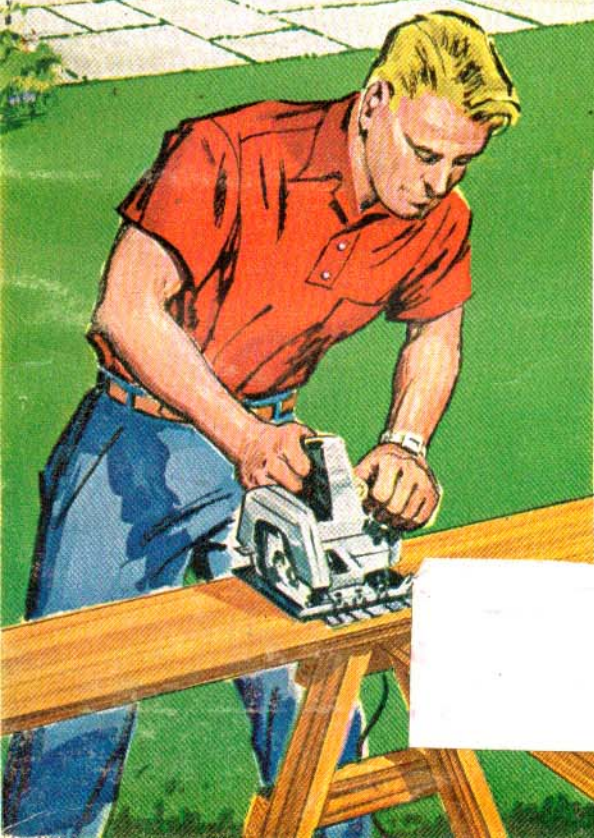


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Gus Takes On a Tankful of Trouble

"IT'S really desperately urgent," said the feminine voice on the phone. "It won't even start. Could you come right away?"

"I'll come," promised Gus Wilson, and went out into the Model Garage shop.

"I have a service call, Stan," he told his helper. "You mind the store."

Making certain he had a booster battery and a can of gas aboard the truck, Gus got in and headed out of town for the newest subdivision.

Ten minutes later he rolled to a stop behind a small sedan standing in a carport. In the driveway of the house next door, a man was hunched over the engine of a Chevrolet hardtop. A woman opened a side door adjoining the carport, greeted Gus, and pointed unhappily to the sedan. "Please hurry, Mr. Wilson," she said.

The sedan's keys were in the ignition lock. Gus opened the hood, made sure that the choke and fast-idle cam were in normal cold-start positions, and tried the starter.

It ground away briskly. The engine's only response was a single half-hearted snort. Noting that the fuel gauge read over a third full, Gus got out but left the ignition on. He pulled off a cable, held it near the plug terminal, and triggered the starter solenoid by hand. Bright sparks snapped over, as regular as drum beats. Gus turned off the ignition and began to remove the air cleaner.

The side door opened again and the woman came out—a small brunette in her forties, dressed for town.

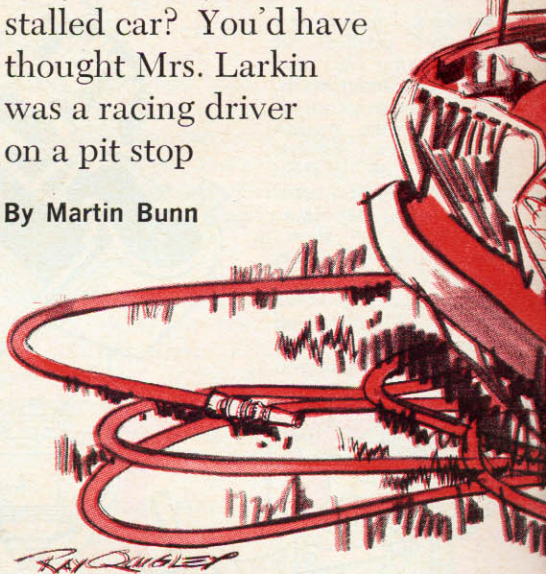
"I hope it won't take long," she said. "I'm due at a citizens' meeting on urban renewal right after lunch. Meanwhile, I'll pop in on a neighbor."

"One thing, Mrs. Larkin. Is that gas gauge right?" asked Gus.

"Oh, yes. I've never had the least bit of trouble with it."

Why the tizzy over a stalled car? You'd have thought Mrs. Larkin was a racing driver on a pit stop

By Martin Bunn



Gus looked down at the boy and grinned. "Oh, you can give me about 10 gallons," he said.

Removing the air cleaner, Gus looked down the carburetor throat as he pumped the throttle by hand. Fluid gushed visibly from the accelerating jet.

