

SEPTEMBER 1964 35 CENTS

# Popular Science

Monthly

**QUINTS-**  
Could It Happen to You?

**Special!**

**THE NEW NAVY**

From the Forthcoming Book  
By Hanson W. Baldwin,  
America's Top Military Analyst

## How to Drive in a Crisis

—Tips on Staying Alive in the 6 Most  
Dangerous Highway Situations

Best Buys in  
FM Multiplex Tuners  
PAGE 102

Wernher von Braun:  
Do Rockets Need Fins?



### Ideas for Your House

- ... How to build and use scaffolding
- ... All about those new house paints
- ... Creating more parking space

Smokey Yunick's Car Clinic

New Exposure Meters  
That Tell You More

How to  
Fibergla

arpending  
uts PAGE 144

# Gus Goes After a Record Catch

By Martin Bunn

THE first familiar thing Gus Wilson saw on walking down the plane ramp at Fort Lauderdale was Ben Judson's bald pate.

"Welcome to Florida, Gus," said Ben. "You're looking pale and peaked. 'Bout time you got shut of that Yankee Model Garage of yours for a few days in the sun."

"Nothing pale about you," remarked Gus with a glance at his old friend's sun-browned scalp. "That's a dandy rooftop tan you've got, Ben."

"Hair is gettin' a bit thin on top," admitted Judson with shameless understatement. "But down here I'm really living. We've got 154 kinds of freshwater fish, besides the whole Atlantic at our front door. You know you could fish a different lake in this state every day for 82 years?"

Following a stop at the luggage counter, Judson led the way to the parking lot. Gus raised his eyebrows at sight of a '51 Hudson, its paint thin and lower body panels lacy with saltwater rust.

"Yep, it's the same one I drove South when I retired nine years ago," said Ben. "They don't build 'em like this any more."

Gus grinned at the familiar cliché.

"Oh, we've got a '62 compact, too," confessed Judson. "My wife uses that."

They got in, the six-cylinder engine churned into action, and Ben guided the big car expertly onto the highway.

"We'll stop in town for gas and your five-day nonresident permit," he said.

Gus's eyes flicked to the gas gauge. It showed two-thirds full, but no doubt Ben had his reasons for topping the tank.

*The fishing was superb* for three days. One was spent on a charter boat, from which Gus caught a 35-pound barracuda. The other two days he enjoyed freshwater fly fishing. On the fourth morning it rained.

