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MONTHLY

MECHANICS - AUTOS - HOMEBUILDING



Robot Uses  
Hand Tools  
PAGE 100

25¢  
December



U.S. Now Flies  
World's Fastest Fighter

PAGE 94

Studebaker's  
New Wagon

PAGE 110

Home Uses  
for Aluminum

PAGE 139



# Gus Rides

*On a storm-swept Christmas Eve, Gus digs deep into his bag of tricks to save a cargo of holly—and an old man's faith.*

**By Martin Bunn**

WHEN Knute Hansen drove his pickup truck to the pumps at Gus Wilson's Model Garage on that gray afternoon before Christmas Eve, Gus knew where he was bound.

It was near closing time. The sky was brooding and sullen. The very air was thick and heavy. Gus sniffed the weather as he filled the gas tank. Out of the corner of his eye, he studied the old man at the wheel.

Everyone knew Knute. Small, rheumatic, a mere wisp of a man, Knute made a meager

living doing odd jobs around town. Christmas time was his chief joy. It was then that he gathered holly, fashioned it into beribboned wreaths and bunches and sold it in the tiny town of Highland, high in the mountains.

Knute enjoyed a monopoly. No one in Highland would think of buying holly from anyone but him. And the holly was free to those who couldn't pay. Knute took an extra measure of pleasure in Highland. His daughter, her husband and three children lived there.

Gus screwed on the gas-tank cap, hung up the hose and walked up to the cab.



# with Santa Claus

"Merry Christmas, Knute," he greeted the old man. "Headed for a visit with your daughter, eh? Better take it easy. Weather looks bad."

Knute thrust his head out the window.

"Yah!" he said with satisfaction. "Every year I go home to my Frieda. Maybe this year, Gus, you like to go along?"

## *Sky Looks Forbidding*

"Go along!" Gus exclaimed. "I've got no folks in Highland."

He glanced again at the forbidding sky.

"That's yust it," Knute declared, his faded, blue eyes beaming with friendliness. "I bane widower, so I go at yule time to my daughter. You bane bachelor man, so you go along with Knute and have one good time for yourself."

"But I've got to be in town tomorrow," reasoned Gus. A chilling gust of wind struck his face.

"That's all right," Knute told him. "You go to Highland with me for Christmas Eve. Tomorrow you drive my truck back. After New Year my daughter and son-in-law bring me back to town."

Gus rubbed a reflective hand over his chin. Knute could get himself in a peck of trouble. But to go on a drive to Highland on a night like this?

"Wait a minute, Knute," he said. "Be right back."

As Gus rang up the state police he thought of the old man, skidding around up in the mountains on dangerous roads, with a storm threatening.

"This is Gus Wilson, down at the Model

Using the tree trunk as a pry, Gus and Knute Hansen finally managed to hoist a rear wheel.



Garage," he said when the state police office answered the phone. "How's the road to Highland?"

"It's open over the pass," the answer came back, "but there's no guarantee on how long it'll stay open. There's snow up there already, and more might come at any time."

"Thanks," Gus said as he hung up. It was something over 40 miles to Highland, over a graveled road that was only fair in summer. What the heck, thought Gus. His decision was made. He told his helper, Stan Hicks, where he was going, and left him to close the shop. He climbed in beside Knute, noting that there were chains on the rear wheels of the pickup truck.

"Let's go," he said.

"Sure," Knute declared. "We have one fine time, by yimminy."

They rolled along at a good clip until they branched off into the winding, narrow road that led up into the mountains. The truck labored with its load of holly. Snow began to spit on the windshield and it seemed to Gus that the wind was building up. As they crawled into higher altitudes the vast, brooding hills became blanketed with snow that hadn't reached lower levels. There was six inches on the roadway, fluffing up with new fall. As they topped the summit the truck writhed in the old man's hand as the full force of the gale struck them broadside. It was a wild night for Christmas Eve.

As they moved down after topping the summit, Knute rode the brake pedal too much, not always shifting into lower gears when he should.

