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Gus Drives A Bad Bargain

By Martin Bunn

WHEN Silas Barnstable, the town tightwad, showed up at Gus Wilson's Model Garage early one morning and announced that he was going to the city to buy a new car, Gus could hardly believe it.

"A new car!" Stan Hicks, Gus's helper, gasped. "I never thought to see the day."

"And why not?" Silas snapped, his wolfish features thrust over the door of his piston-clattering Model A Ford. "I know a bargain when I see one."

"Bargain?" Gus Wilson said. "But why drive 200 miles to the city, Silas? Our local dealers can take care of you."

"Hah!" Silas snorted. "They'd take care of me, all right, eyeteeth and all. I can beat their prices a mile. Give me five gallons of gas."

"Five gallons won't take you halfway," Stan Hicks told him, even though he knew the old reprobate's penchant for having an empty tank.

"Gas is a cent cheaper nearer the city," Silas announced with satisfaction. "I aim to get my money's worth."

"Can you beat that?" Stan Hicks said as Silas drove away with a grinding of worn gears.

"Well," Gus chuckled, "he did buy three gallons more than usual, and gas is a cent cheaper nearer the city. He'll save



*"Fifty dollars," Silas
shouted into the wind,*

five cents, all told, on gas. I wonder how much he'll save on the car?"

GUS thought about this as he worked, knowing that there were certain car lots in the city that stocked standard makes of new cars, even though they were not authorized dealers. These cars were often advertised at reduced prices.

The night was wind-blown, with a spattering of rain, when Gus came back to the Model Garage after dinner to work on a rush job he'd promised out. He had finished the job and was cleaning up when the telephone rang. Picking up the receiver, Gus heard Silas Barnstable's thin voice over the wire.

"How much will you charge, Gus, to



"and they didn't fix it!"

come out and tow me in? I'm 10 or 15 miles out on the main highway."

Gus sighed, "Let's not worry about charges now, Silas. I'll be right out."

Gus found Barnstable standing beside a new sedan, parked on the highway shoulder. Silas was waving his arms, the wind whipping an ancient slicker about his skinny legs. Gus backed the tow truck into position and set out red flares, while Silas trotted beside him, chattering incoherently.

"Fifty dollars," he shouted into the wind, "and they didn't fix it! I'll get a lawyer. I'll sue. I'll—"

"Slow down, old-timer," Gus said soothingly. "What's the trouble?"

"I bought this car spanking new, mind

you," Silas declared. "I was on my way home when it quit on me. There I was, 30 miles from a garage. I walked to a farmhouse—dratted farmer charged me 30 cents to phone the garage at Six Corners."

"Thirty cents," Gus said. "Then what?"

"Feller towed me in." Silas' voice took on a note of hysteria. "He charged me 50 dollars—50 dollars, mind you—to tow me in and fix things, and here I am again. Wait until I see my lawyer."

"Six Corners," Gus said. "Hmm, that's about 60 miles back."

RECALLING Silas' penchant for putting in two gallons of gas at a time, Gus snapped on the switch and looked at

the gauge. It showed that the tank was about a quarter full of gas.

"How much are you going to charge for a tow?" Silas demanded.

"May not have to tow you," Gus said. "There can't be much wrong with a new car like this. What did the Six Corners mechanic find wrong?"

"How should I know?" Silas wailed. "He towed me in to his garage, fiddled around under the hood for a while, then ended up by charging me 50 dollars and sending me on my way."

"Not too bad a charge," Gus commented, defending his colleague, "for a 30-mile round trip on a rainy night."

"But he didn't fix it," Silas protested. "I'm stuck again."

Gus made a routine check of ignition and timing, and when he couldn't start the car, pulled the air cleaner and squirted raw gas into the carburetor throat while Barnstable turned the motor over. The car started instantly, ran smoothly, then died.

"Gas trouble," Gus said flatly. "Maybe I'd better tow you in."

When they arrived at the Model Garage a check of the fuel pump showed that it was in good working order, yet when the line from it to the carburetor and gas filter was disconnected and the motor turned over, it would throw no gas through the tubing. Either the gas gauge was wrong, and there was no gas in the tank, Gus thought, or there was some foreign substance stuck in the gas line between fuel pump and tank. Gus disconnected the line and applied his air hose to it, while Stan Hicks listened at the rear of the car.

"There's gas in the tank," Stan announced. "I can hear the air bubbling into it."

"Fine," Gus said, having killed two birds with one stone. If the gas line had been obstructed, it was now cleared.

