

10,000-Mile Test of Ford's New In-Between Car

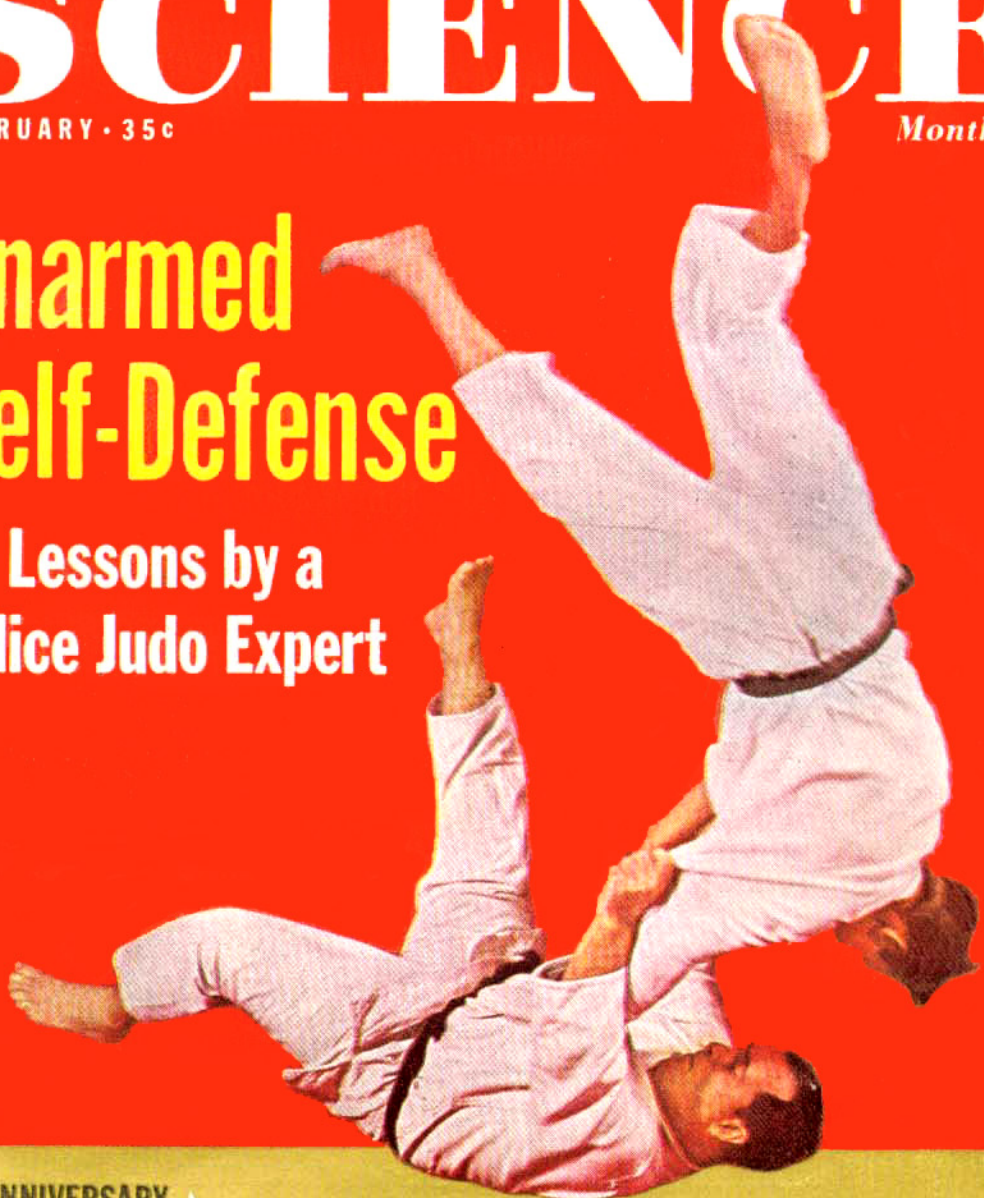
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Gus Loses a Customer



By Martin Bunn

"EMERGENCY? Sure it's an emergency. I got 15 machines to service," crackled an agitated voice on the phone.

