

Gus Wilson Misses

A MOVIE ACTOR SOLVES ONE FOR

GUS WILSON, driving his ancient and immaculate sedan back to the Model Garage after the Kiwanis luncheon meeting down at the Park House, whistled to himself softly and expressively when he caught sight of the car standing at the shop door. It was a long-hooded, low-slung roadster of an unusually expensive make—a job whose satiny finish and highly polished metal trimmings glistened almost blindingly in the afternoon sunshine, and which proclaimed "Important Money!" to every one within range.

The hood had been raised, and as Gus got out of his car he noticed that the big engine gleamed quite as dazzlingly as everything else about the plutocratic roadster. Cylinder heads, air cleaner, generator band, carburetor rods, and even the engine nuts had been chrome-plated!

Harry, the grease monkey, was listening to something that the car's driver was saying, and Gus noticed that his dirty face was red with badly suppressed excitement, and that his mouth was hanging half-open. "Yessir—yessir!" he said as Gus came close to them. "Yessir—here he is now!"

The driver was every bit as scintillating as his chrome-plated chariot. Taking him from the hoof upward, he wore rough-finished brown shoes that had the soft sheen of velvet, fawn-colored flannel trousers with knife-like creases, and a short-sleeved sport shirt of a delicate tint. His hands were incased in lemon-yellow chamolés gloves. His hatless head was crowned by a smooth thatch of wavy black hair that had an oily sheen to it, his teeth shone whitely from under a small waxed mustache, and his eyes, as well as most of the upper part of his face, were protected by a pair of amber-lensed driving glasses. His face was almost as red as Harry's, and Gus didn't need to be endowed with second-sight to realize that he was hopping mad.

He looked Gus over disparagingly, and said: "Oh, so you're here—at last! I want this car fixed and I want it done quickly. I have a highly important appointment in the city this afternoon, and I'm an hour behind my schedule. So don't keep me waiting a moment longer than is absolutely necessary, my good man!"

Gus Wilson, who is a highly respected

member of his community and accustomed to living on terms of give-and-take equality with its leading citizens, never before had been addressed as "my good man." It didn't take him more than a half second to realize that he didn't like it. He wasted plenty of time over filling and lighting his pipe. That done, he tossed a glance at the glistening roadster and demanded coldly: "Well, what's the matter with your circus wagon?"

Harry gasped. The customer glared—and then he grinned.

"It's lousy!" he said. "In strict confidence, it stinks! I paid plenty for it, and I've paid plenty more since I've had it. But I'm not squawking about that. What burns me up is that the damned thing..."

He had been gazing at his diamond-studded wrist watch while he talked. Now he broke off and stared at Gus. "I've got to 'phone!" he yelled. "Now—right away! Boy, show me your telephone!"

"YESSIR!" Harry said. "Right this way, mister!"

"I've seen that stuck-up sap somewhere before, I'll swear," Gus said to himself as he watched them go into the office.

He was looking over the engine, thinking what a beautiful piece of machinery it was in spite of its chrome plating, when Harry came back.

"Gee!" the grease monkey said, breathlessly. "He's calling Dolores Damphier! I heard him tell the Ritz Hotel operator to get her for him. Gee! Just think of him coming in here!"

"What the devil are you talking about?" Gus snapped. "Who is this guy who's got you all overbeated?"

"Who is he?" echoed Harry. "Do you mean to say that you didn't recognize him? Why, he's Montgomery Devoe. I knew him the second he drove up."

"Yeah?" Gus said patiently. "Well, who's Montgomery Devoe?"

"Wha-what?" Harry stuttered. "You don't know who Montgomery Devoe is? Why, every one knows him! Don't you ever go to the movies? He was the star in 'False Evidence,' and in 'Big Town Glamour,' and in..."

By MARTIN BUNN

POPULAR SCIENCE

a Trick

THE VETERAN MECHANIC



Gus wasted plenty of time over lighting his pipe. "Well, what's the matter with your circus wagon?" he asked

"Oh," Gus said disgustedly. "That ham! You sound as if you were talking about Richard Mansfield or John Drew. So that's who our fancy customer is—I knew I'd seen him somewhere before. Well—so what? I'm not going to waste my time while he's blabbing to some movie dame. If he wants to talk to me about his car when he's finished 'phoning, tell him he'll find me in the shop."