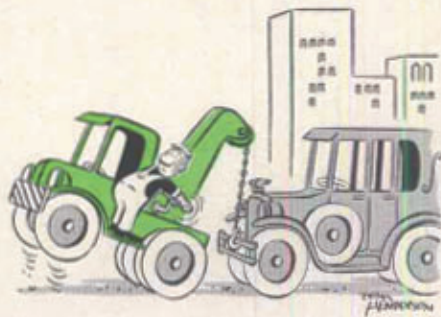
Gus blew enough air into the tank to

build up air pressure and then removed the air hose from the gas line. Air pressure in the tank forced a stream of gas back through the tubing. Gus hastily clamped a horny thumb over it to halt the flow and re-attached the line. Then he started the car easily.

"Well," Silas said caustically. "You finally fixed it."

"No," Gus told him. "Whatever was in the gas line is now back in the tank. I'll have to drain and clean out the tank, or you may stall again shortly."

"Oh, no you don't," Silas declared, hastily getting behind the wheel. "You fellers are all alike, always trying to work one job into three. I'm going before I get cleaned any more."



SILAS got his new car as far as the gas island. Then the

engine quit on him again.

"We'll have to clean out the tank, Silas," Gus said grimly, as he and Stan turned to and pushed the car back in out of the rain.

Now what, Gus, asked himself, could be in the tank of a new car that would so quickly stop up the gas line again?

Maybe he'd have to take the tank off entirely, and then Silas would really scream. Gus hesitated before going back to work on that tank. Something was nagging at his mind.

"Let's blow out the gas line again, Stan," he said finally.

This time when he had blown out the gas line, forced the gas tank full of air pressure and removed the air hose, he didn't put his thumb over the flow of gas from the disconnected line. He let the fuel run a moment, watching it thoughtfully. One good hunch deserves another, Gus told himself.

"Let's shove her out to the pumps again," he told Stan, "and fill her up."

"You'll just have more gas to drain out

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when you clean out the tank." Stan Hicks began to protest, and then, looking shrewdly at Gus, closed his mouth.

IT TOOK 13 gallons to fill the 17-gallon tank. With the tank full, Gus started the engine easily, revved it up a few moments, got out, leaving it running.

"I'll bet," he said thoughtfully to Silas, "that the first thing you did when you were towed into the garage at Six Corners was to have gas put in—about three gallons, I'd say."

"How did you know?" Barnstable asked in astonishment. "Sure, I had three gallons put in. I had a quarter of a tank. That made enough to get me home, and it wasn't any cheaper at Six Corners than here in town."

"So," Gus said softly, "your gas gauge showed a quarter tank the first time you stalled, just as it did the second time."

"That's right," Silas admitted.

"Well," Gus said, speaking positively now, "you've got a break, a hole in the gas-tank suction pipe, inside the tank. That pipe reaches from the top almost to the bottom of the tank to draw gas. When your gas level got down to a quarter full, it uncovered the break, and the fuel pump naturally sucked air through the line instead of gas. If you'd filled your tank in the city, or at Six Corners, you'd have come home without any trouble."

"Hole in my gas tank!" Silas' thin features were indignant. "How much is that going to cost to fix?"

"That depends," Gus told him, backing to the bench and lighting his pipe, "on where and from whom you bought the car, Silas. Now if you'd bought it from our local dealer, he'd pick it up in the morning and install a new gas tank for you, free of charge. He might even manage to have your towing charges refunded."

"Tow charges refunded," Silas crowed. "Fifty dollars?"

"Plus my towing charges," Gus reminded him.

"But," Silas protested, "I bought this car from..."

"That's what I reckoned," Gus interrupted. "Maybe your outfit will take care of you, and maybe they won't. But in any event, Silas, they're 200 miles away."

Silas Barnstable's face was a picture of newly dawning dismay.

"But don't you worry, Silas," Gus went on, and Stan Hicks caught Gus's sly wink. "If they won't fix you up in the city, Stan and I will take care of you. Now let me see—installing a new gas tank, and then there's my towing charges..."

SILAS BARNSTABLE didn't wait to hear more. He stepped on the gas and drove out of the Model Garage, his lean chin thrust forward like the nose of a pointer.

"Man, is he burned," Stan Hicks chuckled. "But how, Gus, could you be so sure there was a break in that pipe?"

"I didn't get wise," Gus told him, "until the second time we blew out the gas line and put air pressure into the tank. The air pressure forced gas to flow from the disconnected line as it always does under such conditions. But with one difference. Raw air was introduced into the gas stream through the break above the gasoline level. That gas came through the line like carbonated soda pop. When I coupled this with the fact that Silas had stalled twice, each time with his gas gauge reading a quarter full, with a new car, I knew. Naturally, when Silas had three gallons of gas put in when he first was towed at the Six Corners garage, the mechanic there couldn't find anything wrong, and gave him some sort of a motor tune."

"I see," Stan said. "I wonder how much money Silas will really save, when he finally adds everything up?"

"I think," Gus told him, "that the old codger is about to learn a lesson in economics. Or maybe," he chuckled, "maybe he'll just keep his tank filled hereafter above the quarter level." **END**

NEXT MONTH: Gus meets a flood of trouble.