

POPULAR SCIENCE

FEBRUARY • 35¢ Monthly

U. S. Army Builds

City Under Ice

PAGE 86

Driving Test —
10,000 Miles in
a Ford Falcon

PAGE 74

Build Your Own
Magnetic Engine

PAGE 147

The Truth About
Truth Serum

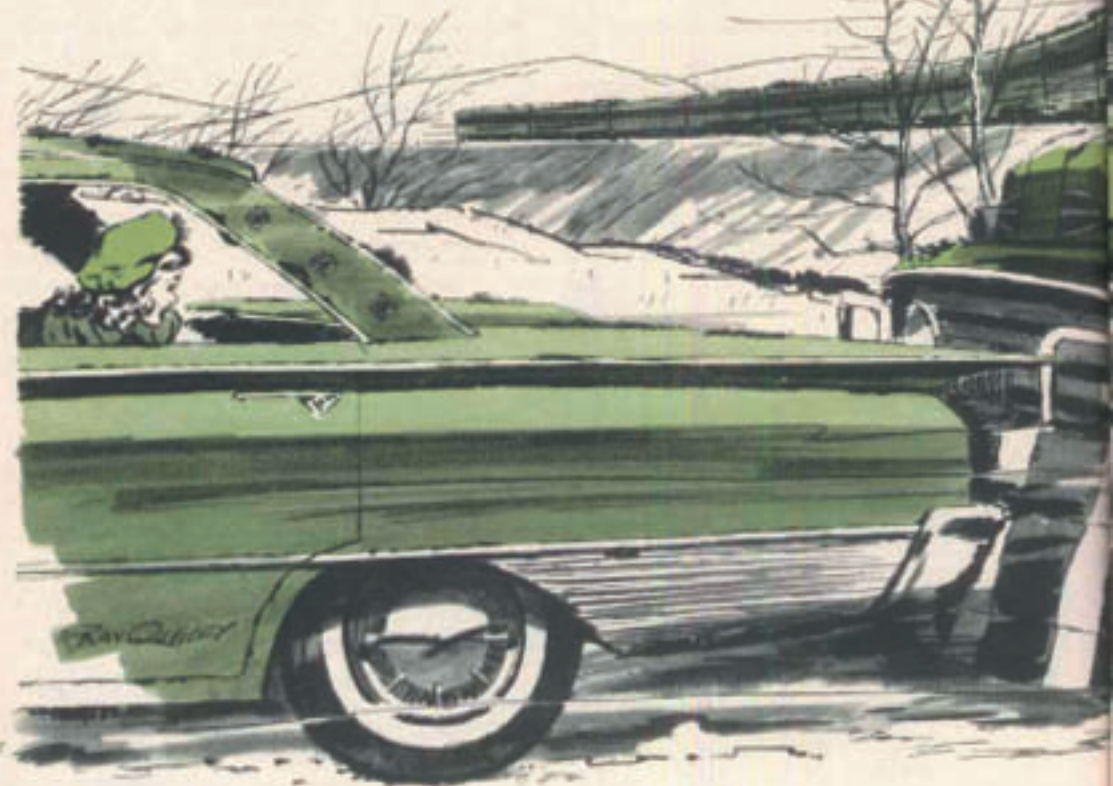
PAGE 106



McCall

Gus Takes a Long Chance

It was one of those nothing-much-going-on days—then suddenly Gus was faced with the toughest choice he'd ever had to make



By Martin Bunn

ONE eye on the clock, Stan hung up the inspection lamp, picked up a lubricant spray, and headed back under the small English sedan on the grease rack.

"Hold it a minute, Stan," said Gus, emerging from the office where he had taken a phone call. "What did I tell you about using this rack?"