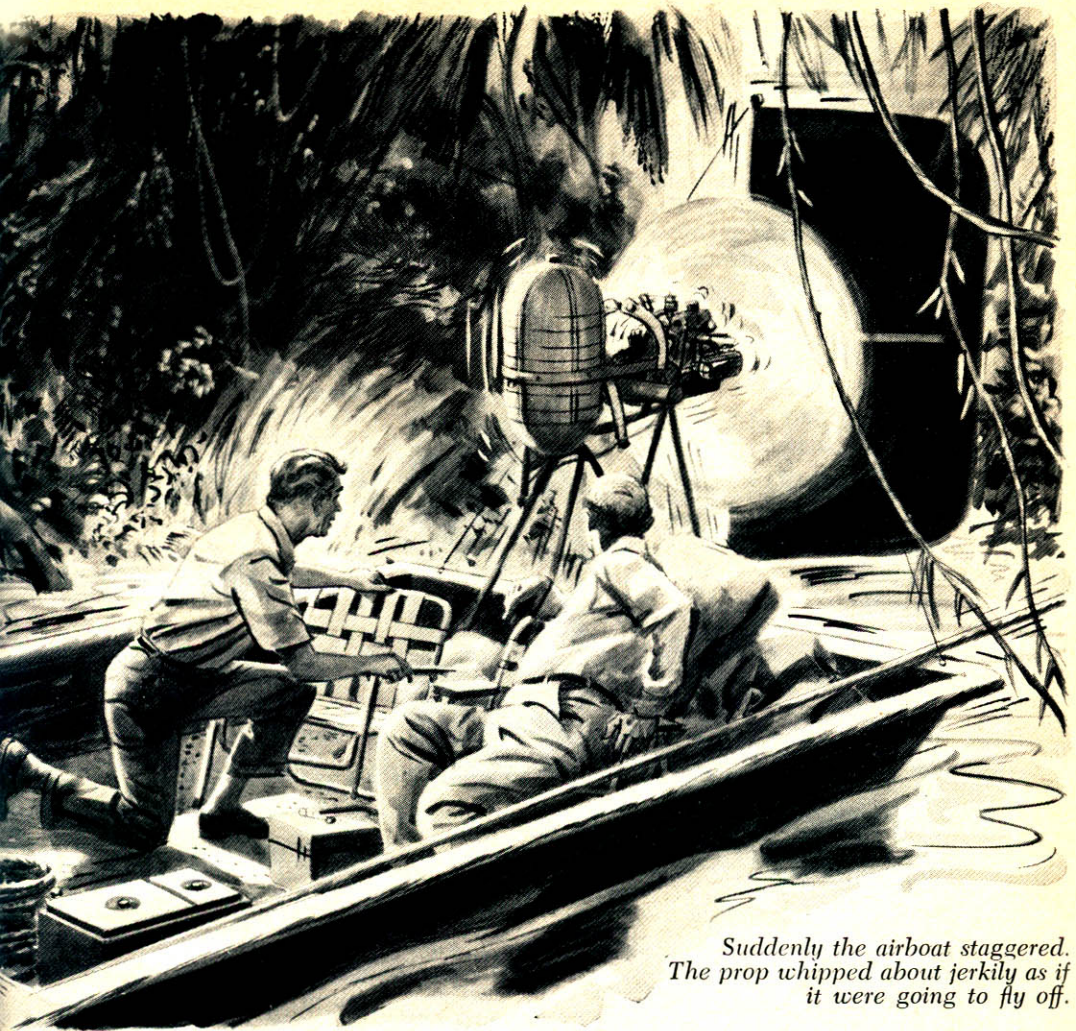


Ben drove off grumpily by himself to do some errands, while Gus overhauled some damaged tackle. Judson came back in better spirits.

"Have you noticed how I always keep the gas tank almost full?" he asked Gus. "I thought your gauge might be off."

"No. It began when the engine sputtered at times, as if it wasn't getting enough gas. Thought I'd licked it when I found a leak in the steel-tubing gas line near the tank, so I cut out the rusty part and spliced in a new piece with couplings.

"Next time I was down to half a tank of gas, the engine suddenly quit. I had my gas-station man blow out the line—all clear. He insisted it must be my old fuel pump. I let him put on a new one. But ever



*Suddenly the airboat staggered. The prop whipped about jerkily as if it were going to fly off.*

since, on half a tankful, the engine quits.”

Gus looked up from a snarl of line.

“When you tightened that coupling . . .”

“Hold it, Gus,” chuckled Ben. “There’s more. Today I had him blow the line out again. Then he took off the flexible fuel hose up front and checked it with air. You could *blow* through it fine. But suction would suck it shut, pinching off the gas. With a full tank, when the pump didn’t have to lift gas far, suction wasn’t strong enough to collapse the hose. With the gas level half down, it did.”

“I wouldn’t think there’s that much more vacuum,” said Gus.

“Must be. It runs fine with a new hose. Tomorrow we’ll head west near the Hillsborough Canal. Got a date with an airboat

there to take us out into the Everglades.”

*The Hudson did perform faultlessly* next morning, with the gas gauge just above the halfway mark, until Ben left the highway. On a rutted country road, the engine coughed two or three times—sounding to Gus like momentary fuel failure. But as the road dipped downhill, the skip ceased. Ben stopped at a small dock.

