

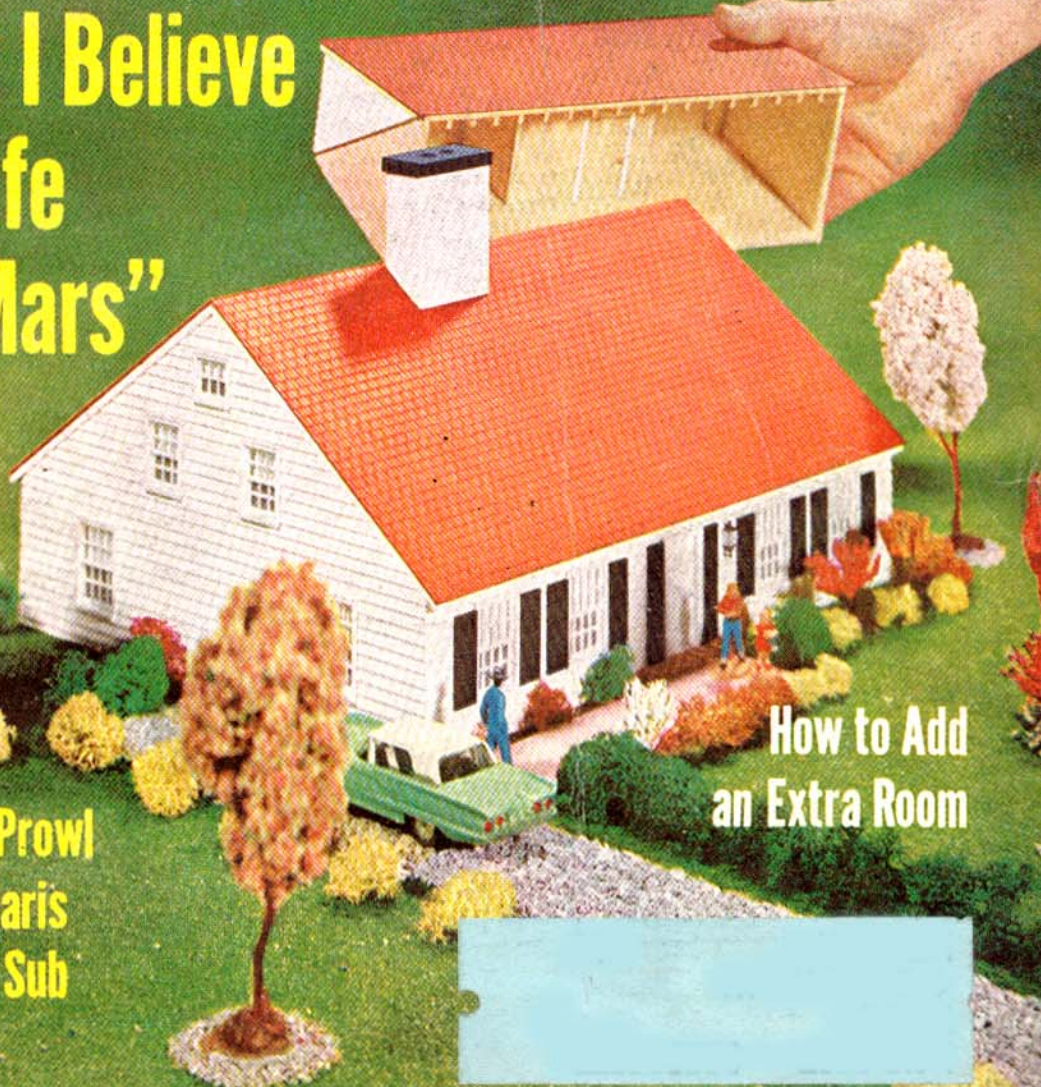
First Look at Falcon's New Convertible

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ANNUAL HOME-IMPROVEMENT ISSUE

GUS CHECKS OUT

By Martin Bunn

"JERRY CORCORAN wants me at State Police headquarters," said Gus, hanging up the phone. "You carry on, Stan."

"Sure, Gus. What's with the cops?"

"They picked up a suspect on that burglary last night. Want me to check his car. I won't be long."

Gus had hardly left when brakes squeaked gently outside and a 1959 V-8 hardtop rolled into the Model Garage.

"Oh, no!" gasped Stan soundlessly.

