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Gus Settles a Family Feud

By Martin Bunn

LEAVING the dairy where he had just revived a moribund milk truck, Gus Wilson turned his wrecker into Dwight Road. Even this early, there was a long line of cars waiting for driving-license tests. At sight of the uneasy applicants and bored inspectors, Gus reflected on how long ago he had taken his own first test.

He had driven halfway past the lineup when the head car pulled out. Closing in to three car lengths behind it, Gus saw it was a 10-year-old jalopy, brave in hand-brushed, streaky body paint and whitewall wheel disks. Sitting ramrod straight beside a broad-shouldered inspector was a black-haired teen-ager.

The car moved off jerkily, as though some of the youngster's nervousness communicated itself to steel and rubber. Making an avenue stop, with Gus now close behind, the boy started around a corner just as a station wagon whipped out from the curb across his path. The car stopped, and the wagon raced off. As Gus waited patiently behind the car, its starter churned.

The engine came to life, but the car hadn't budged before it died again. The boy's neck stiffened with tension. Again the engine caught. The car lurched off as its young driver let the clutch grab. At the next corner he turned left—from the wrong lane and without giving a turn signal. Gus shook his head in silent sympathy and drove on.

"We just got a call for a rental battery and recharge, Boss," reported Stan as Gus drove into the Model Garage.

"I might as well go right out on it, while you finish that brake job," said Gus.



Stan hoisted in a charged battery and gave Gus the address.

It was a big new split-level just outside town. Gus pulled into the driveway behind an almost-new Ford.

"Thank you for being so prompt," said a voice as he stepped out of the truck.

With mild surprise, Gus saw that the speaker was a round-faced Chinese. He had the bland expression that Westerners associate with Orientals.

"We try to be," returned Gus. "Shall I test your battery first?"

"If you wish, but I am sure it is discharged. I must go into the city at once. If you will recharge it, I will bring back your battery later today."

"Sure thing," agreed Gus. He noted that the battery and terminals were clean and the clamps tight, but his meter showed every cell below par. In minutes he had



Gus hooked up the light. Timing checked out on the nose.

the rental battery in place. It cranked the engine with enthusiasm.

"That will get you there," he said. "The car's new, isn't it? Normally the battery shouldn't run down. Drive much at night, or use the radio a lot?"

"Because it is new and I am not used to it, I have not yet driven it at night," the man answered. "But once last week the battery was dead. I complained to the agency that sold the car. They made electrical tests. All was okay."

"Could just be a bad battery."

"They say it is good. That time, my son had the radio on all day as he cleaned the garage. Yesterday, when he was alone here, I think he practiced driving for the license test he's taking today. Often he lets the clutch out too fast, so he must start the engine again and again. That is why the battery is now so weak."

"We'll put it on charge. You can have it any time after four," promised Gus.

It was after three when an ancient Dodge chugged into the shop. Gus recognized the hand-painted finish and white wheel rims he had seen that morning. From the venerable jalopy stepped Ernie Byers, a high-school senior Gus had watched grow up.

"Got a stumper for you this time, Mr. Wilson," said Ernie. "But first meet Tommy Chang. His dad's opening a big new Chinese restaurant downtown."

The slim, black-haired youngster who stepped from the car raised a hand and grinned in greeting. "Hi, Mr. Wilson. Ernie says you're tops. If you can settle our beef, I'll sure go along with that."

"Well," said Gus, "I better tell you I was behind you when you stalled this morning, Tommy. Still want me to try?"

Tommy's round face sobered. "Sure do. Because I didn't stall both times. The engine just quit. That—and maybe something else—got me so rattled I flunked out."

"Better luck next time," said Gus.

"I hope so," said Tommy soberly. "Anyway, somebody's got to cure this jalopy of what ails it before I shell out \$85."

"That's my price for the crate," explained Ernie. "The deal was that I'd put in a new coil, condenser, oil filter, and points, let Tommy take his driving test in the car, and he'd buy it."

"But not if it's going to cut out and go dead," put in Tommy.

"I just drove you here," retorted Ernie. "It never missed a beat, did it?"

"Okay, let's see." Gus snapped open the distributor. The points proved to be set right within the tolerance range. The new condenser was tight, all connections secure. He but-tuned up the distributor, hooked up the timing light, and started the engine. It ran smoothly. Timing checked out on the nose, and the spark advanced smoothly as the engine was revved.

"All okay, isn't it?" asked Ernie.

"Seems so," agreed Gus. "Only—"

"Yeah, what?" asked both boys.

Gus turned to the Chinese lad. "Only you know, Tommy. How far up was the clutch when the engine quit?"

"A bit, the first time, when that wagon ran in front of me," admitted the youth. "But the second time the pedal was still on the floor. I'd just touched the gas."

Gus grunted. It had seemed to him that morning that the engine hadn't stalled, but died. He felt the low-tension ignition wires for internal breaks, scanned them for worn insulation, and found neither. Again he opened the distributor.

"I took it apart and cleaned it before I put in new points," said Ernie.

"Did a good job," murmured Gus, fingering a small, wasp-waisted retainer clip on the vacuum-advance shaft. The clip turned easily in its groove.