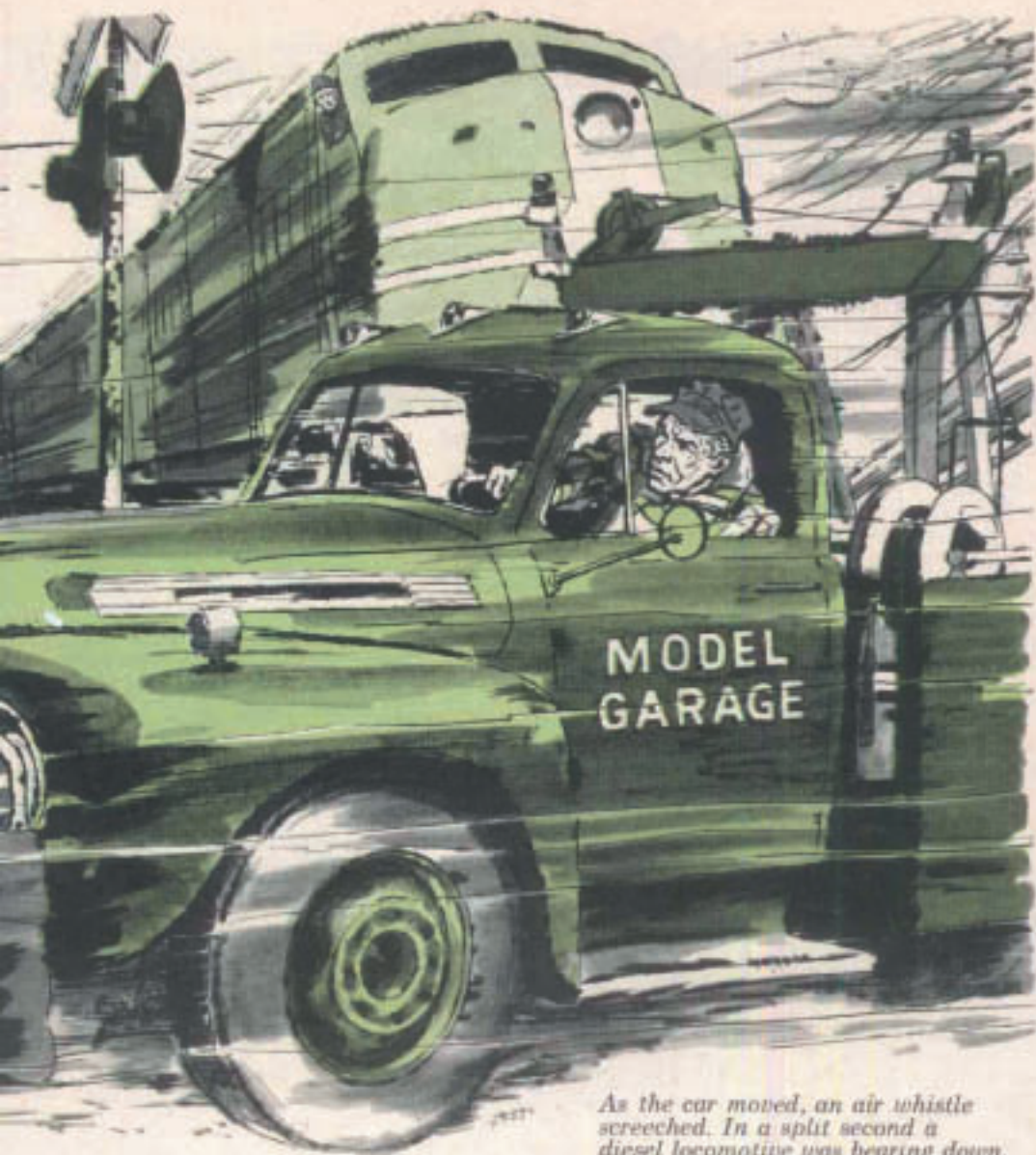
Stan flushed under the grease smudges.

"Guess I did forget to put down that safety prop. But, Gus—it's only a light car."

"Nothing light about twenty-one hundred pounds if it falls on you. Sure, the risk of the hoist valve bleeding off is small. But why take any chance you don't have to?"