On a carpet of water hyacinths growing thickly along the bank squatted a scow-bottomed airboat. A red-haired young man in a checked shirt was filling its tank.

“That’s Bud Hilton,” said Ben. “He’s taken me out in that homemade boat twice. I always wonder how he finds his way back.”

He introduced Gus. The young redhead grunted and tossed the gas can ashore.

"What're you after—redfin, warmouth, catfish? I know some good spots."

"We'll leave it to you," said Judson.

Gus studied the engine and its stubby pusher prop, mounted on an angle-iron frame at the rear of the hull. The four-cylinder power plant, salvaged from a small European car, was almost dwarfed by the huge rudder behind it.

Hilton steadied the boat as both men climbed aboard, then poled it around, swung himself up on a high, stool-like seat, and punched a button. The engine roared into action, and the hull nudged forward. He opened it up. The prop howled, bit air, and plastered both passengers against the seat back. Like a water bird racing to take off, the little boat skimmed at increasing speed over wind-rippled open water.

Hilton headed straight for what seemed to be a low-lying island. With no perceptible shock, the airboat hit it and slid over marsh grass at more than 50 miles an hour. Presently it returned to open water, only to enter a channel mouth that quickly narrowed to a serpentine passage.

The boat flew past mangrove swamps and island-like clumps of jungle growth. Approaching what seemed a dead end, Hilton eased off the throttle, kicked the rudder hard over, and with a burst of prop power literally blew the stern around.

Gus detected a skip in the engine, though it quickly returned to a full-throated roar. But he was glad Hilton had taken the pole along. How long would it take with that, he wondered, to go back the distance they were now covering at nearly turnpike speed?

For half an hour the boat skimmed on like a flying carpet, now arrowlike in a straight stretch, now shooting spray sideways as it crabbed around a stump or

protruding root. Sloughs alternated with clumps of trees draped with Spanish moss and creepers. Occasionally fish broke the surface, or birds' cries protested the engine's thrumming note.

Heading into a narrow channel, so overhung with vines that they would have fouled the prop, Hilton killed the engine. A few minutes later he started the motor again. The airboat picked up speed.

Suddenly it staggered. A racking vibration shook it from stem to stern. The prop whipped about jerkily as if about to fly off, and Gus saw a frame brace tear free just as Hilton cut the engine.

Hilton climbed down and poled the boat to a nearby group of trees. As it touched, he sprang out and tied it to a limb, then got aboard again and produced wire and pliers to tie the sheared brace back in place.

"I'll stretch my legs," announced Ben, "while you fix the engine."

Hilton's only answer was a grunt. Gus watched him check ignition wiring and gas connections. Then he tried the engine. It caught at last, but swung the prop feebly and with terrific vibration. Hilton held a screwdriver to each plug terminal in turn. On the fourth, the engine stopped. "Dig that!" he muttered. "It's only hitting on one cylinder."

Unsnapping the distributor cap, he looked inside it.

His mouth twisted.

"Well, that's it! It's cracked. We'll be a long time gettin' home."

A human cry pierced the chorus of wildlife sounds. Hilton jumped out of the boat. Gus, close behind him, felt his feet sink into the spongy, moss-green soil.

Fifty feet away, Judson lay with a trouser leg pulled up, his other foot lapped by a green scum of stagnant water. Hilton took one look and ran back to the boat.

"A snake—" gasped Judson.

"Lie still," ordered Gus. Gently he pulled Ben clear of the water. Hilton returned with a small box and a rag. Binding



### Explosives on move

Hazardous explosives used in compounding high-energy solid propellants are carted, a pound at a time, in a 36-inch steel sphere, to contain detonation in case of accident.

The driver of DuPont's two-ton battery-operated vehicle is shielded from shock in a steel cab lined with sponge rubber. A periscope shows what's going on behind.

a strip a few inches above the swollen area of the leg, he took a razor blade and a small suction cup from the box. He made two small cuts across each fang mark, then applied the suction cup.