"Look at this," said Gus, and three pairs of eyes converged on the clip. "Say the engine's running fine and you gun it. The extra vibration makes this clip turn. Ever see that toy with a propeller on a

notched stick? You rub the notches—and the prop turns. Same here. It doesn't matter, until the clip swings like this."

Gus turned it. "Now it's touching the breaker arm, and shorting out the points. No spark. Engine's killed."

"Hey!" breathed Tommy. "You're okay."

"Guess you spread that clip a bit taking it off, Ernie," suggested Gus. "But you can fix it." He handed the boy a pair of sharp-nosed pliers.

Removing the clip, Ernie carefully bent back the ends of the legs, squeezed the encircling loop a trifle smaller, and replaced the clip. It now turned reluctantly in its groove, and the legs safely cleared the breaker arm.

"Okay, Tommy? Deal?" asked Ernie.

"Sold," agreed the Chinese lad, pulling a sheaf of bills from his pocket. "Thanks to Mr. Wilson."

He had just counted them out when a sleek new Ford rolled in.

"Oh man," groaned Tommy. "It's Pop!"

"He doesn't know about our deal?"

"Oh, that's okay—Pop's kind of square, but he's a good guy—it's something else. He thinks I drove his new bus yesterday." The slanted young eyes were sadder. "First time he's ever thought I'd lie."

Gus walked over to the Ford as Mr. Chang got out, staring at the two boys, who

"Got those valve tappets set yet?" asked Eddie. "I need the feeler gauge to adjust these new points."

Slim withdrew the gauge from the last tappet. "Just done. Here, take it."

Ten minutes later Eddie snapped the distributor cover on. Both boys listened with satisfaction to the smooth, highly responsive engine.

"Best points I could buy," said Eddie. "Set just right on the high side of the tolerance range. Won't have to look at them till long after we get back from our West Coast trip."

But though the rest of the ignition system was faultless and the points had indeed been properly adjusted, they failed before the car had covered 500 miles.

...How Come?

ANSWER: Eddie hadn't wiped the feeler gauge bone dry before using it. Oil transferred from the valve tappets to the point surfaces was carbonized by the spark, contaminating and burning the points quickly.

stayed quietly talking near the other car.

"So you know Tommy, Mr. Wilson? He is my number-one and only son."

"Just met him today, Mr. Chang. How was your car? Battery okay?"

"I am not sure," said Chang slowly. "When my business of some hours was finished, it seemed to me perhaps the starter turned more slowly than when you put in this battery."

For a long instant Gus looked into the man's dark, unreadable eyes. There was something, Gus realized, that Chang wanted very much, and Chang knew that he knew it. Without a word Gus got into the Ford. As he turned the key, the engine cranked briskly—as it should after a long drive.

Getting out, Gus connected a test meter to the voltage regulator. It cut in and out reliably. At a thousand revs, the generator charged at the specified rate. All connections were firm. Gus shut off the engine, checked fuses and under-hood wiring for any trace of a short, past or present. There was none.

Inside the car, Gus briefly tried the horn, dome light, heater, and headlights. All worked normally, but he paused with his fingers on the headlight switch. The knob and escutcheon felt warm.

Unscrewing a lock nut, Gus released a spring catch. He pulled out the switch with its connected wires and something else—a coiled resistance element sticking out of the ceramic barrel of the dash-light dimmer. Gus found Chang beside him.

"Here's the trouble," said Gus. "This resistance wire is supposed to be wound on

the insulating ceramic. It came loose and was free to touch the dash. When it did, enough current drained off to kill your battery in a day or two."

"But I have not driven at night. I never touched that switch," said Chang.

"If you had, you would have noticed it was warm. Didn't matter whether it was on or off—that resistance wire is alive all the time. You got a short whenever it touched the dash, but going through a resistance, it was never enough to blow a fuse. I'll clip off the wire and you can have the dealer put in a new switch."

"I am grateful," said Chang quietly. "For your help with the car and because you have showed me I was wrong in an important matter. I must speak to my son tonight."

Chang had paid and driven out, his original battery back in the Ford. The two boys strolled over to Gus.

"Thought we'd better wait and let you get Pop straightened out," said Tommy.

"It wasn't hard," returned Gus.

"Guess it's up to me to pay for our job," put in Ernie. "What's the tab?"

"It's Tommy's car, isn't it?"

"Yeah, but I agreed—"

"Your father paid for what I did on the Ford, Tommy. Your job is on the house."

"And you're invited to a special dinner on opening night, Mr. Wilson, also on the house. But what's this jazz about my job being free because Pop paid for his?"

"Oh that," said Gus, straight-faced, "that's what I call my family plan." ■ ■



Swedish Army gets turretless tank

A new 35-ton tank is so low it gives an enemy little to shoot at. It has no turret; its steering and suspension let it aim its

fixed 105-mm. gun and four machine guns by traversing and elevating the whole tank. A 300-hp. Boeing turbine and a 230-hp. Rolls-Royce engine (for cruising) power it. Volvo, Landsverk, and Bofors built it.