"Okay. Where do I go?" asked Gus.

"I'm leaving Humbert's now. I'm parked on a hill so I can roll down to start. Meet me at National Drugs—and be sure to bring that new Bendix drive."

Slightly mystified, Gus drove the Model Garage service truck to the drug-company parking lot. A hard-used sedan with the legend "Vend-a-Cup" on its battered sides was there—locked. He sounded his horn. A white-jacketed fig-

ure ran out of the nearest building.

He was a slight man with a snub nose that gave him the appearance of a harried small boy. A grin split his freckled face as he dropped two enormous hampers to shake hands.

"Name's Jim Melchin. I run a string of coffee, candy, and sandwich machines."

"So that's it. I wondered what you meant by having 15 to service."

"Gotta be dependable. Slack off, and you lose your machine locations to the syndicate."

Having loaded sandwiches from the car into one hamper, Melchin thrust a



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bunch of keys at Gus. "Try the starter. Then put in that new Bendix. I've got to be on my way when I've serviced these machines."

Gus found that the starter whirred energetically but did not engage the engine. He proceeded to remove the starter, which on this car could be done from above.

The drive wasn't gummed or jammed; its pinion ran freely up the shaft thread. The helical spring was intact. The pinion teeth were a bit chipped, but not enough to prevent meshing. More likely, Gus thought, a few flywheel teeth were

missing. But his fingers in the starter opening felt teeth in position to mesh with the pinion.

"Be down in eight minutes!" Melchin's high, urgent voice came from an upper window. Gus nodded, gave up any idea of checking further.

Knocking out the retaining pin, he removed the drive and installed a new one. With the starter back in place, the engine promptly cranked and fired.

"Quick work!" Melchin opened a clinking leather bag. "Hope you don't mind being paid in silver. That's the kind of money I take in."

Gus wrote a receipt for a modest charge and received a fistful of coins. Melchin got behind the wheel.

"I'd like to check the flywheel gear," said Gus. "If it's damaged, the same thing could happen again."

"Might. This is the second new Bendix drive I've had. But I can't spare the bus now—not with the syndicate after my locations."

ABOUT two weeks later State Police Trooper Jerry Corcoran stopped at the Model Garage for a generator check.



"Caught the syndicate yet, Jerry?" asked Gus banteringly.

"Syndicate? How did you know?"

Gus's grin faded. "It's a gag, Jerry." He explained about Melchin's vending route. Jerry laughed.

"That's competition. No law against it yet, and I don't know of any syndicate in that business. No, it's the old numbers racket we're after."

"Thought that was big-city stuff."

"It's moved out. A few employees in big offices and plants here sell the slips on the side. But we haven't spotted the collectors who work for the ring, picking up bets and cash."

"This morning we got a tip from a man at a boat yard. He says the collector drives a Merc station wagon. Yesterday he skidded into a sand hole back of the yard, spun his right wheel trying to get out, then suddenly quit and walked away. An hour later a wrecker came and hauled

the car off. But nobody knows where.

"That's all we can get out of our informer. He clammed up. We'll stake out the place, of course."

"If the car was damaged," said Gus, "they may be using another one. Enough sand in the brake drum could lock the wheel. Keep trying to pull out, with the other wheel on firm ground, and you can break an axle."

Corcoran nodded. "Worth checking garages for a job on a Merc axle?"

Gus shook his head. "Axles break so seldom nowadays they aren't often stocked. The car may be under wraps waiting for a new one from Detroit."

LATER that day Melchin's dusty sedan pulled in. The little man looked morose.

"More starting trouble?" asked Gus.

Melchin nodded. "Same one. You may as well check the flywheel gear. Lost so many locations to the syndicate that I can do my route in half a day."

He sat down, munching one of his chocolate bars, while Gus pulled off the starter. Its pinion teeth were covered with chips,

but not, Gus saw, from the teeth themselves. He put the car on a lift, took down the flywheel housing, and called Melchin to look.

"There's your trouble—a soft ring gear. See how all the teeth are chewed down at this end? Each time you put on a new Bendix, its unworn teeth, a shade longer than the old ones, would catch what was left of these, until it again wore them out of mesh."