#### *Gus Thinks of Taking the Wheel*

Darkness was fully down now. It was snowing harder, with a cross wind that drove the storm in gray, slanting sheets across the beam of the headlights. Looking out the window Gus saw a wild, uninhabited land. He thought of taking the wheel from the old fellow, but Knute knew the twisting, up-and-down turnings of this mountain road better than he did.

The oldster was riding his brake as the truck nosed steeply down into a pocket in the mountains. As it hit the bottom, facing

a rise, Gus suddenly smelled burning insulation. Almost as the strong scent hit his nostrils, the lights went out and the motor went dead. With one slap of his hand Gus heaved back on the emergency brake. They slid to a halt.

"By yimminy," Knute declared, winding down the window and spitting into the wind, "something goes wrong."

"How right you are, by jimminy, Knute," Gus said, hitting the ground.

Here they were in a dead truck in a night black as the inside of a hat, with six inches of snow on the ground and more coming down by the minute. There would be no traffic over this lonely pass to Highland for days. Highland folks were accustomed to

being snowed in at times in midwinter. As far as Gus could figure, they were about 15 miles either way from civilization. Could they walk out? In a blizzard?

Feeling in his coveralls pocket Gus found the ever-present pencil light, pair of pliers, screwdriver, and roll of black tape.

"We should be able to locate the trouble and fix it, Knute," he said with a cheerfulness that was half counterfeit.

"We do," Knute said, and there was deep feeling in his voice, "or I carry my holly over these mountains on my back."

The words halted Gus with the hood half-lifted. He stood there in the blackness and in the wild clamor of the stormy night suffused by a feeling that was greater than his worry. This simple, kindly soul, he observed to himself, is thinking only of carrying holly to Highland.

Gus played his pencil light back and forth over the engine. The light steadied on one of the battery straps. The heavy, leaden connection seemed to have sagged down in the center. Gus reached over and touched it. It was hot. The battery had been subjected to a dead short. It had been so heavy that it had practically melted the lead connecting the cells. The battery was dead.

Gus recalled the burned-insulation smell. He pulled up the floorboards. There was the trouble. The arm of the brake pedal

[Continued on page 238]



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### Gus Rides with Santa Claus

[Continued from page 180]

had been rubbing for a long time against the main battery lead to the starter button. Finally, under Knute's heavy braking, it had been worn through to the bare copper, producing a dead short.

The battery might or might not be capable of taking and holding a charge now. The plates might be too buckled for service. Gus taped the wire, shoved it clear of the brake-pedal arm.

### Gus Chews on the Problem

He straightened, fumbled out his pipe with fingers that were stiff with cold, absently poured in tobacco that was swept away by the wind, while his mind chewed on the problem. The truck would run on the generator if they could get it rolling fast enough for a husky charge. But the vehicle sat at the bottom of a steep grade, facing a steep upgrade.

"Here," Knute's voice came out of the blackness of the night, "I have a better light than your little one, Gus."

A broad beam emanated from Knute's hands as he spoke, and Gus saw that he had one of those camp lights that are powered with two telephone batteries. Hmm, thought Gus, here were four volts. Would a six-volt ignition system start an engine on four? A car battery with one dead cell would start an engine if it was cranked by hand, even when too weak to turn the starter.

Quickly Gus stripped wire from the tail-light lead and tied the two telephone batteries into the primary ignition circuit, while Knute held the pencil light on the work.

"Now, Knute," he said, "we'll turn her over."

### Knute's Crank Is 100 Miles Away

"By yimminy, Gus," Knute said sadly, "I ain't got no crank. Feller next door borrows my crank and my yack—he goes for yuletide a hundred mile." And as if in explanation of the loan, he added, "What poor, raggedy tires that feller had."

"Oh, Lord," Gus groaned. To himself he muttered, "Better start carrying holly, Knute."

Knute's thin, weather-seamed features were centered in the beam of Gus's pencil light. Looking into the faded, blue eyes,

[Continued on page 240]

## This is a Syncro Electric Jig Saw

It's a Complete Unit in Itself. You can carry it home under your arm, set it on a table or workbench, plug it in, and proceed to work on it.



