

A Bargain from Gus

"NOTICED," Joe Clark remarked when Gus Wilson, his partner in the thriving Model Garage, came into the office, "that old Silas Barnstable had his car in the shop this morning. First time he's been around to see us since you showed him why his horn tooted every time he pulled on his emergency brake, isn't it? What was his trouble this trip?"

Gus laughed. "The old skinflint drove his bus in all right," he said, "but he drove it out again without our being able to do any business."

"How come?" Joe wanted to know.

"Because he wouldn't do business our way, and I wouldn't do business his way," Gus said. "You know what we decided on when we started, Joe—that we'd do honest jobs and charge prices that would give us an honest profit on them, and that we'd charge every one the same price for the same job."

"Right!" Joe agreed. "That's what you might call the corner stone of our business."

"Old Silas came into the shop in a pretty sour sort of humor," Gus went on, "and said that his oil-pressure gauge wasn't working and that his engine was overheating. That was easy to check on, and I soon found that he was right on both counts.

"As the overheating wasn't serious, and as he has driven that bus of his only a few thousand miles, I figured that the chances were that something had gone wrong with his oil gauge. To make certain, I took it off and put on a new one. But the indicator of the new one didn't move any more than the indicator of the old one had. So I checked the firing order, the timing, and the water pump, but didn't find anything wrong.

"All the time that I was working on his car, old Silas was buzzing around me, asking fool questions and making fool suggestions, and growling about me holding him up when he was in a hurry. I told him that I couldn't do anything to remedy his trouble until I found out what it was, and that it probably was either in his oil pump or in an oil line that had broken or clogged, and that he'd have to hold his horses while I dropped the oil pan and checked on it.

"Then he wanted to know how much the job was going to cost him, and I said that I couldn't tell him anything about that until I had found out what was the matter. That set him to growling about garage prices and

how he had been skinned again and again, and to telling me about some cheap place down in the city where they did repair jobs for less than half what anyone up this way charges. By that time I'd had more than enough of him, so instead of dropping the oil pan I took off the new oil gauge and put his old one back on.

"There's your car, Mr. Barnstable," I told him, "in exactly the same condition it was in when you drove in here. You'd better take it down to that shop in the city you've been telling me about. Maybe they'll do business your way. We won't!"

"That sort of took the wind out of the old cuss. He hung around for a few minutes, and



The noise that the engine made was terrific. Con-

I got the idea that he'd just been trying to beat me down a dollar or two. But I got very busy on another job and didn't pay any more attention to him, and pretty soon he climbed into his car, snarled something about he'd 'show' me, and drove out."

"You did right, of course," Joe said, although a little doubtfully. "But I do hate to lose a customer."

"Me too!" Gus agreed. "But maybe we haven't lost old Silas. I've got a hunch he'll be back before long. I hope so, anyhow—somehow I sort of like the old grouch, and he's usually good for a laugh!"

But Silas Barnstable didn't come back that day, or the next day, or the day after that. "Guess we've lost him," Gus had to admit. "I suppose he got a cheap job done down at that place he was talking about."

The days stretched out to a couple of weeks, and Gus and Joe had almost forgotten about their grouchy client when, one rainy afternoon, Silas drove into the shop.

He's a dried-up little old man, and when he hopped out of his car and ran his bony, work-

Silas Barnstable Learns About Cut-Rate Garages

By
MARTIN BUNN

twisted fingers through his scanty gray hair he looked like an ancient and slightly embarrassed bantam rooster. "Hey!" he squeaked, looking at Gus.

"Hi!" Gus said, laughing. "What's the matter now?"

"This dam' automobile of mine—that's what's the matter!" Silas said. "It's knocking itself to pieces. Jest listen to it, will you? Sounds like a boiler-plate factory!"

Gus listened as Silas raved the engine. "It is a little bit noisy," he agreed. "But what did you expect? There was something the matter with your oil system when you were in here two weeks ago. It stands to reason that the trouble is worse now."

"Tain't!" Barnstable

said briefly and tartly.

"What was the matter then was just what you said it was—the oil pump. But it ain't that now—I've got a new oil pump. Got it downright reasonable, too. That shop down in the city I was telling you about only charged me five dollars—for the new pump and labor. Hey, mister—don't stand there staring at me like I'd stole something! Jest because a feller's got a few dollars laid by ain't no reason why he shouldn't take a bargain when he can get one!"

"No reason at all,"

Gus said. "Five dollars was cheaper than dirt for that job. A whole lot cheaper than we would or could have done it for you. . . . That being the case, I don't quite see why you brought your bus back here."

"I like to do my tradin' close to home, when I can," Barn-



stable's rod bearings knocked, a main bearing pounded, wrist pins clattered

stable explained. "You go ahead and see what's the matter with my car. Now that I've showed you that I can do pretty well somewhere else, I guess maybe you'll be more reasonable."

"Oh, all right," Gus said good-humoredly. "Let's see—is your oil gauge working now?"

"Course it's working. Better than it ever worked before," Silas said. "Step on her and you'll see."

Gus got into the car and stepped on the accelerator pedal. As his foot went down, the indicator needle on the oil-pressure gauge jerked up to 30—to 40—to 50. The noise that the engine made was terrific. Connecting-rod bearings knocked, a main bearing pounded, and a half dozen wrist pins clattered. Old Silas regarded the hood of his car with undisguised apprehension. "Sounds like the hammers of hell!" he said in an awe-struck voice.

