

# Gus and the Scrambled Transmission

By MARTIN BUNN

DOC HOCKENJOSS lives in a fine old farmhouse that his great-great-grandfather built on land that is now part of a swanky district on the edge of our town. But there's nothing swanky about Doc. He's rough and ready in appearance and brusque and salty in speech; he often says he hates folks who put on airs, and he refers to himself as a "hoss doctor." As a matter of fact, he's a top-flight veterinarian who is as good with pampered Pomeranians as he is with colicky cows, and he has a practice that keeps him hustling.

Something went wrong with Doc's car one night shortly after Stan Hicks had started working for Gus. He was called out into the country to attend a sick horse, and the job turned out to be a long one. It was wet, and along toward midnight it got cold. The farmer produced a quart of applejack and, by the time the horse was out of danger, he and Doc had emptied it and made a good start on another.

Doc got home at 5 A.M. feeling a little the worse for wear, but he did something that he never forgets no matter how tired—he turned his car around and backed it into the barn so that if he should get a hurry call it would be headed right and ready to roll. Just then the applejack got in its dirty work,

"Towing her loosened up the gears, all right," Stan told him

and Doc backed into the wall good and hard. He jerked and cussed at the gear-shift for a few minutes, trying to get it out of reverse, but he couldn't budge it. So he went into the house, left a note for his wife asking her to phone Gus to come first thing in the morning, and then he went to bed.

Stan got to his house about 9 A.M. Doc, still sleepy, looked out the window. He saw Stan go into the barn and then come out, get into the wrecker, and back it in.

"That blame young fool," Doc muttered. "How does he expect to tow that car front-end first when it's stuck in reverse?"

With that he threw on some clothes and hurried out to the barn. He was just in time to hear Stan start up the wrecker; and then it happened—from the innards of Doc's bus there came a weird banshee shriek and the clatter of disintegrating mechanism, but the wheels began to turn.

Stan looked up and saw Doc standing near the doorway, agony in his face. He grinned triumphantly. "Towing her loosened up the gears, all right, mister," he said with all the cocksureness of youth. "I'll have your bus back in an hour or so." And he drove on out before Doc could regain his speech.

He was still in this satisfied frame of mind when he pulled into the Model Garage some 20 minutes later and Gus asked: "Well, what's the matter with *that* one?"

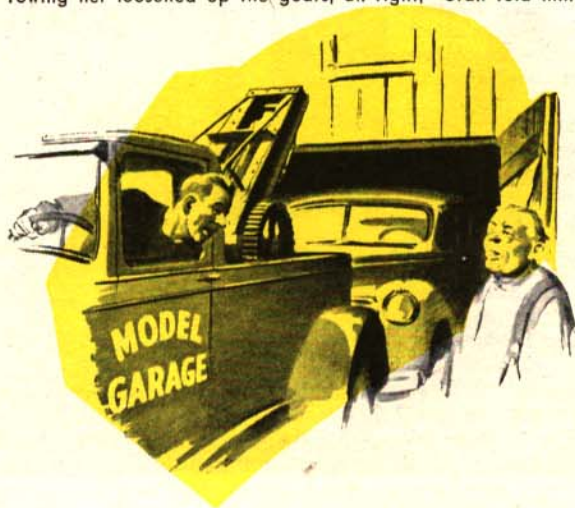
"I dunno," Stan said. "Nothin' now, I guess, but I thought I'd better bring her in so we could look her over. That old hick backed her into the barn wall, and she stuck in reverse. I couldn't shift her, so I hooked on the wrecker and gave her a yank. That freed the gears, all right."

Gus felt a cold sweat on his forehead. "You—you what!" he stammered.