"Is that you, Stanley?" fluttered the brightly dressed, pretty matron who got out. "Is Gus Wilson in, or are you going to fix my car all by yourself?"

"Depends what it needs, Mrs. Allen."

"Well, it runs fine, only it doesn't start. Of course, I might have expected that after my sister Carrie had her car at my house all week."

"Yes, ma'am," said Stan dubiously. "How did you start it to get here?"

"The same thing happened with Carrie's car last night, and a man just pushed it. So when mine made this buzz, instead of going chug-a-chug, I asked a neighbor to push me. And it started!"

Stan got in, drove the car on the lift, and cut the engine. When he turned the key to start, there was a tell-tale whine, but the engine didn't crank.

"There!" cried Daisy Allen. "That's what Carrie's car did. She kept it next to mine in our garage, and they're the same make, so I guess it was catching. It probably runs in the family."

Stan made a strangled sound and disappeared under the raised car. Dropping the splash pan, he removed the starter and hooked it up at the test bench. The motor whirred and the pinion spun, but failed to slide out to mesh with the flywheel ring gear. Stan phoned the local agency for the car.

"Starter clutch assembly?" replied the stock clerk. "We don't keep 'em."

Stan turned to Mrs. Allen. "Sorry, but



"Drove it here myself after we picked Dougal up," said Corcoran. "Never hit 45, but it ran okay."

we have to order parts from the city. They should get here tomorrow."

Daisy Allen pouted. "But I need the car! Carrie's already on her way home—that nice young man at the agency fixed her car right away."

"Ben Driscoll?" asked Stan thoughtfully. "Well, you leave the car, Mrs. Allen. If I can't fix it in an hour, I'll take it over to him myself."

"Captain Bullock calls it open and shut," Lieutenant Jerry Corcoran told Gus at headquarters. "Early this morning the Hayworths' caretaker found a window jimmied and the room inside ransacked. Hayworth,

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who was out of town, says that \$2,000 is missing."

"Where'd you find this suspect?"

Jerry Corcoran rubbed his chin. "That's what bothers me. Asleep in his car half a mile away. But we matched tread marks in the Hayworth drive to his tires. And Tim Dougal's an ex-con, with a record of rural burglaries. A neighbor driving by at nine o'clock heard a casement window bang

in the wind. He looked just in time to see a tall man run off the porch. Dougal's tall."

"Where does his car come in?"

Jerry opened the door. Another trooper led in a man whose six-foot height was shrunken by a slight stoop.

"Sit down, Tim," said Corcoran briskly. "Tell it all again."

The middle-aged suspect folded into a chair. "What for?" he asked bitterly. "I

learned printing last time I went up. Gone straight ever since—but first time I'm near any trouble, I get nailed."

"You came here to get a job?"

"Owner of the Thorburg *Sentinel* told me to be there at nine, after the paper is put to bed. My old car ran all right in town, but on the way it kept missing and slowed me down. I stopped at a gas station about eight. They put in new points while I phoned Thorburg."

"The car ran okay after that?"

"At first. Two women flagged me from a closed gas station in West Milltown. They'd stopped there before seeing there was nobody around. The starter didn't work. I pushed 'em to get the engine running. No," Dougal added as Corcoran began to ask a question. "I didn't get any name or license. The car was from out of state."

"And what time was that?"

"'Bout nine. That's when my crate began to miss again. That's why I stopped in Shrewsbury about quarter to ten. Later I drove into that Hayworth place by mistake, but like I told you, I drove right out again."

Corcoran signaled the trooper, who led Dougal away.

"I went personally to both those gas stations," said Jerry. "You know what was wrong both times?"

"You tell me," said Gus.

"Both times the wire was off the number two plug. Captain figures Dougal yanked it off himself, drove to the first station, then raced to the Hayworth place. After taking the money and stashing it, he drove back the way he'd come, pulled the cable off again, and limped into that Shrewsbury station to make it look as if he'd only got that far.

"But what bothers me is that Dougal couldn't know that neighbor would spot the thief and set the time, and that he

stuck around. I can't help wondering—"

"Whether a cable could pull off by itself," finished Gus. "Let's go see."

The car was a paint-faded 1953 of a popular make. "Drove it here myself after we picked Dougal up," said Corcoran. "On that twisty road from Hayworth's I never hit 45, but it ran okay."

