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Dream Highways
for Dream Cars

PAGE 140

McCall

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Gus Cools Off a Hot-Rodder

By Martin Bunn

WHEN Bob Tethrow drove his late-model car into the Model Garage with a flourish and a roar of dual exhaust pipes, Stan Hicks looked over at Gus Wilson with a wry expression.

"Hi, Gus," young Tethrow said.

Gus managed to keep from looking surprised as he moved forward, but his mind was busy. Gus was the chairman of the newly formed Traffic Safety Committee. Bob Tethrow, the only son of a wealthy and indulgent father, was inclined to be a wild and unpredictable driver. The Model Garage, Gus mused, was the last place he'd expect to see Bob Tethrow.

Bob was a well-set-up teen-ager, with a cocksure way about him, the look of an eagle in his dark, level eyes. Such a kid, Gus told himself, could become an army commander, president of the United States—or a gangster chief. He had that elusive quality that would cause other kids to follow his lead.

"Morning, Bob," Gus greeted him. "What's your trouble?"

"This crate cooks strictly on one burner," Tethrow announced. "It has the getaway of a wheelbarrow."

"I see," Gus said.

"Give her a tune-up," Tethrow said. "You know—the works on the motor. Or do you think that the members of the

Traffic Safety Committee might object?"

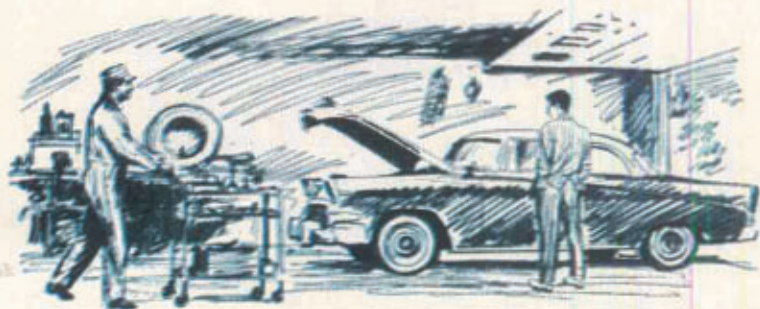
"Of course there's no objection to your motor running right," Gus said mildly. "That's what I'm here for."

Gus opened the hood, cocked an ear to the exhaust, wiggled the throttle. A little rough, he thought. Kids like this wanted the last ounce of power and pep out of a motor. But why had he brought it to Gus? A wary look came into Gus's

Gus sniffed sharply.



The Model Garageman had a double job: to speed up a reluctant car—and slow down its hasty owner.



Was something wrong with this rig, Gus wondered, that other mechanics had not been able to fix?

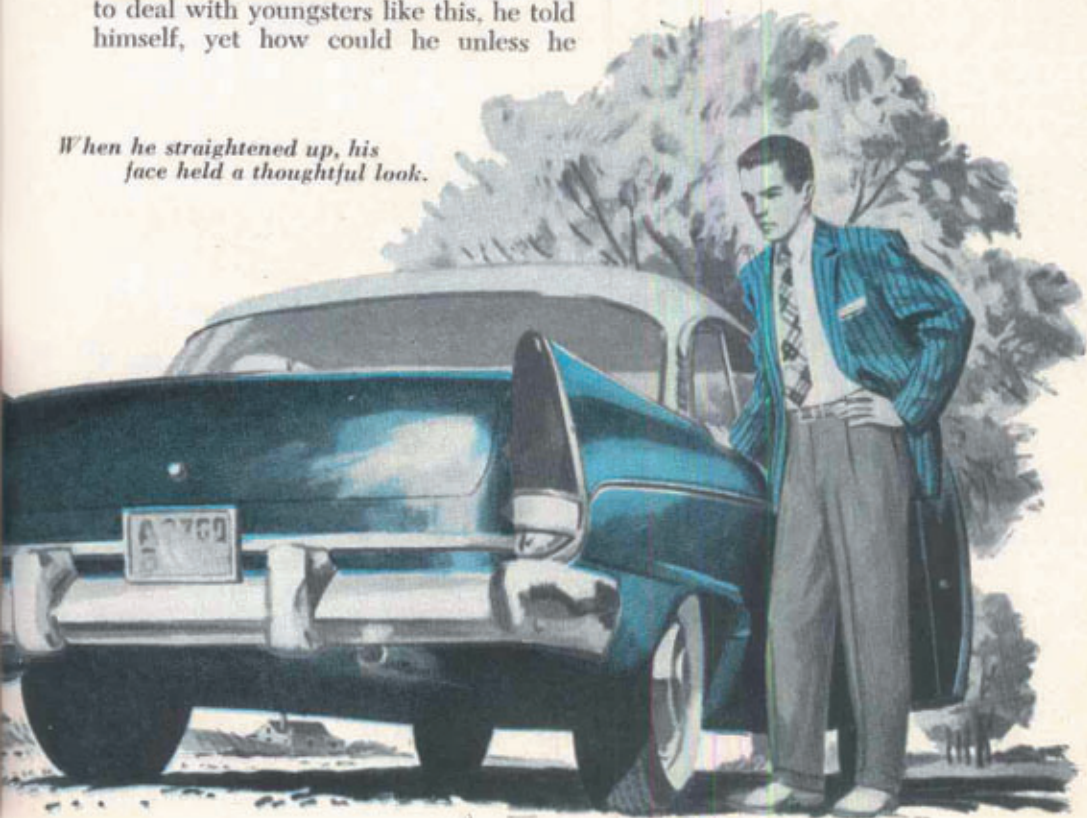
eyes. Was the youngster here to feel out Gus, as chairman of the Traffic Safety Committee? Or was there something wrong with this rig that other mechanics hadn't been able to remedy? Gus wheeled over his tool bench and went to work.

