could he use the phone. He's in the office now. Hurry up out here and see what happens when he tries to start his engine. By golly, if it runs on those tablets it means that he's found out how to beat the gas short-

age, and there'll be millions of bucks in it!"

Gus didn't waste any time in getting out to the pump. Wally, his mouth gaping open, was staring at a sedan with Colorado tags—a car which looked as if it had been driven plenty hard and which apparently hadn't been washed since the day it had been driven off the dealer's floor. A tall, thin man with stooped shoulders and a wide-brimmed felt hat shading a long, solemn face came out of the office. He started to get into the car, changed his mind, and asked Wally for some more water. When the grease-monkey gave it to him he emptied it carefully into his gasoline tank. Then he took a small tin box out of his pocket, extracted three large yellowish tablets from it, dropped them into the gas tank, and screwed on the cap. Then he got into the car and stepped on the starter. The engine took off at once. It pinged and it seemed sluggish—but it kept on running.

The solemn-faced man looked over at Gus and Joe. "Thanks, gents," he said. "Thought I might as well fill her up while I was at it—it don't cost any more, and now I won't have to stop for gas for a couple of days."

"Hey, mister," wide-eyed Wally gasped, "do those pills you put in your gas tank really run your motor?"

"She runs, don't she?" the man in the

car demanded. "That's good enough proof, ain't it?"

"Where can you buy 'em—those gas-pills?" breathless Wally wanted to know.

"I ain't put 'em on the market yet," the man told him. "But I'll tell you how you can make some. You take . . ."

"Wait a minute, mister, will you?" Joe cut in. "Just wait until I get a pencil and a piece of paper!"

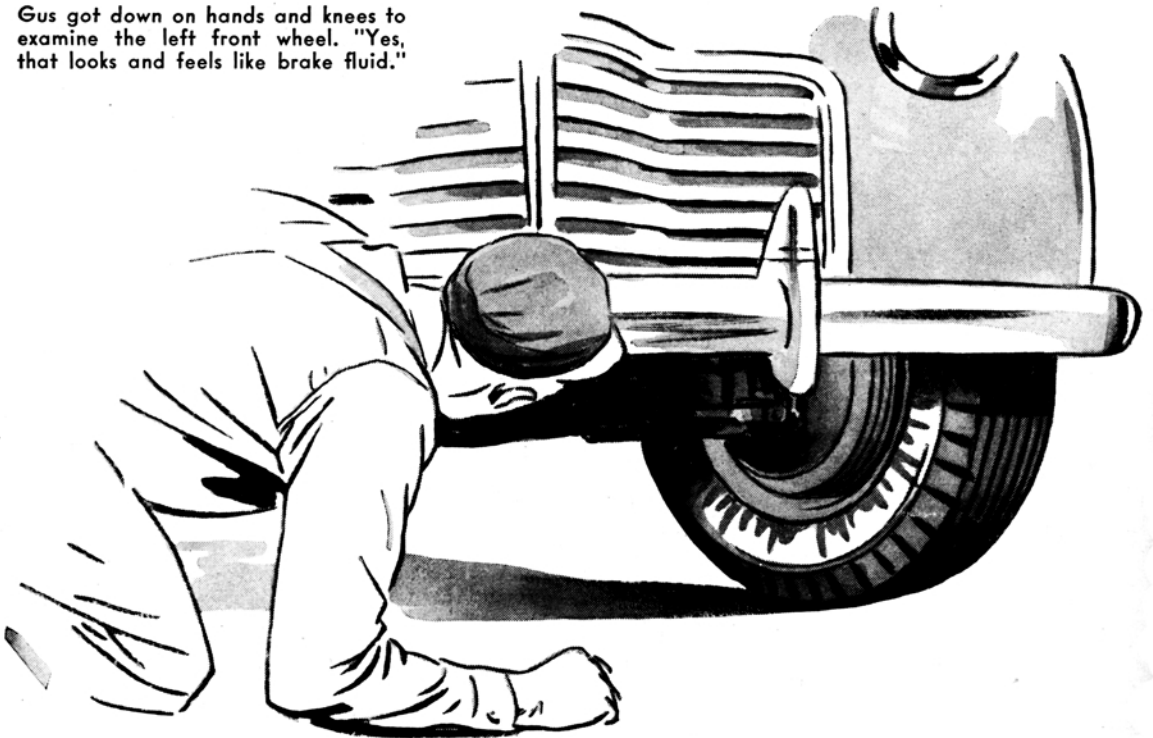
He started for the office door, but Gus caught his arm. "Don't bother, Joe," he said, and turned to the thin man. "Same old Bill Osgood, aren't you? As big a kiddler as you were out in Cripple Creek 20 years ago. How's that mine of yours doing?"