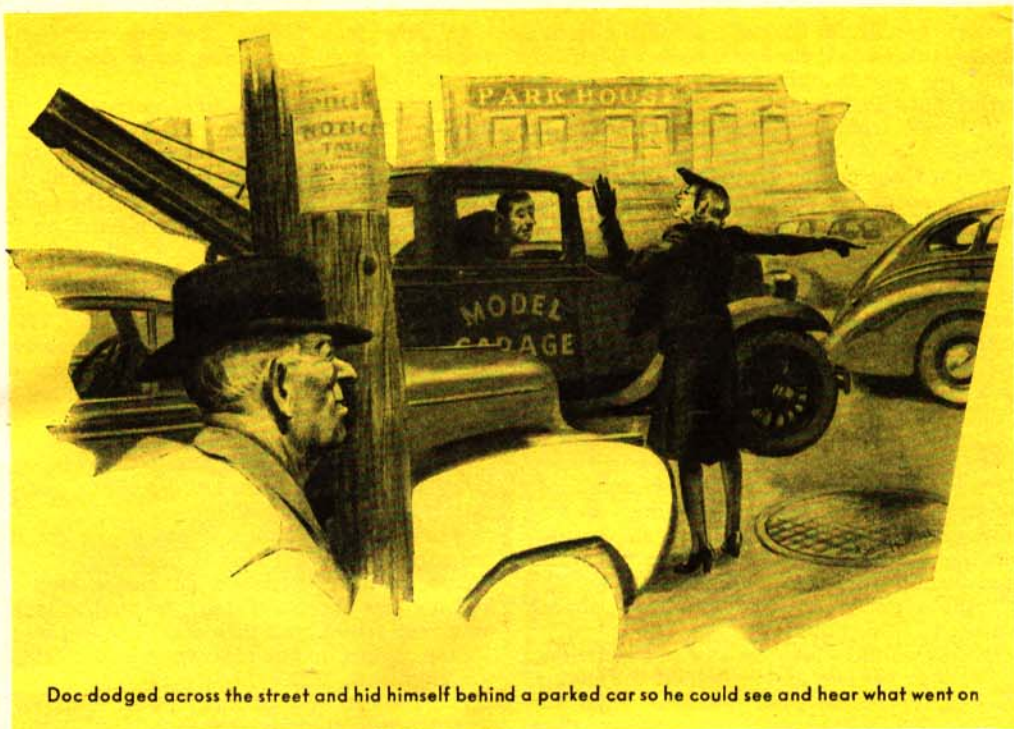
"Want me to check her, or would you rather do it?" Stan went on cheerily.

Gus thought of several things to say, but he held them. "I'll do it," he told Stan grimly. "There's a greasing job over there that you'd better get busy with."

His worst fears were realized







Doc dodged across the street and hid himself behind a parked car so he could see and hear what went on

when he went to work. He found that the complicated automatic-transmission mechanism had been ripped to pieces, with many of the small gears ruined, and he knew some of them would be hard to replace. Sadly he went into the office, called Doc Hockenjooss, and told him it would be several days before he could have his car.

"That lunkhead you sent here said I could have it in an hour," Doc roared at him.

"He's an optimist," Gus said. "I'm not. If you'll come in Friday, I'll try to have it ready. You'll have to use your wife's car until then, or I'll lend you mine."

Then he hung up and went back to the shop. There he found Stan gazing at the scrambled mechanism of the automatic transmission.

"What's the matter with it, boss?" Stan asked innocently.

"We won't go into that now," Gus said. "But here's something to remember: *Never use force trying to make any part of a car work.* Get me?"

"Sure, boss, I get you," Stan replied in a subdued voice, and went back to his greasing.

Gus had to make a trip down to the city to locate some of the gears and other parts that Stan had ruined, but he succeeded in rounding them up, and when Doc came in for his car on Friday he had it ready.

"What happened?" Doc asked, and when

Gus told him, he whistled. "What's it going to cost?"

Gus had been checking the jobber's bill for the new gears. He passed it over.

Doc took one look and hit the ceiling. "What!" he yelled. "Derned close to \$100. I won't pay that!"

"Keep your shirt on," Gus advised him. "You asked what it was going to cost, not who was going to pay. Stan didn't know his job, so the loss is on the house."

"Well, that's fair enough," Doc admitted. "Tell you what, Gus—next time you get sick, call me. I won't charge you a cent."

**D**OC HOCKENJOSS is a vindictive cuss—when he dislikes anyone, he dislikes for keeps. And at the head of his blacklist is Mrs. C. Sherman Landsmoore. She's an angular woman with loads of money and a vitriolic tongue, and she holds office in every woman's club and uplift organization in the county.

She and Doc speak—usually sarcastically—when they meet, but they make no bones about heartily detesting each other. Mrs. Landsmoore always refers to Doc as "that awful, awful man," and he has been heard to call her "that long-toothed mare."