Now this blade gives you 14,400 smooth strokes per minute, just about 5 times as fast as the ordinary jig saw blade. It is especially well suited to delicate fret



saw work and it always cuts that smooth edge that requires no sanding. This last feature alone will save you many hours of time which you would ordinarily spend sanding such things as what-not shelves, magazine racks, fern stands and the many other things that you will like to make.

You will find that all the forests of the world are right at your elbow to provide you with rare and beautiful materials for your handicraft. But even with that, you are not limited to wood. Plastic materials are now appearing in a large variety of colors.



For instance, catalin, a molded plastic. It is comparatively easy to work on this jig saw and takes a beautiful polish. Not quite so easy to work, however, as bakelite. Bakelite, for a cast plastic, is hard and brittle and the ordinary saw cuts kind of a splintered or split edge on it. But the high speed or split edge on it. But the high speed and the fine teeth in these Syncro blades always insure a clean cut. You will find that these various plastic materials are particularly nice for working out such things as monogram pins, belt buckles, picture frames and wall lamps.

Now comes the best news of all. Parents especially are glad to know that here is a power jig saw that is safe also for boys and girls to use. Accidental injuries on this machine, even the slightest cuts, are very rare. Serious injuries are impossible. Now that may seem strange to you but the reason is very simple—the Syncro blade does not "pull" the "work" or finger towards it as belt-driven jig saw blades do.



If you happen to have seen a Boy Scout Troop doing handicraft metal work, you will always find a jig saw one of their main tools. Perhaps you have various ideas that you would like to work out in metal; a name plate out of aluminum, a shadow lamp out of copper, or book ends out of brass. You can do all these things on this same machine using the same one blade to cut all those different types of metal, as well as wood, cardboard, etc. And remember that you can do all these things without a great deal of expensive equipment. Actually with only one machine—one jig saw and one blade—one saw you can carry home under your arm, plug it in and go to work on it.



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However, if he is out of stock or no store is near you, send only \$24.95 direct to Syncro Corporation, Dept. G-123, Oxford, Michigan, and your Syncro Jig Saw No. 301 will be shipped to you postpaid. Use it 10 days, then if it does not please you 100% return saw postpaid to Syncro and your money will be promptly refunded. Or send postcard for Free Circular of Syncro Saw and Syncro Sanders.

100%

## Gus Rides with Santa Claus

(Continued from page 230)

Gus saw a man's faith in him die. Knute Hansen had never expected to see a stalled vehicle that Gus Wilson couldn't start.

The wind was howling now. Snow stung their faces. Gus's tiny light was reflected from the blade of an axe, thrust in the side of the pickup, beside the holly.

"Wait, Knute," he cried. "You've got an axe and you're handier with it than a grease monkey."

"By yimminy, Gus," Knute complained, "you been running a yoke on old Knute. I know all along you start my truck easy."

It wasn't easy. It was hard, cold work, up there among the snow-laden trees in the darkness, cutting down a tree that Gus had selected and trimming it of branches. Together they got it down to the pickup truck. Using the tree trunk as a pry, they finally managed to hoist a rear wheel.

### Gus Turns the Motor Over

With the motor in gear, Knute in the cab manipulating gas and choke, Gus turned the engine over by spinning the wheel. Gus was cold. His hands were half frozen. Would those four volts be enough?

Never in his life before had the sound of a starting, sputtering engine sounded so good to Gus. He catapulted into the cab, shoving Knute aside. He slapped the truck out of gear, keeping the engine turning over fast enough to throw a full output on the generator. They sat there a long time, while the heater brought them warmth. Then the truck started crawling through the snow, over the mountain.

When, at long last, they drove down the short, single street of Highland, it seemed to Gus that every door in the town burst open in greeting. Folks gathered about the truck, heedless of the storm, women with snow-sprinkled shawls about their heads, bearded men grinning.

"Merry Christmas, Knute!" they chorused. And it seemed to Gus that the time-honored greeting took on a new and deeper meaning. END

### On Their Own

A GANG of road repairmen had forgotten their shovels and phoned their foreman.

He replied: "I'll send the shovels out on another truck. Just lean on each other until they get there."—*Fireman's Fund Record.*