Osgood's solemn face crinkled into a hundred deep wrinkles as he laughed and shoved out a skinny hand. "I knew you the minute I set eyes on you, you old buzzard!" he told Gus. "But I didn't think you'd recognize me, so I thought I'd put one over on you before I told you who I was—just for the sake of old times. My ol' mine's doin' right good—so good I can take off all the time I want to. That's how come I'm in these parts. I'm visitin' my daughter and son-in-law up the road a piece."

Gus jerked a thumb toward the battered car. "What's the gag this time?"

"Jest a laugh-getter, that's all," Osgood explained. "Folks out east here are too

Gus got down on hands and knees to examine the left front wheel. "Yes, that looks and feels like brake fluid."



danged serious for me. I like a joke. Boy, those gas-pills of mine leave 'em gaspin' when I drive away. A couple of days ago I got in a little smash-up, and it sprung a leak in my gas tank. Hearin' everyone talkin' about the gas shortage gave me a big idea, so instead of gettin' my tank fixed I had an old one rigged up in the baggage compartment. Then I bought me a box of cough lozengers, and ever since then I've been workin' this gas-pill stunt for all its worth—and maybe a lot of you wise-guy Easterners ain't fallen for it. But, first off, I come in here on business—feller down at the station told me it was a good place to have a job done. I'm havin' a little trouble with my brakes—the brake fluid's gettin' away somehow, I guess. That's how I come to get in that little smash-up."

"What's this—another of your fool jokes?" Gus demanded suspiciously.

"No, sir!" Osgood proclaimed loudly.

"All right," Gus said. "But just remember that we're charging you for time from this minute on. Drive that bus of yours into the shop, will you?"

Osgood drove into the shop, and Gus noticed that he stopped his car by pulling on the hand brake. "How long is it since you've had anything done to your brakes?" he asked.

"Ain't never had anything done to 'em except adjust 'em once or twice," Osgood said. "Ain't never had any trouble with 'em until the last couple of weeks." He got out of the car, produced two cigars from a vest pocket, and held them out to Gus. "Have a see-gar," he invited.

Gus shook his head. "Those trick-shop cigars of yours were a stale joke 20 years ago," he declined scornfully.

Osgood grinned and put the phony cigars back in his pocket.

Gus got into the car and stepped on the brake pedal. It went right down to the floorboard. "You're right about losing brake fluid," he said. "You've lost so much that there's mighty little, if any, left in the system. Have you been using your hand brake altogether?"

"What's wrong with a good hand brake?" Osgood demanded.

"Someday you're going to drive yourself right into a graveyard," Gus said grimly. "Worse than that, you're going to drive some people who aren't as big fools as you are into one. A man who drives a car with brakes as bad as these ought to have his license taken away from him! He's a public menace! Well, let's find out where that fluid is getting away."

"That front wheel's been sort of wet lately," Osgood suggested. "Looks to me

like the fluid is leaking out past its brake drum."

Gus got down on hands and knees to examine the left front wheel. "Yes, that looks and feels like brake fluid," he said.

He pulled off the wheel and examined the brake mechanism. Then he whistled.

"Well, what about it?" Osgood inquired.

"You're a wonder—a real wonder," Gus told him. "You're undoubtedly the world's worst automobile driver. You've done something which, so far as I've ever heard, no one else ever has been fool enough to do. You're so bad you're remarkable!"

Osgood seemed to feel flattered by this caustic tribute. "That so?" he said. "What did I do?"

"You wore all the lining off your brake shoes," Gus said. "Then you went on using your brakes with the shoes bare. That wore down the shoes. Now, by golly, the shoes are gone, except for the inside reinforcing ring. You've let the pistons right out of the wheel cylinders—and all the brake fluid out of the system."

Osgood grinned. "Say, I made a right good job of it, didn't I?" he remarked with satisfaction. "Well, you better fix things up, Gus—all four brakes, while you're at it. And there's something else on this car that ain't working just right."

"There would be," Gus said. "Trouble comes double to a driver like you. What's your other grief?"

Osgood got in the car and started the engine. "Listen to that danged motor," he said. "What's the matter with it? It oughtn't to run thataway."

"It certainly shouldn't," Gus said, "but the way you manhandle a car, I don't wonder that it does. Probably it is something wrong with your distributor that is making the engine miss."

"That's right," Osgood said. "By gum, I jest remembered something. A few days ago my motor got to missing pretty bad, so I stopped in at a service station to see what was the matter with it. The feller said that my rotor was worn. He didn't have a new one that he could put in, so he fixed it up somehow with a little solder, and told me that I should get a new one first chance I had."

"Well, I drove away, and the motor ran all right for a while. Then I hit a rough spot in the road, and the motor stopped. No juice. I got out and fooled around with the distributor for a while—didn't really do anything to it, because I didn't know anything (Continued on page 220)