Harry grinned widely. "You're sore because he called you 'my good man,'" he said. "You shouldn't mind that. I guess he gets to talking that way from those high-hat parts he always plays. Why, in his last picture . . ."

"Never mind about his last picture," Gus said. "You get back in the pit and finish greasing Mrs. Hanks's car!"

"Oh, all right," Harry said unwillingly. Then his grease-smudged face brightened as he asked: "Say, Gus, do you suppose he'd

give me his autograph if I asked him for it?"

"I'd say that the odds are a hundred to one that he'd give it to anyone who was sap enough to ask him for it," Gus growled. "But before you ask him, step into the office and tell Joe Clark for me not to accept your 'Mister' Devoe's autograph on a check in payment of his bill. I'll bet my shirt there's something phony about that bird!"

Montgomery Devoe's telephone conversation with the delectable Dolores Damphier was a lengthy one. A half hour later he came into the shop and approached the workbench, glanced at the array of tools on it, stripped off his chamois gloves, and picked up a vernier micrometer caliper that Gus had been using. "Tools!" he said dreamily. "Precision tools. I love 'em!"

"You do?" Gus said grumpily. "Well, now, that's something that I never would have guessed!"

The elegant Devoe put the caliper down as if it had burned his fingers. "Of course," he disclaimed hurriedly, "I'd be helpless if I had to use any tool. Utterly helpless! But now about that car of mine."

"Yes," Gus said. "What's the matter with it?"

"That," Devoe told him, "is something that no one has been able to discover. It ran well enough until a couple of weeks ago, when I allowed some fellow to talk me into having my engine chrome-plated. This is the first time that I've driven the car myself since then, but my chauffeur has been complaining that every time he gets up to thirty-five miles an hour, the engine begins to miss and labor, and then cuts out altogether. I drove from the city up to the Elm Valley Golf Club, and it did the same thing with me. Do you think you can locate the trouble—and fix it?"

"It might be in the distributor," Gus said. "Or it might be in the spark plugs, or in the coil, or in the condenser, or possibly in the fuel line. I guess I could find it and fix it for you all right, but it might take some little time. You told me that you are in a hurry, so I guess you had better take the job somewhere else."

"No, I'll leave it here," Devoe decided. "A fellow I was playing golf with this morning told me that you're tops as an automobile trouble-shooter. Get that boy of yours to call a cab for me, and I'll go back to the club and shoot another round. I'll be back here at half past five. You can have the car ready by then, can't you?"

"I'm not making any promise—not before I have a chance to check on the job," Gus said, rather ungraciously. "But if you want to leave it, I'll do my best for you."

Montgomery Devoe got Harry to take an oversize golf bag from his gleaming roadster, and departed in a cab. Gus went to work on the chrome-plated engine. He removed the distributor and cleaned the points. Then he timed and synchronized the distributor on his shop stroboscope. After that he tested out the coil, condenser, and spark plugs. Everything checked in the best of condition, and when he started the engine it ran smoothly. But when he speeded it up, it began to miss, and then cut out.

DECIDING that the trouble must be in the fuel line, Gus was about to start the job of cleaning it out when a motorist drove his six-year-old coupe into the shop and told his tale of woe. He was in a tearing hurry, too, but was polite about it, so Gus turned the job of cleaning and checking the fuel line on Devoe's roadster over to Harry, and went to work trying to find the cause of the fellow's grief.

When he had started his car that morning, he said, there had been a loud clattering noise that seemed to be somewhere near the clutch. He hadn't been able to find anything wrong, but ever since then his engine had been vibrating so violently that it shook the whole car.

Gus went out, got into the old car, and

stepped on the starter. The engine took off easily, and ran without any unusual noise, but the vibration was terrific.

He opened the hood and began to examine the starter. Under it he found a six-inch-long piece of metal which looked like part of a fan blade. "What's this?" he asked.