"Got no antivenom," he said morosely. "Used it and forgot to get more. Soon as I suck out some poison we'll move him."

By the time they had Judson in the airboat he was white, his pulse fast and weak. Hilton offered Gus the suction cup.

"You keep on with this. Loosen the rag every 15 minutes. I'll start poling back."

"How long will that take?"

Hilton shrugged, but his look at Judson was heavy with foreboding.

"Let me look at the engine," said Gus.

"Can't fix a cracked distributor, or run on one cylinder. Even if it had power enough, it would shake the boat to pieces."

Nodding agreement, Gus went aft and examined the distributor cap. A crack ran from the coil socket to that of the number-four plug. Gus put the cap in place, wrapped a few turns of thin line around it, and yanked out the number-four cable.

"Okay," said Gus, squatting beside Judson. "Try the engine."

Hilton went to the controls. The engine started at once, with much more pep and less vibration. Hilton loosened the painter, nudged the boat away from shore.

Slowly the boat picked up speed, vibrating with only three working cylinders.

It was a grimly tense journey. Twice Gus loosened and retied the bandage.

Then they were floating across the hyacinths toward the ramshackle dock. When they lifted Ben out and carried him to the car, he seemed no longer aware of them.

Hilton started the car and swung it around. But the instant it breasted the slope the engine gasped and died.

"Any spare gas in the boat?" asked Gus.

"Only in the tank. No way to pump it out fast, and this man can't wait."

Gus sprang out and grabbed the keys. In the trunk he found a few wrenches, and with them rolled under the car. In a minute he came out and gave Hilton the keys.

The starter groaned for a long moment. Then the engine fired. Hilton took off.

"*Bud was here* an hour ago," Judson told Gus from a hospital bed the next morning. "Said the boat engine was only hitting on one cylinder but you made it run on three."

"A crack in the distributor cap made a leakage path directly from the center tower to number-four plug tower, bypassing the rotor," explained Gus. "When the others should have fired, there wasn't enough voltage to fire one of them and number four, too. I wrapped the cap so vibration wouldn't spread the crack, and disconnected number-four plug. That sealed off the leak, and the others fired."

"And my old bus got me here," Judson said. "That new hose did it."

Gus grinned. "Not by itself. Sometimes a car gets a combination of troubles—a gas leak, a tired fuel pump, a collapsed fuel hose—and Ben Judson."

"Me? What did I do?"

"What I tried to ask you about yesterday. When you tightened the coupling at the tank, you didn't hold back the tank fitting. It turned and swung the pipe inside the tank up to the halfway point. Any time gas dropped below that level, the pipe sucked air. Can happen with any car that has the inlet on the tank wall or edge."

Judson nodded. "You always could figure odds, Gus—at poker or with cars."

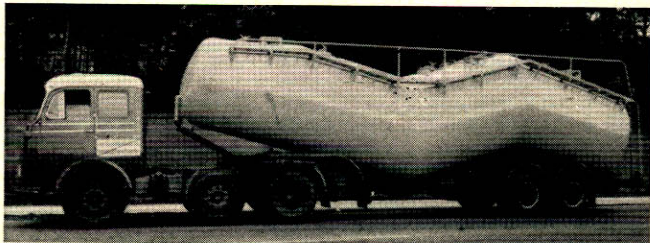
"Haven't won a pot in a long time."

"No? How about that airboat engine? You drew three of a kind—all aces." ■ ■

## Worm that turns

This odd-shaped vehicle is no aluminum worm on wheels dreamed up for a world-of-the-future exhibit; it was built that way for a practical purpose. The West German pneumatic tank trailer is used to haul 18½ tons of flour, sugar, cereals, and other products that create dust.

When the contents are blown out at the back to unload, the dust settles in the dip. Besides,



the unusual construction lowers the center of gravity, and makes steering the vehicle easier.