Down on Main Street one afternoon not long ago, Doc saw Mrs. Landsmoore nose her convertible into an angle-parking space. When he came out of a store a little later,



he saw her still in the car, racing the engine and yanking at the gearshift. Realizing that she was in difficulty, he went over to enjoy himself.

"Havin' trouble, Mrs. Landsmoore?" he asked.

"Yes, I *am* having trouble!" she snapped. "My gears won't shift. But there is no use asking *your* advice."

"Well, now," Doc said with fake geniality. "I don't know much about automobiles, and that's a fact. But a while back I had exactly the same trouble you're havin', and a smart young feller from the Model Garage got my gearshift free in a wink. If I were you I'd get the same feller down here—Stan Hicks is his name. And lots of luck to you."

Grinning, Doc hurried across the street to the Park House lobby where he could keep Mrs. Landsmoore under observation. For another few minutes she continued to tug and yank at the gearshift; then she got out of the car, founced across the sidewalk, and disappeared into a drugstore.

"She's going to phone!" Doc almost shouted. "Oh, boy!"

A few minutes later he saw her come out, go back to her car, and switch off the engine. A quarter of an hour passed. Then the Model Garage wrecker came along, Stan Hicks driving it. Mrs. Landsmoore flagged him down, and Doc dodged across the street and hid himself behind a parked car where he could see and hear what went on.

"Yeah, I'm Stan Hicks," the grease monkey was saying. "But how come you called me? Nobody else ever has!"

"You were highly recommended by Dr. Hockenjoss," Mrs. Landsmoore told him. "The gearshift of my car is stuck somehow, and he told me that he had experienced the same difficulty and that you had—er—obviated it in a—a wink, I think, was his expression."

Most of the color drained out of Stan's ruddy cheeks. "Stuck gearshift . . . Doc Hockenjoss . . ." he gasped.

## GUS SAYS:

In spite of all warning, lots of folks are driving as if they can get a new car any time they want it. They had better continue their war-born conservation well into peace, though, for when the new cars do come, there won't be enough to go around for some time.

"Young man," Mrs. Landsmoore commanded, "stop muttering and do something!"

"Lady," Stan told her earnestly, "I wouldn't touch your car for \$1,000 cash."

Mrs. Landsmoore's temper slipped the leash. "Don't you dare be impertinent to me!" she shrieked. "You fix my car the same way you fixed Dr. Hockenjoss's—and do it immediately!"

"Lady," Stan repeated, "I told you I wouldn't touch—"

"That'll do, Stan," Gus Wilson said. He had been driving along Main Street and, seeing Stan and the wrecker, had stopped to lend a hand if one were needed. "What's this all about?"

Mrs. Landsmoore told him—and how!

Gus looked at Stan. "Well," he asked, "why don't you fix Mrs. Landsmoore's gearshift? You know how."

"Huh?" Stan gasped. "You mean fix it the same way I did Doc Hockenjoss's?"

Gus grinned. "There's an easier way—and it's less expensive, too," he said. "Jack up a rear wheel, and then start the engine."

Stan jacked up one rear wheel and started the engine as told.

"Now shift into neutral," Gus went on. The gears shifted sweetly.

"There you are, Mrs. Landsmoore," Gus said politely. "You won't have any further difficulty, I'm sure. . . . The charges? Oh, we'll send you a statement."

WHEN Gus got back to the shop, he found Stan waiting and looking injured.

"All right, kid," Gus said. "You did all right. First chance I get we'll take an automatic transmission apart so you can see how it works. Until then, here's enough to go on with: Some automatic transmissions stick in gear when a car is backed hard against a wall or driven head on into a curb. Once in a while they even stick in high gear when a car is climbing a steep hill.

"If they stick while the car is where it can't be moved a foot or so in the direction it was going, lack of centrifugal action in the transmission prevents the gears from being shifted. Trying to force them by rocking or pushing is dangerous. If you push or pull the wrong way, you're likely to ruin some of the delicate gears in the automatic-transmission unit—the way you did when you towed Doc's car. The only safe remedy is to jack up a rear wheel and start the engine. Then you can shift without trouble."

"O.K., boss," Stan said. "I'll remember that . . . But why the heck did Doc recommend me to that dame?"

Gus laughed.

"Don't get a swelled head about that," he advised. "It was no way to treat a lady."