"Never saw it before," the car owner answered.

Gus examined the fan—a model with two heavy blades. One of the blades was broken off six inches from its end.

"**T**HERE'S your trouble," he said. "Your fan is of an exceptionally heavy type. The broken blade throws it out of balance, and that causes the vibration that's been shaking you up. I'll have to order you a new fan blade—we haven't got that model in stock. I'll have it tomorrow afternoon. Better not drive any more than you have to until then."

"Fuel line on this job of Mr. Devoe's is all right," Harry reported when Gus finally got back into the shop after performing several more "emergency" jobs for customers.

Gus glanced at the shop clock. It was half past five. And just then a taxi stopped at the door, and Devoe swaggered in.

"My car ready?" he demanded.

"Everything is all right but the fuel line," Gus told him. "I've had that cleaned out, but I've been too busy to check it. I'll do it now."

He got into the roadster, and stepped on the starter. The engine ran smoothly. He pressed down gently on the accelerator pedal. The engine picked up speed quickly—and then began to miss. And then it stopped!

"Same damn' thing!" yelled Devoe. "What's the matter with all you fellows? You call yourselves mechanics, but . . ."

The hood still was up, and Devoe's eyes ran swiftly over the chrome-plated engine. Suddenly he leaped forward, and, careless of his chamois gloves, jerked the shiny cover off the air cleaner. The felt pad which should have been pressed snugly into the cover was resting loosely on the cleaner. "There's the trouble!" he exclaimed. "Step on her now!"

Gus stepped on her. The engine roared smoothly—and kept right on roaring when he pressed the pedal all the way down to the floor boards!

"That's one on me," Gus said slowly. "Whoever did that chrome-plating job was careless about fitting the felt back into the cover. Since then the loose felt has been acting as a governor. Up to thirty-five miles an hour it allowed the proper amount of air to enter the carburetor. But when the speed got up to thirty-five miles, the felt kept enough air from getting in, and the engine received too much (Continued on page 216)



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Gus Wilson Misses a Trick

(Continued from page 124)

gas in proportion to the air. That loaded the cylinders and made the engine hold back and miss, and finally cut out. You're pretty good, Mr. Devoe!"

"No I'm not," Devoe disclaimed, with unusual modesty. "It was just a brain wave. I happened to hit it right. 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.' I don't know a thing about engines. I'm an artist—not a mechanic. Well, how much do I owe you?"

"You don't owe me anything," Gus said. "When I don't do a job, I don't charge for it. Good-bye!"

Several customers and friends of Gus and Joe gathered in the office of the Model Garage that evening. They found Gus unusually quiet—so much so that after a half hour George Knowles asked him why.

Gus told them about Montgomery Devoe and his chrome-plated roadster. "I don't mind missing a trick now and then," he concluded. "We all do it. But it sort of stings to be shown up by a lily-handed movie star!"

Joe Clark got up and began digging through a pile of magazines on a table in the corner. "I was reading something about Montgomery Devoe only the other day," he said. "In the gossip department in one of the movie magazines. Wait a minute—yes, here it is. Listen:

"Montgomery Devoe, debonair star of 'Big Town Glamour,' 'False Evidence,' and various other silk-hat and tail-coat dramas, is one of the several Hollywood headliners who live in constant fear of their pasts finding them out. The sleek and aristocratic Devoe has a past which wasn't lurid, but which was strictly plebeian—in his case much worse from a publicity point of view. He used to be an automobile mechanic back in Detroit—a good automobile mechanic—and his first job in Hollywood was keeping the automobile fleet of one of the big producing companies in running order. Now, in his day of fame, he disclaims all knowledge of automotive machinery—even to the chauffeur who takes care of his three expensive cars."

Gus looked puzzled for a minute, and then laughed. "Montgomery Devoe—Mike Davoli," he said. "I knew I'd seen that guy somewhere, and I was pretty sure it hadn't been on the screen. Why, we worked in the same shop one time—my last job, almost, before I settled down. Bet he knew me, too, and is having a big laugh over the way he showed me up. Mike always was a fresh kid—but he was a darned good mechanic!"

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