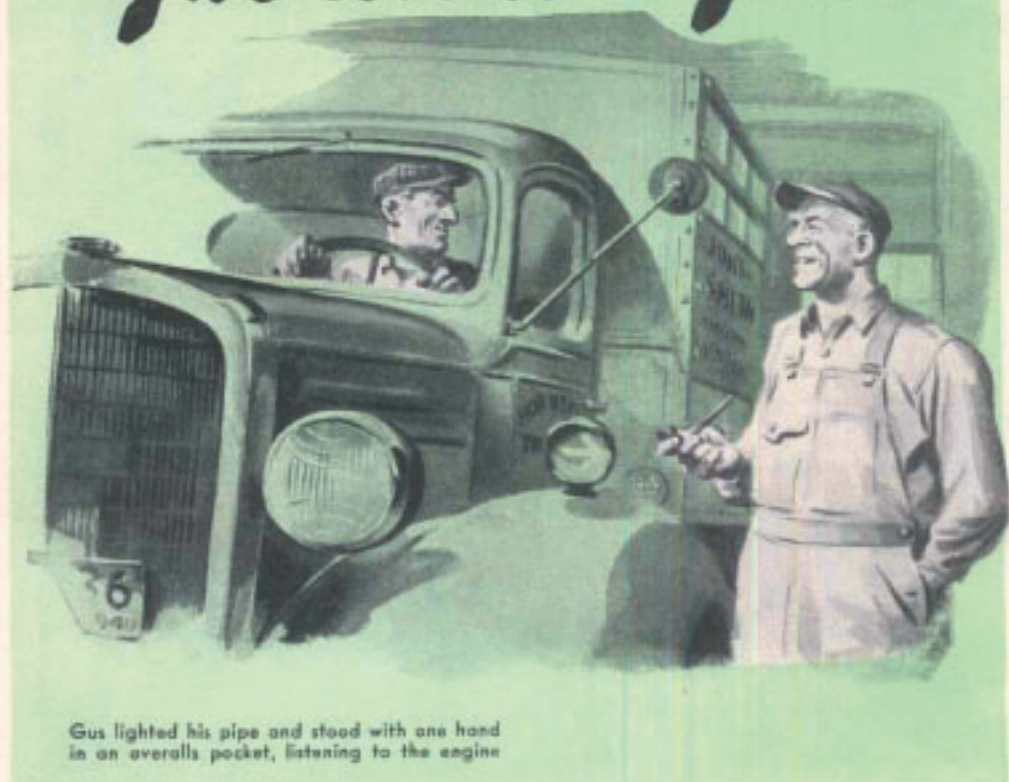


Gus Licks a Jinx



Gus lighted his pipe and stood with one hand in an overalls pocket, listening to the engine

"GOOD mornin', mister." Gus Wilson looked up at the little man who had come into the shop of the Model Garage so quietly that he hadn't heard him.

"Good morning," Gus said. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I dunno," the little man said. "I hope you can, but I ain't bankin' on it. Say, mister—did you ever hear the story about the railroad engineer?"

"I don't think that I have," Gus admitted. "But I've heard at least a hundred that start off 'It seems there was a traveling salesman . . . If it's a variation of one of them—"

"Naw," the little man assured him. "It aint that kind of a story. It seems that there was a railroad engineer that had an early-mornin' run. One mornin' he gets up late, and the first thing he does is cut his face while he's shavin'. For breakfast his wife burns the bacon an' eggs an' toast, and gives him a cup of coffee that tastes like

dishwater looks. Then on his way to the roundhouse he blows a tire, has to park his car at the side of the road an' thumb a ride, an' shows up so late his boss gives him hell. But he gets started on time, and after a while he gets his train out on the main line. Pretty soon he heads 'round a curve—and what does he see but an express train comin' around the curve from the opposite direction, doin' a good sixty, an' on the same track he's on. So he looks over at his fireman an' says: 'Jim', he says, 'this is one of them mornin's when everything goes wrong.'"