"How many, mister?" asked a treble voice in the region of Gus's waist.

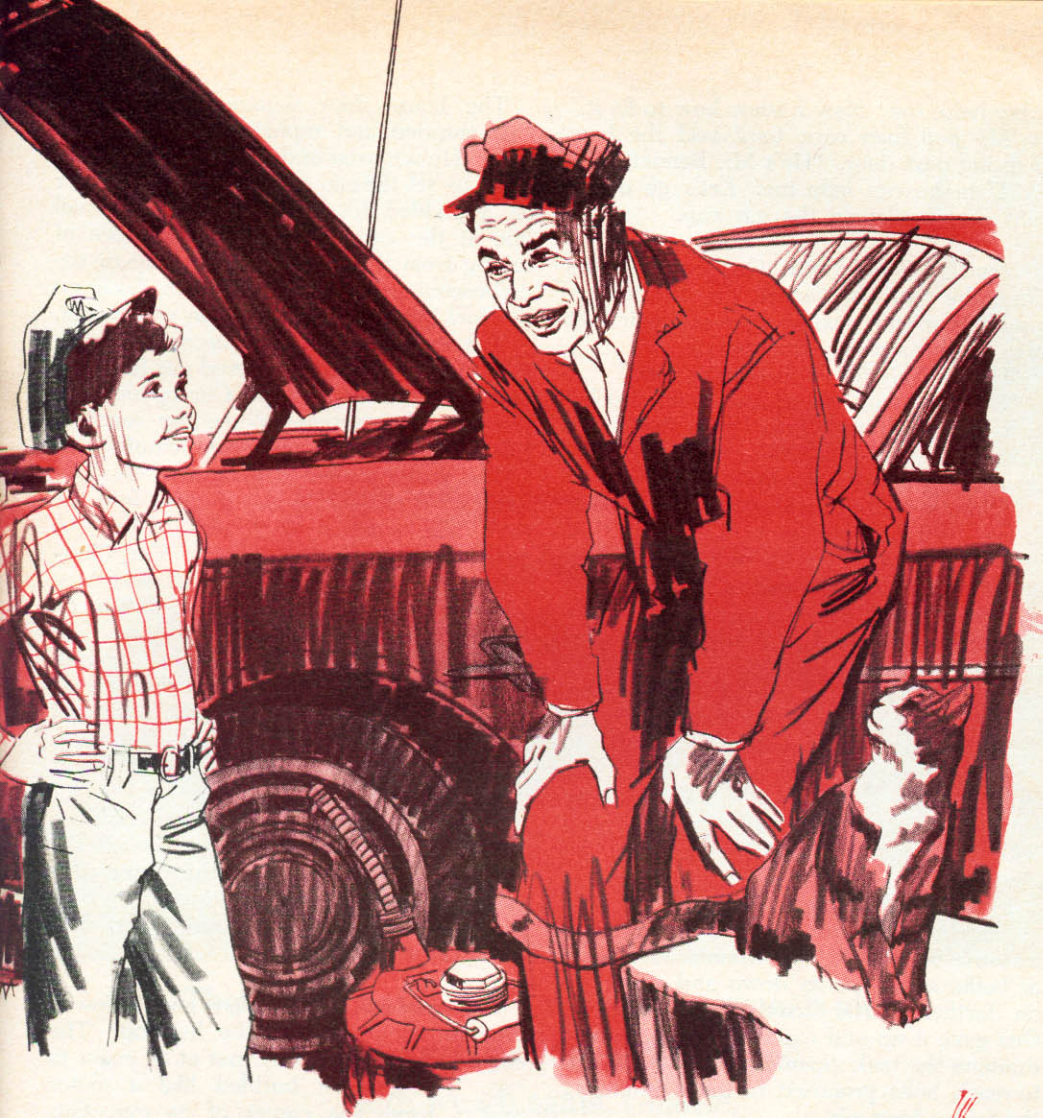
He looked down into the pixie face of a small boy, perhaps five years old, with a freckled nose and brick-red hair.

"How many what?" asked Gus.

"Gallons! We're playin' gas station."

Gus grinned. "Oh, you can give me about 10 gallons," he said.

"Okay," said the lad with businesslike curttness, and scampered off. Despite all the fancy new toys around, mused Gus, kids still invent their own fun on the run.



Replacing the air filter, he shook his head. With a spark at the plugs and fuel in the carburetor, the engine should show more life than it had. Barring something drastic, like a stripped timing gear . . .

"Wait!" protested a childish voice. "You gotta take off the lid first."

Another voice answered. Still pondering his no-start problem, Gus glanced toward the kids—and almost tripped over himself getting into action.