As he worked he thought of the Traffic Safety Committee. He was supposed to deal with youngsters like this, he told himself, yet how could he unless he



The car ran sweetly until Gus tried to gun it from a stop. It wouldn't gun.

When he straightened up, his face held a thoughtful look.



had their confidence? He could handle the adults, but could he reach a kid like this one?

"You graduate from high school this year, don't you, Bob?" Gus said, as he removed the air-cleaner and valve-assembly covers, tightened the cylinder-head studs to factory specifications.

"Yeah," Tethrow said. "What of it?"

"Going to college, I hear. What will you take up?"

"Engineering," Tethrow told him.

"Fine!" Gus said enthusiastically. "We need good engineers. I hope some of the other fellows will follow your lead in this, as they do in other things. They do, you know."

"They do what?" Bob asked. His eyes had a wary look.

GUS realized that he was treading on shaky ground. With his hands still busy, he turned his head to give young Tethrow a grin so warm and amiable that it would have disarmed the most suspicious of bobcats.

"There's always one fellow in every age group who's just naturally a leader," Gus said. "In my gang, when I was your age, it was Hank Scofield. If Hank liked sour apples, we all liked them."

"Yeah," Bob remarked drily. "So what?"

"Fortunately," Gus chuckled, preparing to make a compression test, "Hank led us in fairly safe places, and finally made up his mind to become a doctor. We hunted and fished and boated, but six doctors came out of our gang—good ones, too."

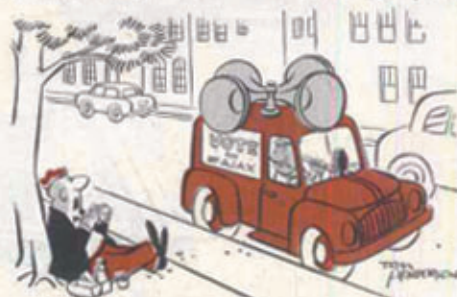
"Sort of a square, eh?" Bob commented. "This Hank character."

"Not at all," Gus assured him. "Hank was a regular guy. He never realized, mind you, that we were following his lead. Youngsters like that never do. Sort of a pity, seems to me."

"Why?" Bob's curiosity was aroused.

"Well," Gus said, digging out his pipe and lighting it, "there's a lot of unasked-for responsibility on the shoulders of a guy like that. If he manages to carry it in good shape, he should be able to sort of pat himself on the back. Take Hank, for instance. I'll bet that he doesn't realize to this day that he influenced the making of six doctors, and keeping my bunch out of trouble a good many times."

GUS concentrated on doing the best tune-up job he knew how. This kid, he thought, came in here to get a sweet motor, and I'm going to see that he gets it. Gus set the ignition for the hot gas he knew Bob was using, checked all connections, carburetor and fuel pump. He set the tappets with the motor at normal



"Frank, wouldja kindly turn off the mike while you're eating that celery!"

operating temperature.

"You didn't become a doctor yourself," Tethrow remarked.

"Didn't have the necessary to go to college," Gus told him ruefully. "But in a way, I guess, I'm still trying to follow Hank's lead. He turned out to be a crack surgeon, and I try to be as good a car doctor as he is on humans. Let's road-test this bus and see how she clicks."

The car ran sweetly until Gus pulled up at a stop sign and tried to gun her away. It wouldn't gun. Gus's eyes narrowed in concentration. Something, he thought, was holding this car back when it took off from a stop. Slow ignition? Couldn't be. He'd set it up and checked cam angle and automatic advance. Could it be the automatic choke? He'd checked that, but maybe the piston was sticking. Gus got out and took off the air cleaner. The choke stood wide open, as it should have with a hot engine. He replaced the cleaner, started the motor, accelerating it by hand from idle to quick pickup.

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Gus Cools Off a Hot-Rodder

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"Peculiar," he remarked. "This motor is sweet. Yet it seems draggy on a get-away from a stop."

"That's what the other mechanics told me," Tethrow blurted out, and sudden embarrassment came to his features. "That's why—well, I heard it around that you were super on deals like this, Gus. Everybody's tried to fix it, and then, with this stuff you told me about trying to be like this Hank character, I thought for sure that you could . . ."

SO, Gus thought, this kid hadn't come to his place to hang something on the chairman of the Traffic Safety Committee. He had come expecting Gus to be able to put his hand on the trouble. And what had been Gus's reaction? He'd puttered around, handing the kid a lot of tripe about Hank Scofield, who was nothing more than a freckle-faced rogue who liked to fish and hunt too well to get into trouble.

