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Wilbur Shaw Previews a

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Making the Most
of Your Basement

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Gus Gets the Pitch

"Hurry, hurry, hurry!" spieled the carnival pitchmen, but the Model Garageman kept stalling as mysteriously as their new car.

By Martin Bunn

A HORN honked impatiently outside the Model Garage.

"I'll get it," Gus called back to Stan Hicks, his helper. "You'd better stick with that valve job for Mr. Landsdowne."

Two cars were parked out on the concrete by the gasoline pumps. A frayed knotted tow rope linked them. Gus recognized the tow car as the battered coupe belonging to old Jim Barstow who ran a sizable farm about 10 miles out of town. The car being towed looked as if it had just left the showroom.

"Newfangled Buggy" Breaks Down

"Got customers for ya," greeted Barstow as he unhooked a piece of baling wire and pushed open his door. "Broke down on the road out by my back 10. Happened to be cultivatin' and offered to tow 'em in."

"Thanks, Jim."

"Yep, that's the trouble with these newfangled buggies," Barstow rambled on. "Too many gadgets to get out of kilter. Well, I'll be seein' ya."

He tossed the tow rope into his car and clattered off down the road.

"Quite a character," said Gus with a chuckle to the two riders in the new car. "Now, how did your car happen to stall?"

"Just stalled, that's all," said the big man behind the wheel, in a voice like a saw sharpening a file.

"Yeah," echoed a small man sitting beside him, in equally rasping tones. "We were



"I'll just road-test it,"

breezin' along in fine style when all of a sudden no motor. It was like Chick, here, had turned off the ignition. I says to Chick—"

"Can the spiel, Sparks. We got no time for chatter. Let's get the car fixed and hit the road." He turned to Gus. "We're pitchmen, mister—you know, spielers—for the big carnival that's opening in the city and we gotta be there tonight to help stake out our act. Think you can help us in a hurry?"

"Try to," said Gus.

The big man eased his bulk out of the



said Gus, as he backed the car quickly out of the shop.

car and Gus slid in under the wheel. There was plenty of gas. The mileage showed less than 1,200—the car still had that new smell about it. But nothing would coax even a cough out of the engine.

Pitchman Tells Gus How to Fix It

“Let’s push her into the shop,” Gus said after a few tries, “where I can put some test instruments on her.”

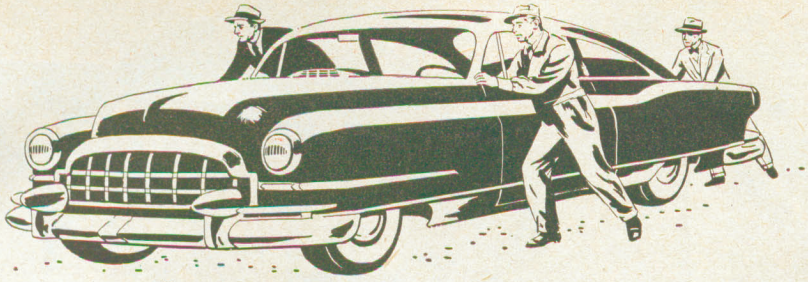
“Now, wait a minute,” the man called Chick said. “This should be an easy thing to fix. I know a little about cars myself. It’s

plain enough that the engine just ain’t getting any gas. Trouble’s obviously somewhere in the carburetor, the fuel pump or the feed line. You ought to be able to find it there quick enough. We ain’t got time for a fancy tune-up, so just check the fuel system and get us moving as quick as you can, huh?”

“You may be right,” returned Gus evenly. “But I have to look a car over before I can spot the trouble.”

“Okay, okay, let’s get her inside.”

The three men, with Gus reaching in



through the driver's window to steer, soon had the car parked beside Gus's bench.

"Ever have any trouble before?" asked Gus.

"Nope," answered Chick curtly.

"Been in a repair shop for a check-up?"

"Nope."

As Gus rolled his test panel over, the pitchman moved away and began to pace the garage nervously. His little sidekick paced right along with him. They seemed to be discussing something important in confidential tones. Gus began checking the ignition system—he felt sure the trouble was there somewhere.

After a few minutes, the little guy, Sparks, called out: "Making any progress, Pop?" He looked at a potato-size gold watch anchored to his vest by a heavy gold chain.

Gus ignored the little spieler and kept about his work of checking every wire and connection. On the surface everything seemed perfect, yet the ignition system was completely dead. The test rig bore him out.

There was only one thing to do, check each unit separately, so Gus started out with the battery leads.

Gus's Behavior Mystifies Stan

"Got an oversize battery in here, haven't you?" he asked, tapping the case with the tip of his screwdriver.

"Yeah, yeah," Chick said shortly. "Do a lot of cold-weather driving. . . . But never mind that. Haven't you located the trouble yet?"

Gus was checking the distributor now and he had an odd gleam in his eye. "Listen, mister," he said finally, "give me a little time, will you? This engine is new to me—I've never worked on a model like it before."