A chubby, round-faced lad was triumphantly holding up the gas cap of Gus's truck, while the redhead was maneuvering the nozzle of a garden hose into the tank.

Gus grabbed it in time to deflect the pistol-grip spray head. Struggling in frustration, the redhead squeezed the handle.

A mushroom spray hissed out. The other boy squealed as he caught the edge of it, and Gus snatched the filler cap from him as he scooted off.

"You said 10 gallons!" muttered the redhead, releasing the trigger at last.

"My tank's full," answered Gus. "Besides, this isn't my brand."

"But you said 10 gallons!"

"I made a mistake," confessed Gus, a suspicion growing in his mind. "Now Mrs. Larkin's car there won't start. I wonder if *it's* out of gas?"

The boy shook his head violently.

"How do you know it isn't?" asked Gus.

"Because I put some in right after breakfast," was the reply.

Gus drew a deep breath. "You've been

a big help, son. Now I know how to fix it.”

“My pop fixes cars, too,” said the boy, pointing next door. “He’s Mr. Bennett.”

“Then he can help me. Let’s go over,” said Gus, replacing the gas cap.

Hand in hand, with Gus carrying the hose, the two approached the hardtop. A young man with anxious eyes and hair that matched his son’s greeted them.

“Hello. This fellow bothering you?”

“He was going to put gas in my truck,” answered Gus with a grin, “from that fancy nozzle on your yard hose, which he’d already used on Mrs. Larkin’s car.”

“Ohforgoshakes!” blurted the young father, looking even more harassed. “I’ll give him what-for later; now, I’ve got to finish putting in new points. Sure picked the wrong day for the job. My wife’s started labor pains—I may have to rush her to the hospital any minute.”

“Could I look in your garage for an empty can or two to drain the tank?”

“Sure thing. Timmy will show you.”

He bent over the motor again as Timmy led Gus to the garage. There was an empty antifreeze can and a big oil can. Returning with them to Mrs. Larkin’s car, Gus got down and slid under the gas tank.

It had no drain plug.

Crawling out, Gus thrust a siphon tube into the filler neck. It encountered a bend or baffle a few inches down and would go no farther. After fruitless maneuvering, Gus gave it up and crawled under again to examine the tank mountings. Rusted, hard-to-reach bolts promised to make removing the tank a long job.

“What, for goodness sake, are you doing down *there*?” demanded a tense voice.

Gus crawled out to face a tense, harried-looking Mrs. Larkin.

“Well!” she exploded when he explained the trouble. “Stop shilly-shallying. Empty it and put in new gas. And *hurry*.”

The house door slammed behind her. Gus emptied and replaced the carburetor bowl. He removed and dried the wet plugs. Then he set the can of gas from the wrecker on a padded fender. Detaching the fuel line at the carburetor, he ran a piece of tubing from the petcock on the can to the carburetor, slipped an extension hose on the fuel pump and led it to an empty can.

The engine started on the second turn, its fuel pump sucking watered gas from the tank into the empty can. Gus opened the throttle a bit further. When the can was full, he substituted the other empty one.

The pump sucked dry at last. Gus put some fresh gas and a can of drier into the tank and emptied that also. Then he poured in a few gallons of gas. The Chevrolet next door backfired, but it was Mrs. Larkin’s voice, taut with tension, that made Gus jump as he reconnected the line.

“Aren’t you through yet?” she inquired.

Gus nodded, and started up the car.

“Here!” she said imperiously. “I’ll get my change later. Just get that—that truck thing of yours—out of my way. Some things just *can’t* wait.”

Wondering how urban renewal could be in that much of a hurry, Gus backed the truck. As he hit the street, the young man pounded toward him, shouting.

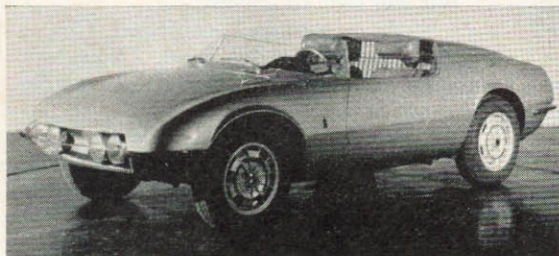
“Need help! It won’t run right. My wife . . .”

Gus parked the wrecker and followed Bennett, who got into the hardtop. The engine caught sluggishly, not at all eager to run. The exhaust burred like a motor boat’s. From the corner of an eye, Gus saw Mrs. Larkin’s car back out briskly.

“Quits dead if I put it in gear,” said Bennett. “I just put in new plugs, points, distributor cap, and rotor. Never would have if my wife had warned me how close she was. She says I get too excited.”