Gus gave the number two cable a tentative pull. It held. He yanked it off, pushed the end through to inspect the terminal clip, and replaced it. "I can't see this coming off by itself. Even the cap's a tight fit. I better drive the car."

The engine idled smoothly. Gus wheeled onto a four-lane parkway, pushed the car to 30, 40, and 50 miles an hour without a skip. Then he floored the gas for a spurt around a midget sedan. The engine began to gallop in a one-cylinder miss. When Gus pulled off the road, it stalled.

He flung the hood up. Number two cable was off. The plug terminal was clean, the porcelain free of any oil film. Gus replaced the

cable and headed back to headquarters. Half a mile away, he stepped on the gas. At 55 miles per hour, one cylinder again cut out. "Doggone," sighed Gus.

"Ben?" asked Stan on the phone. "You still shop foreman, or did they find out you can't even spot a flat tire?"

"When Gus Wilson fires you," retorted Driscoll, "come around. I've got a job for you—on the wash rack."

"Yeah. Listen, Ben, I may have to send you a customer. Starter won't engage. You fixed the same grief for her sister this morning."

"Starter just spins, hey? Sure."

"Your parts shop hasn't got a new clutch, and she wants it today."

There was a brief silence. "Never mind. Can do. Send it over."

Where'd it come from?



"Three sheets to the wind"

The picturesque expression to describe a state of intoxication is nautical. A full-rigged ship would have three foresails set. In changing tack ("coming about"), the sheets or lines would naturally be loosened. As the ship came up into the wind it would lurch—not unlike a drunken sailor.

"Not unless I have to. But thanks."

Back at the bench, Stan removed the clutch. The solenoid winding checked. Why didn't it have enough punch to snap the pinion out—and how did Driscoll plan to fix it without parts?

Slipping off the clutch, Stan fingered the spring behind it. This helped the solenoid at the start of its stroke, when it was weakest. The spring felt weak. Maybe it didn't help enough . . .

Seizing both ends of the spring with pliers, Stan stretched it a half-inch. He

"Hold it," growled Bullock. "He could've put a bum plug in to rig this story of his. I don't buy it."

"How about those women he helped?" asked Corcoran. "We should check—"

"Check an unidentified, out-of-state car?" sneered Bullock. "You kidding?"

Jerry flushed. "Thanks for a darned good try, Gus."

"Good work," approved Gus when Stan described the starter repair. "I fixed a few of those the same way. The assist spring is a shade weak in that model—sort of runs in the family."

"That's what Mrs. Allen said. Her sister has the same car and got stuck near West Milltown last night."

"Her sister stopped here for gas once," interrupted Gus. "She has Southern plates. How did they get the car going?"

"Fellow in a jalopy pushed them."

Gus grabbed the phone. "Can't have been two cars stuck in the same place for the same reason in one night. I'm giving Jerry a tough assignment—to get the facts from Daisy Allen."



"Mind if I use your phone?"

reassembled the clutch. On test, it threw the pinion out with a snap. Back in the car, it cranked vigorously.

Bucking to a stop at headquarters, Gus found Jerry Corcoran waiting beside burly, red-faced Captain Bullock.

"Wasted your time, hey, Gus?" he roared. "Dougal's guilty as sin."

"Don't know about that," said Gus, flinging up the hood. "But this cable popped off by itself on me twice. And I think I know why."

Turning the idle adjustment up to prevent the engine from stalling, Gus got an oil can from his car. With the cable still off, he dripped oil slowly around the top of the plug.

"See those bubbles? There's a leak around the electrode. When the cylinder is firing, at speeds over 55, it builds up enough pressure inside that cap to blow it off."

"Then Dougal wasn't—" began Jerry.

Corcoran's car braked to a stop at the Model Garage about closing time.

"Don't know whether to thank you or book you for disrupting police procedure, Gus," he said wryly. "That Allen woman . . ."

Gus and Stan grinned at each other.

"Captain Bullock insisted on going along to question her. I don't think he'll ever be the same. But we learned enough to have the Maryland police stop her sister and take a statement. Dougal did help them. So we overhauled the caretaker's story."

"He's not only as tall as Dougal, but finally broke down and confessed. We'll release Dougal and put in a good word for him at Thorburg."

"Guess you wrapped it up," said Gus. "Leaves only one thing missing."

"What's that?"

Gus handed Jerry a small carton. "Number two cylinder in Dougal's car. Have him put in this new plug—compliments of the Model Garage." ■ ■