"Aren't flywheel teeth hardened?"

"Supposed to be. Guess somebody goofed and a batch came through soft. We'll put a hard-toothed flywheel on."

STAN HICKS, Gus's assistant, was doing just that when a big station wagon, trailing the odor of hot steel and burned brake lining, screeched into the shop. As Gus walked over, a hatless young man with glossy hair and a leather coat leaped out.

"Gus Wilson? I've heard you're pretty good. Let's see how fast you can fix that draggin' brake."

The car was a '59 Merc, its load hidden under canvas. The heat from the right-rear brake drum was so intense it could be felt feet away.

"It's too hot to touch," Gus said. "I'll pull the wheel; it may cool faster."

Gus removed the wheel, noticing that the axle nut showed shiny rounding spots, as if turned with a slightly too large wrench.

The drum was still warm when Gus took it off. Marks on the brake-shoe anchor bolts suggested recent removal. Both drum and lining were ruined.

The driver looked at them and swore. "Okay, get with it. Put in new ones."

Gus mounted a new drum on the hub. With relined shoes in place, he flexed the return springs which, hooked across the two shoes, pull them away from the drum surface when brakes are released. As if accidentally, he dropped a spring on the concrete floor. Then he put both in and finished the job.

With the car on the jack, he put it in gear, spun the wheel, braked it to a stop a few times, checked to see that it still turned freely.

"What's the tab?" asked the man.

Gus told him. "Give it a road test, to see if it still drags."

"If it does," said the driver, handing Gus the cash, "I'll be back."

The moment the car roared out, Gus headed for the phone.

"**WE** PICKED him up a block away," Corcoran told Gus an hour later. "He was headed back here—with a smoking wheel."

"I thought he would be," said Gus.

"In the car," said the trooper, "we

found policy slips, sandwiches, coffee supplies, candy—and this."

He showed Gus a sign of the kind that can be hung on a car window.

"Vending, Inc. That syndicate was in the coffee-and-sandwich business. No wonder your friend was frozen out. Servicing the machines daily made a good cover for collecting. The fellow we caught was switched to another route today. That's why our stake-out failed. But he's talking. Now that we know how to spot the collectors, they'll lead us to the big fish."

"So a snapped axle was their Waterloo."

Jerry nodded. "This chap did snap an axle in that sand hole. The ring's mechanic got a used one and put it in. But when the brake dragged, he was too far from home base, so he came to you. Says he watched you do all the right things—even check it on a jack—and can't figure why it still grabbed. What gimmicked it?"

"The return springs," said Gus. "Running hot in the sand took the temper out of them. I dropped one and it sounded like a lead nickel. Their man replaced the shoes but not the springs. So I left 'em in, too."

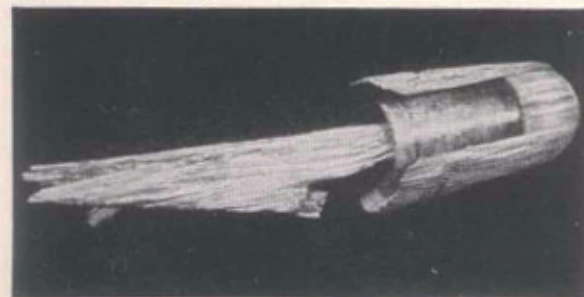
"But it didn't drag on the jack."

Gus laughed. "You can stop a free-turning wheel just by touching the brake. But after he hit them hard enough to stop the car a couple of times, the springs stretched so much they couldn't pull the shoes clear of the drum."

"I get it," said Corcoran. "Well, we're sure grateful, and that's official. Only one thing I'm sorry about."

"What's that, Jerry?"

"You've lost a customer, Gus—for something like five years." ■ ■



What is this?

Can you tell what's in the picture at left? Check your answer below

ANSWER: No, it's not a rocket speeding in space or a piece of Rotam driftwood. It's an old, weathered, glass-and-wood insulator bracket used to hold telegraph wires along early Union Pacific railroad tracks.