Over in the corner of the garage where he was working on the Landsdowne car, Stan glanced up in surprise. What did Gus mean by saying he wasn't familiar with that car? Doc Hanson had one just like it and they'd had it in the shop for a tune-up only

last week. Gus's voice sounded funny, too—kind of Milquetoasty, as if he were extra anxious to please the big loud-talking pitchman.

But it seemed to suit Chick. For the first time he sounded almost genial when he said, "Well, all right, old-timer, but shake it up, will you? We're busy men and time's a-wastin'."

Road Test Rouses Carny Men's Wrath

Ten minutes later, after several trips to the stock room, Gus snapped the distributor cap into place and slid into the driver's seat. The engine started up smoothly.

"I'll just road-test it," he called out to the pitchmen and backed the car quickly out of the shop. Both men started to protest that they couldn't spare the time, but Gus was already headed down the road.

When Gus got back to the garage, he was greeted by two red-faced, fuming men, who, judging from the look on Stan Hicks' face, had been venting their anger on him.

"What's the idea?" Chick shouted. "You knew what a hurry we're in!"

"No idea. Just routine in this shop. We don't like customers to get a few miles down the road and find that what we thought we'd fixed isn't right after all. Matter of fact, she needs one more minor adjustment." Gus popped open the hood again. "Stan, come over here a minute, I've got a job for you." Gus whispered briefly. Stan nodded and left the garage.

After a few minutes Gus closed the hood again. "There she is, boys, as good as new. That'll be \$12.50."

"Well, it's about time," snapped Chick. The little fellow was already in the car when the big guy slid in and started backing out. Suddenly he stopped. "Hey," he yelled, "get that grease monkey of yours to back that tow truck out of the driveway. How in blazes do you expect me to back out?"

Stan climbed up into the driver's seat and

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Gus Gets the Pitch

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started the engine. As the tow truck eased back out of the way it revealed a state police car also parked crosswise of the entrance.

Sgt. Jerry Corcoran was standing in front of it with his right hand resting firmly on the butt of his gun.

"Okay, you fellows," ordered Jerry, "might as well make it easy for all of us. Slide out of the car with your hands in back of your heads."

Gus Gives Stan the Inside Dope

At that moment, two more state cops appeared from behind the tow truck and had handcuffs on the startled pair before they knew what was happening.

"Thanks a million, Gus," said Jerry, after he'd herded the handcuffed pair into their own car with a trooper at the wheel and another in the back seat. Then he climbed into the police car and started the engine.

"What gives with the carnival guys?" asked Stan as he and Gus watched the two-car caravan pull away. "Fleece a local yokel at the last stand?"

"Nothing as simple as that," said Gus. "That car of theirs has more built-in secret compartments than a Chinese puzzle chest."

"Jewel smugglers?"

"Dope peddlers."

"Then they weren't really carnival men at all."

Pitchmen Put Up a Good Front

"Sure they were. They've been using that as a front to sell dope to local peddlers around the country. That car of theirs is a rolling narcotics warehouse."

"Gosh, how did you spot it?"

"Well, if the trouble hadn't been in the ignition I probably wouldn't have stumbled on it. In checking it over on the first go-around, it seemed as if everything was over-size—the battery, the oil cleaner, even the coil. Incidentally, the trouble was in the distributor."

"What was it?"

"You know that small carbon brush in the center terminal of the distributor cap that serves as the contact for the spring on top of the rotor?"

Stan nodded.

"Well, it had cracked and a piece of it had dropped down into the breaker-arm assembly. It was shorting out the breaker arm,

and keeping the breaker points from closing, too."

"What was suspicious about that?"

"Nothing. But after I dislodged the piece and began replacing the broken brush with a new one, the coil caught my eye. I noticed that it seemed higher than most. I twisted the top and it came off in my hands. The outer shell was a very neat dummy. Inside was a standard coil and wedged in around it were dozens of tiny white paper packets."

"And that's when you decided to road-test the car," put in Stan.

Gus Helps Smash a Syndicate

"Right. I wanted Jerry and the boys at the barracks to back me up. The paper packets contained dope, all right—'uncut heroin' they said—and a concealed drawer at the back end of the battery case was filled with marijuana. What the narcotics boys'll find when they really go to work on it is anybody's guess."

"Nice haul for Jerry," said Stan.

"Oh, both the state and the federal boys knew that some syndicate was doing a fast job of distributing dope around the country, but they didn't know about this car. Now they think there might be more than one, part of a big network run by some mechanically minded guy who thought up this gimmick of stashing the dope away in car parts rather than under the seats and in built-in compartments cops are wise to."

Sometimes It Pays to Play Dumb

"But wouldn't any wise mechanic like you catch on?"

"They probably have their own garage where they go for repairs, most likely the same place where the changes are made. Fortunately, the mechanic, whoever he is, cracked that distributor brush." Gus grinned. "And maybe you noticed I played kind of dumb."

"You sure did. Maybe you ought to be in show business yourself." END

Next month: Gus goes hunting for trouble.

Tipsy Tip

A guy went into a bar and ordered three buckets of beer for his horse, hitched outside. Bartender says, "All that beer for the horse? How about you?" "Not me," says the guy, "I'm driving."
—Clues.