Gus Wilson is a polite man. He laughed. Then he said: "That's a good story—but you're not a railroad engineer, are you?"

"Naw, I ain't," the little man admitted. "I drive a truck and my name is Hornsby. I ain't had any head-on collisions with express trains—so far. But this is one of them mornin's when everything goes wrong."

"We all have them," Gus said. "What's been going wrong with you?"

Hornsby produced a big black cigar from under his windbreaker and fired up. "I live fifty miles up-state from here, an' drive a truck for a factory that makes a line of mechanical do-funnies," he explained. "This mornin' I had a rush delivery to make down in the city, so I got rollin' a few minutes after seven. Went along all right for maybe ten miles—an' then we stopped. Don't ask me why. Never had any trouble with that truck before—less'n fifteen thousand on its clock. I tried everything I knew, and after quite a while I got started again. Couldn't figger out why, any more than I could figger out why we stopped. Had to stay in low or in second, an' the engine kept sputterin' and missin' all the time, but I managed to keep movin' until we got to a garage in the next town.

THE feller in the garage goes all over everything, and then says the trouble is caused by pitted distributor points. 'Put in new ones,' I says, 'an' charge it to the firm.' He puts in new points, an' the bus runs fine—until we get out of town. Then she starts buckin' and backfirin' again, an' I have to keep her in low until we get to the next garage.

"The mechanic there goes over everything, and says the trouble is that the carburetor is dirty. 'Clean it out,' I tells him, 'an' charge it to the firm.' So he cleans out the carburetor, and I start off again. Same thing. We go along fine until we get out of town, and then the engine starts actin' up again. So I have to go back into low again, with the engine actin' like it was starved for gas.

"After while I gets to another garage, and drives in. The feller checks everything, says there's nothin' the matter with the gas line, and that what I need is new spark plugs. 'Put 'em in,' I tells him, 'an' charge it to the firm. He says: 'Nothin' doin'. No credlek—can't you read the sign? But I tell you what I'll do—I'll put new plugs in, an' if they don't make your truck run all right I won't take your money.' I had a few dollars in my pocket, so I told him to go ahead. When he gets the new plugs in the engine runs smooth as cream. So I pays him—an' no sooner we're out of town than that danged truck quits on me again!

"This time it takes me fifteen minutes to get started. Then we come to a detour ten miles up the road, and I says to myself: 'This washboard road'll stop you for good. So I starts over the detour—and the bumper the road gets the better the truck runs. Sometimes I even get into high for a half mile or so. But soon as we get back on the concrete—bam! Back into low, with the engine coughin' and sputterin'. Fix her up,

mister—if you can. But I ain't got any more cash on me, so you'll have to charge it to the firm."

"Never mind about the cash," Gus told him. "Drive your truck in and I'll have a look at it."

"If she'll start," Hornsby said gloomily. But half a minute later he drove into the shop with his engine running smoothly. "It ain't the wiring, an' it ain't the gas line, an' it ain't the carburetor, an' it ain't the plugs—they've all been checked," he said. "You got a job on your hands, mister!"

Gus didn't seem to be in any great hurry to start on the job. He lighted his pipe and stood with his hands in his overalls pockets listening to the engine. "She idles all right," he observed. "Now open the throttle—as far as if you were driving at about thirty miles an hour."

After a couple of minutes the engine began to miss. Then it stopped.

"Switch it off," Gus said. He stood looking at the gasoline tank—a square tank with the



He inserted two long screw-driver blades through the filler and caught the plate

Everything Seemed To Be
Going Wrong for Hornsby
Until He Got His Balky
Truck into the Hands of
Gus at the Model Garage

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BY MARTIN BUNN

fuel pipe running at an angle down from its bottom, directly in line with the filler cap.

"Can't be the tank," Hornsby said. "I thought of that, but the whole gas line's been checked three times."

Gus unscrewed the filler cap. "No harm in having a look," he observed as he peered into the tank. "Say—what sort of tank is this, anyhow?"

He moved aside, and Hornsby looked into the tank. "I don't see anything any different from any other tank about it," he said.