Once more Gus wrapped a cloth on his

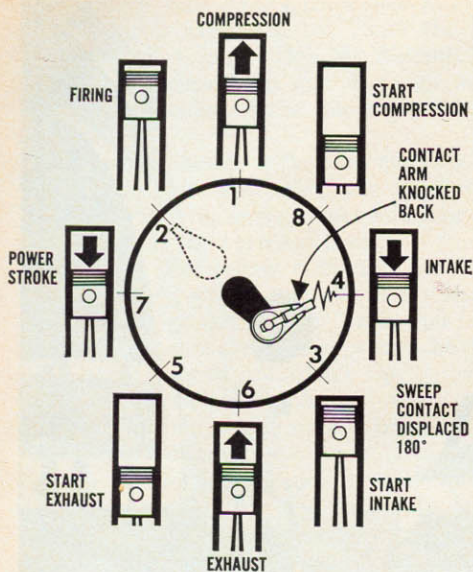
CONTINUED



Italian coupe has low-slung cockpit

This Fiat-Abarth two-seat convertible was styled by Pininfarina. Based on a Fiat 850 chassis, it has a rear-mounted engine enlarged to 60 cu. in. and tuned to 54 hp. for 95-m.p.h. top speed.

The low cockpit has a wraparound windshield curved to meet wide windows. A hinged steering column, iodine-vapor headlights, light-alloy wheels, headrests, and bucket seats are included.



Mounted backwards, the distributor rotor was damaged but still functioning. When it should have fired number-two cylinder, it fired number four, where the piston was halfway down the intake stroke. If the sweep had been displaced a full 180 degrees and the rotor had fired number-three cylinder, then starting its intake stroke, the engine would probably not have run at all.

hand and pulled off a plug cable. A good spark jumped from it to the terminal.

"I gapped all the plugs right," insisted Bennett. "Points, too—there's the dwell meter I borrowed."

Gus nodded. The *put-put* exhaust suggested a compression loss—or mistiming. He followed each plug cable to its distributor tower. The firing order was correct.

"Ever have any sticking valves?"

Bennett shook his head. Gus scratched a mark on the distributor casing, loosened it, and gingerly advanced the timing. The result was a loud pop in the carburetor. Bennett jumped. Gus hastily retarded the timing. The engine faltered and almost died. He put it back on the marked setting and hooked up the dwell meter. It showed a correct 30-degree dwell.

Stopping the engine, Gus unsnapped the distributor cover. At sight of the big, flat rotor, he drew a breath of surprise. The brass sweep arm, which normally lay between two molded bosses, had broken one boss and was twisted aside. The whole rotor was cocked at a slight angle.

"Hey! What happened?" asked Bennett.

"You're not the first to put one of these

rotors on backwards," said Gus. Loosening two screws, he lifted the big rotor and turned it over. "This little round projection and that square one fit into matching holes in the plate. But you got the round one in the square hole. It dropped in, but the square one sat on top of the round hole."

Without a word, Bennett rushed off and rummaged in a trash barrel. Gus maneuvered the distributor weights about and fished out four bits of the shattered boss.

Bennett came back with the old rotor.

"Looks okay," pronounced Gus. He set it on properly and tightened the screws. Two of the cap contacts were scarred, but the plastic wasn't cracked. Gus snapped the cap back on. The engine started easily, with none of the previous exhaust static.

"With new points, the timing should be checked," said Gus. "But it'll do now."

The young man sighed with relief. "Sure was lucky you were around. I don't see how the engine ran at all, with the timing off by 180 degrees."

"The rotor was off 180," explained Gus. "But timing was one full crankshaft turn out—remember the distributor is geared one to two. That should have fired the plugs at the start of the intake stroke, and the engine probably wouldn't have run."

"But with the rotor cocked up on one side, that sweep contact hit on its first turn and was knocked back about an eighth of a turn. Instead of firing the fourth cylinder ahead, it sparked the third, in which the piston was halfway down on the intake stroke, and the valve almost closed. The engine ran—but only just."

Bennett nodded, then jumped as if stung. "Got to see about my wife!"

Gus was headed for his truck when a frantic hand spun him around.

"She isn't there! Nowhere in the house. Where could she go, in her condition? That Larkin woman was here. I'll ask her—"

"Hold it," said Gus. "She drove off—in a hurry. Try phoning the hospital."

Bennett rushed indoors. Gus was writing out his bill when the young man reappeared, a happy glaze in his eyes.

"It's a girl! She had Mrs. Larkin take her—thought I'd be too nervous. Got there just in time. How come you knew?"

Gus chuckled. "I didn't think Mrs. Larkin could get all that excited about urban renewal. Seems she had another kind of renewal in mind." ■ ■