Gus walked around the car, listening to the exhaust from the idling motor. He placed a hand on a rear fender to support himself as he stooped low to knock the dottle from his pipe on the heel of his shoe. He sniffed sharply. When he straightened up, his face held a thoughtful look.

"Speaking of Hank Scofield," he said, "I reckon that if I went to him with a bellyache and told him to take out my appendix, he wouldn't do it until he'd checked everything. There could be something holding this car back that a motor tune wouldn't correct."

Gus pulled the car over on the shoulder and got out. He removed the fuse from the yellow wire that led from the anti-creep pressure switch to the hot lead, which was a part of the automatic drive. Driving the car again, it shot away like a bullet.

"Man!" Tethrow breathed. "She moves out now. You fixed it."

"We haven't fixed it—not yet," Gus told him. "We've just located the trouble spot. It wasn't in your motor at all. It's

somewhere in the anti-creep system of your automatic drive."

"Come again?" Tethrow said, with a puzzled expression.

"WELL," Gus told him, "with this type of drive, when I put on the brakes to stop, ignition switch on, idle-adjusting-screw switch closed, as it would be with the accelerator not depressed, the anti-creep circuit is closed, which energizes a solenoid valve that holds brake pressure on the rear-wheel brakes. With this brake pressure on the rear wheels, any tendency for forward creep in the car is halted."

"Holy cow!" Tethrow exclaimed. "Feed me that line slowly. What has this got to do with slow pickup?"

"When I depress the accelerator in starting up," Gus explained, "the circuit is supposed to open at the idle-adjusting-screw switch of the anti-creep system, de-energizing the solenoid and releasing the brakes instantly. It wasn't doing this. This let me know that the trouble was in the anti-creep system, but I didn't know whether it was mechanical or electric. To narrow it down I removed the fuse to break the circuit of the system. If our brake drag hadn't been gone I'd have known the trouble was mechanical. As it is gone, I know it is electric. You'll eat up stuff like that, Bob, when you get through engineering college."

"How about that!" Tethrow exclaimed. "But how do you fix it?"

"In this business," Gus told him, "locating the trouble is 90 percent of the battle. It's probably either a grounded wire from the idling switch to the anti-creep solenoid, or a grounded anti-creep solenoid coil. It could be in the switch itself. We'll drive back to the shop and find out."

BACK at the garage Gus checked out the switch and the switch-to-solenoid wire, finding them to be all right. A test of the solenoid proved that it had a

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grounded coil. Installing a new solenoid corrected the trouble, as another road test proved.

"I've been thinking," Tethrow told Gus as he prepared to drive out of the Model Garage, "about what you told me about this Hank Scofield. Do you really think, Gus, that the fellows around town sort of—well, you know, sort of follow my lead?"

"That's right," Gus told him. "But don't ask me why. That's just the way it seems to work out for some men. Tough, in a way."

"Tough? How do you mean?"

"Well," Gus said, "it's a sort of unasked-for responsibility, just like with Hank. He got a crew haircut, we got them. He played hooky, we played hooky. You know. You squirrel this bus in traffic, they squirrel theirs. If any of them get hurt doing it, you might feel sort of responsible. It's tough in a way, but it's also a real honor, Bob. Like I said, if a fellow pulls it off all right, he has a right to pat himself on the back for a job well done."

STAN Hicks came over to stand beside Gus as he watched Bob Tethrow pull up at the stop light down the street.

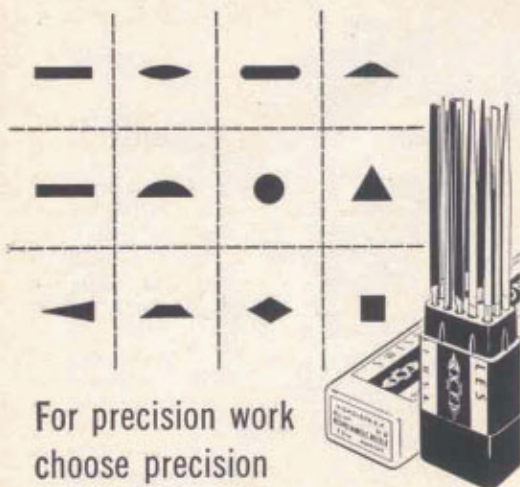
"Hah," Stan said. "Watch him try to beat everyone to the gun when the light changes, tires howling, dual pipes spitting fire."

"Want to bet?" Gus said softly.

"Well, I'll be darned!" Stan burst out as young Tethrow's car pulled out at a normal pace when the light turned green. "What did you do to that kid, Gus—read him the riot act?"

"Who me?" Gus asked in apparent astonishment. "Heck, no. All I did was to reminisce about my kid days and a guy named Hank. I probably seemed an awful drip to young Tethrow. But not as much of a drip as I would have if I hadn't happened to stoop over at that rear wheel to knock out my pipe, and smelled hot brake lining." **END**

NEXT MONTH: Gus baits a trap for a phony.



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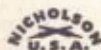
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