"You don't, hey?" Gus came back at him. "Well, I do. It's the first gas tank I've ever seen that didn't have any way for the gas to get out of it."

HORNSBY looked again. The bottom of the tank was a smooth sheet of galvanized metal, with no hole where the fuel-line pipe was attached to the bottom. "By Jimmy," the little man said, "that's the hottest one I've ever heard of!"

Gus brought a flash light from his workbench and turned its beam into the tank. Then, looking through the filler from as wide an angle as possible, he saw that what had seemed to be the bottom of the tank really was a foot-square piece of sheet metal lying on the tank's bottom.

"There's the cause of all your grief," he told Hornsby. "Nothin' more serious or mysterious than a splash plate that has come unsoldered and fallen across the gasoline outlet. Naturally, it shut off the flow of gas, and your engine couldn't run properly."

"Yeah?" Hornsby's tone was doubting. "Maybe you're right, mister, but it sounds sort of screwy to me. If it wasn't gettin' gas, how come the engine would run all right for a while before it quit on me, right after I'd come out of a garage? An' how come that it ran real good on that stretch of washboard road, and then darned near went dead soon as I got back on the pavement?"

"I'll tell you just what happened," Gus said. "The splash plate broke loose after you had driven a few miles this morning, and fell over the fuel-pipe outlet. After a few minutes the suction of the fuel pump drew it down over the opening so tightly that no gas, or at most only a mighty little gas, could get into the fuel line. So after the gasoline in the carburetor had been used up, your engine stopped. When the engine stopped the fuel pump stopped working, so there was no more suction, and the plate loosened enough to allow a little gas to run under it into the fuel pipe. Then when you started the engine again, the pump drew a small amount of gas into the carburetor before the suction clamped the plate down tight again, and the engine ran on that gas until it was used up—and then you were

parked right behind the eight ball again.

"Pretty much the same thing happened each time that you stopped at a garage. I'm not saying that the mechanics who worked on the job shouldn't have found the cause of your trouble—but they were looking for something else, so they didn't find it. What put me on the right track was what you told me about your engine running better on that stretch of washboard road. That gave me the idea that there might be some obstruction in your tank that was cutting off the gas, and that the jouncing that your truck got on the rough road had loosened it temporarily."

"Well," Hornsby said, "you're the doctor. Get me fixed up quick, will you? I've got a rush delivery to make, an' I'm hours late on it now. Say, how the heck you goin' to get that splash plate outa the tank? That's a job for Houdini!"

"And I'm no Houdini," Gus admitted. "I'll have to cut the tank open to get it out, and that'll take time. . . . But wait a minute. I think I know how I can fix it so that I won't have to take the plate out."

He took two long screw drivers, inserted their blades through the filler, and after several failures succeeded in getting the sides of the plate between the ends of the blades and exerting sufficient forces to bend the middle of the plate upward, so that it no longer could lie flat on the bottom of the tank and shut off the flow of gasoline.

"That will fix you up temporarily," he told Hornsby. "I doubt if that splash plate ever will make any more trouble, but to be on the safe side maybe when you get home you'd better have the tank opened and the plate soldered back where it belongs."

"Thanks, mister," the little man said. "Have a seegar? Don't smoke 'em, hey? Well, charge the job up to the firm. You're a good trouble-shooter, I'll tell the world!"

AS THE truck rolled away, Joe Clark called to his partner from the shop door. "Say, Gus, Mrs. Miller's been on the phone a couple of times already to ask whether you're going to have her car ready by noon, the way you promised. She wants me to call her back. What can I tell her?"

Gus stared at Mrs. Miller's car, on which he had been working when Hornsby had driven in with his load of grief. "Gosh," he exclaimed, "I'd forgotten all about that darned job! And I held it over until this morning because I thought I'd have plenty of time!"

"Yeah," said Joe. "But what'll I tell her?" Gus glanced at the clock. "You tell her that her bus will be ready at noon, as promised! Say, Joe, did you ever hear the story about the railroad engineer who . . ."