"Guess I tried to rush it. Mrs. Dolan wants her car at noon." Carefully Stan set the prop in place.

"Complained of squeaks, did she?"



As the car moved, an air whistle screeched. In a split second a diesel locomotive was bearing down.

"Yes, but nothing's loose," said Stan. "Shock absorbers aren't leaking. Chances are it's the spring leaves, so I'll spray on some oil."

"Mm. Before you take *that* chance, Stan, do me a favor."

"Sure, Gus. What?"

"Read the car manual. I left it on the seat, hoping you would." With that, Gus walked out to where his wrecker was parked, whistling innocently.

Smiling at the remembered expression

on Stan's face, Gus wheeled the wrecker over a county road, a short cut to the point on the turnpike from which the call had come. There he found a stalled motorist. A new fan belt soon put the disabled car back on the road.

The job done, Gus left the turnpike and headed back over the same winding road. Sun sparkled on gritty paving, the wrecker's motor purred competently, and Gus found time to wonder whether Stan had got the message about Mrs. Dolan's

car. Chances were—Gus smiled as the thought phrased itself in his mind—that Stan had.

THERE wasn't a hint, on that sun-drenched country road, that Gus would soon be taking a long and deadly chance of his own choosing.

The first innocent clue to it was an almost-new sedan ahead. As the wrecker crept up on it, Gus eased off the throttle. The other car was doing scarcely 30, and Gus fancied he heard a skip in the engine now and then. A double line forbade passing, so Gus stayed back.

As the road began to climb, the new car barely maintained speed. At the crest, just below a railroad crossing, Gus heard the other driver shift down. But the car lurched onto the track only to buck to an abrupt stop.

At that moment the crossing blinker began to flash its red-eyed warning. Simultaneously the other car's starter began to grind. As it kept on, Gus realized two things: The other driver could see neither blinker; and with the starter groaning, he probably couldn't hear the warning bell.

But as he shut off the starter, the clang reached him. The man behind the wheel put his head out, then renewed his efforts to start the dead engine.

"Why doesn't he jump?" thought Gus.

The car's starter ground desperately. Even as Gus was about to get out and shout his warning, he saw something that impelled him to act. A child's face rose into sight at the rear window.

Quickly shifting into low gear, Gus approached the car as fast as he dared and nudged none too gently into the bumper. The child rose higher in surprise, and Gus saw that it was a girl.

As the other car moved, an air whistle screeched offside, and in a split-second glance Gus saw a diesel locomotive bear-

ing down, its cab looming in the wrecker's window. He felt his wheels bump over the tracks, saw the car lurch safely past the far blinker, and felt a shock of air as the train blasted by, inches behind the wrecker.

The car ahead rolled to the side of the road and stopped. Its driver got out shakily as Gus pulled alongside. A slender, sandy-haired, well-dressed man in his late forties, he evidently found it hard to speak.

"That was—we—thank you!" he blurted. "Knew it was time to jump—but we couldn't."

"You cut it too fine!" exclaimed Gus, but fell silent as the driver opened a rear door. The dark-haired little girl in back wore leg braces.

"She can have them off soon," her father explained. "We're headed for the doctor now. But she still can't move quickly. I—I don't think we'd have made it, except for you."

Gus mopped his damp face. "Bad time for a car to act up."

The man shook his head. "No, it was my fault. I knew it was time for new points again. Please tow us in and install them."

Where'd it come from?



KNOT: The nautical mile got its name because once it really was a knot—one of many at 47-foot intervals along a "log line." When the log end was thrown overboard, a sailor would count the number of knots unreeled within 28 seconds. Because knot spacings were in the same ratio to a mile as 28 seconds to an hour, their exact count gave the ship's speed.

AS GUS rolled into the Model Garage with the car, Stan waved and called. "Thanks for the tip, Gus."

"What tip?"

"About not taking a chance on that squeak job. This car has rubber spring bushes. The manual said to paint the bushes with brake fluid. I used rubber lube. No more squeaks."