"Sure does!" Gus agreed as he got out. "Now let's have a look at the engine."

When he raised the hood, the first thing that caught his eye was the oil pump. It had been shined up a bit, but it certainly was far from new, and it looked exactly like the one that had been on the car two weeks earlier.

Then Gus noticed something else—a long, thin spring attached near the carburetor end of the accelerator rod, and running up into the cowl. "Watch your oil-gauge needle," he told Silas. Then he took hold of the spring, and pulled gently toward the carburetor. "What happened?" he asked.

"Why," Silas told him, "the needle went up to 50."

Gus laughed until old Silas glared at him—and then he laughed some more. "What's the joke?" Barnstable demanded grumpily.

"The joke's on you," Gus said. "On you—five dollars worth. Just wait a minute now, and I'll show you something."

He detached the spring from the accelerator rod, and then carefully removed the oil gauge from the instrument panel. The long, thin spring came with it.

GUS took the gauge over to his workbench, and began to take it apart. "Now you watch!" he told Silas. "See how one end of that spring is attached to the needle arm of the gauge? The other end was fastened to the accelerator rod, near the carburetor. See that little elastic band on the other side of the needle arm? That was put there to keep the needle at zero until you stepped on your accelerator pedal. When you did step on it, the pull of the spring made the needle move, and the farther down you pressed the accelerator pedal, the farther up the scale the needle moved. They adjusted it so that when you were driving at average speed the indicator showed just about the pressure that is normal for your car."

"Huh?" demanded old Silas, beginning to look worried. "What's this all about? I don't see what you mean."

"I mean that you've been gypped!" Gus said. "Those cheap birds you took your car to didn't put on a new oil pump, and probably they didn't even check your oil system. They didn't do anything at all but clean up your old pump so that it would look new, and rig that spring onto your oil-pressure gauge, so that you would think that it was working. Your car is in exactly the same condition that it was in when you had it in here two weeks ago, except that it has been running without proper lubrication all that time. You thought that you were saving a few dollars, but maybe you've done ten times as much damage to your engine."

"I've been gypped, hey?" yelled Barnstable. "I'll show those danged cheats! I'll have the law on 'em! By heck, I'll stand 'em a suit!"

"Go ahead—and see how much you get out of it," Gus told him heartlessly. "Well, now, what do you want me to do about your car?"

Old Silas hesitated for ten seconds. "I want you to fix it up right," he said at last. "Do it your own way—but jest remember that I ain't a millionaire!"

Gus checked the oil gauge, found it in perfect condition, and put it back on the instrument panel. Then he checked the crankcase, and found much too much oil in it. "When did you last buy oil?" he asked Silas.

"Not so very long ago, when I first noticed that my motor was getting too hot," the old fellow told him. "I had the crankcase drained, and put in six quarts."

"I'll have to drain it again," Gus told him. He took out almost three gallons. "This bus of yours is a regular oil refinery," he said. "It makes oil. You put in six quarts, and lo and behold I take out three gallons. . . . The only trouble is that this oil I've taken out is over half gasoline. That's the cause of your grief—somehow gas is getting mixed with your oil. I'll have to find out how."

He checked the oil pump, the fuel pump, and the carburetor, and found them all in perfect condition. Then he tipped his cap over his left eyebrow and scratched the back of his head while he did some heavy thinking. After that he began going over the gas line, inch by inch, as far as the pump. Then he started the motor idling and continued toward the carburetor. When he came to a place where the copper tubing of the gas line crossed the copper tubing of the outlet from the oil filter, just a few inches off the engine block, he leaned over and sniffed several times. Then he straightened up.

"Won by a nose!" he told old Silas. "Look here—I want to show you something that wouldn't happen—(Continued on page 238)"

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A Bargain from Gus

(Continued from page 148)

once in a million years." He bent the gas line away from the filter line. "Look!" he said. "The gasoline has been pumping from the small hole in the tubing into another small hole in the return section of the filter line! Those two lines were tight against each other where they crossed. Copper is soft and the tubing thin, and friction wore a hole in each line. What made the leak hard to find was that the two lines were so tight together that they made a tight fit—hardly any of the gasoline spilled out to give a fellow a clue to the trouble. It just happened that I thought I smelled raw gas.

"That accounts for your oil-gauge trouble, too," Gus explained. "The raw gas thinned the oil so much that the oil pump couldn't handle it fast enough to build up any pressure."

"I'll be gosh-danged!" was all that Silas said.

Gus cut off the engine, replaced the leaky lines with new tubing, poured in six quarts of oil, started the engine again, and allowed it to idle.

"That's that," he told Silas. "Guess you didn't drive far enough to do any damage to your engine. Take a look at your oil gauge—it's working all right now. Well, while we let that new oil circulate a bit, let's go into the office and we'll fix up your bill for you."

Joe Clark took care of that little detail. When he handed the bad news across his desk to Silas Barnstable the old fellow looked at every item three times, added up the total twice, and found it considerably less than he had feared it would be. "That ain't so bad," he said at last, grudgingly. "But that odd thirty-five cents. . . we'll jest cut that off, hey?"

"No, sir; we won't!" Joe told him. "That's our price—just exactly as it totals up there!"

The old man grunted, and wrote out a check in his crabbed hand. Then he went back to the shop and climbed into his car.

He backed it a few feet, then stopped and raced his engine. It ran smooth as cream. He saw Gus watching him, and his seamed face twisted into something like a smile. "This time," he said, "I guess mebbe I got a real bargain!"

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