"Fine. While I eat lunch, you might check this car for hard starting."

When he returned, he found Stan replacing the distributor cap.

"It's a wonder he got out on the road. Points were the worst burnt I ever saw." Stan touched the starter. The engine caught at once. "See? New points. Got a real hot spark now."

"Okay, Stan. Make out the bill. Half price on the tow."

"Half? But it was a road call—"

"Special case," snapped Gus, and escaped into the office. For an hour he made out bills, with an uneasy sense of having forgotten something. Finally he put his head out.

"Stan! Call me when the owner of that hard starter shows up."

"He's here now," said Stan in a curiously awed tone, and Gus saw that the stranger and the girl, whom he had dropped off at the doctor's door, were in the shop. Gus went over.

"I'm Ralph Emerson," said the stranger, "and this is Susan. It seems the

installed new wiring and sold them at a discount."

The wiring did look new, with no sign of water damage. Gus scrutinized the thin primary wires connected to the coil as if counting threads in the insulation. Disconnecting one, he hooked an ammeter into the line and turned on the ignition briefly.

"I think we've got it," said Gus. "Stan, get me an ignition parts list for this car."

Studying the sheet, Gus checked one item on it. Stan scurried off again.

"More trouble?" asked Emerson.

"The end of your trouble, I think," said Gus. "You won't need new points for a long time."

As Stan did the job, Gus motioned the customer and his daughter to chairs and began filling his pipe. "Actually, your dealer was conscientious. But he made a mistake."

"How so, Mr. Wilson?"

"Most ignition systems have a resistor in the primary circuit to hold current to a safe limit on starting and idling, when everything is cold and resistance low. Now some 1960 cars have a resistor wire instead. The mechanic who

rewired yours didn't know that. He ripped it out and put in ordinary wire."

"But the car ran well at first."

"Sure. The coil drew too much current, but gave a good hot spark—until that extra juice burned the points."

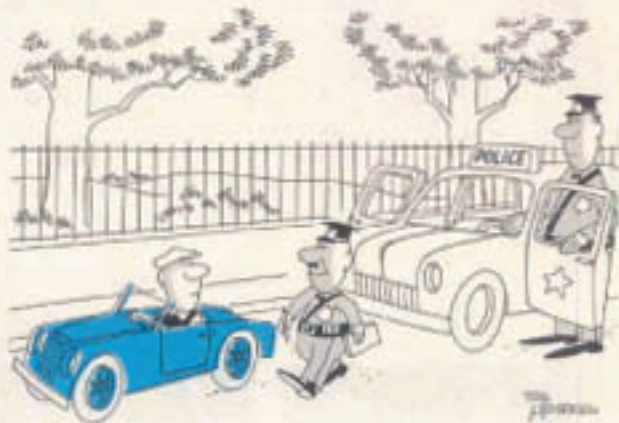
Emerson stood up. "I owe you more than I can ever repay, Mr. Wilson. If I can ever do anything for you, please give me the chance to do so."

"TALK about big shots," murmured Stan as the car pulled out.

"Who? Mr. Emerson?"

"Sure, he's the Supreme Court judge on those racket trials in the county seat. And he wants to do something for you."

"I don't remember breaking any laws lately," laughed Gus. "And anyway, I got this job without influence. In fact, it was more a case of push than pull."



whole town knows you, Mr. Wilson."

"It's a small town," answered Gus. "Now I remember! Did you say it was time again for new points?"

Emerson nodded. "Sixth time since I've had this car. It burns them up in two weeks. Nobody knows why."

"The condenser's okay," volunteered Stan. "I checked it out."

"Everything's okay," agreed Emerson. "But the points always burn."

"How about the coil?" asked Gus.

"One man put in a new one a month ago. He thought the factory had installed a six-volt coil by mistake. But it made no difference."

"Did you buy the car new?"

"Yes, at a bargain. Then I heard why. The dealer had bought a number of new cars from an out-of-state agency in a flooded area. He hauled the cars here,