

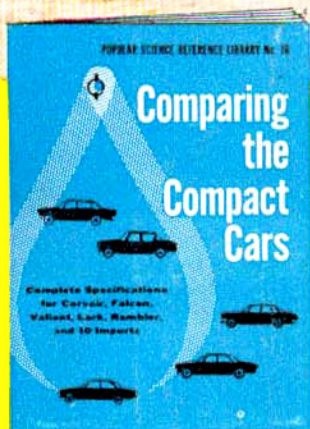
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Before Hinchman could argue, one of the boys came running up. "Hey, Mr. Wilson, chow's on!"

Gus Thaws a

By Martin Bunn

A PAPER airplane, expertly launched from the rear of the bus, glided up the aisle and struck the windshield.

"Kids," muttered the sour-faced driver. "Every day, pick up a bunch of 'em and take 'em to school. Take 'em home again. And now on my day off, too."

"Boys will be boys, Frank," consoled Gus Wilson, who was sitting behind him. The Model Garage owner peered through

a window at the snow-covered countryside. "Next turnoff to the right is ours."

He was answered by a grunt from the driver and a crescendo of falsetto "Yippees" from the youngsters who filled the yellow school bus. Doc Garvey, the dentist, had chartered it to treat the Boys Club to an overnight ice-fishing trip on Little River. Gus had come along because he liked fishing—and kids.

Frank Hinchman, the driver, and also owner of a fleet of school buses, didn't



Frozen Driver

like either. "Kids," he repeated in disgust as he double-clutched, jamming into a lower gear to wheel off the highway.

Gus stood up and zippered his jacket. "We're almost there, Frank. You'll soon be rid of us."

"Darn tootin' I will, I'm not crazy enough to spend the night in a sleeping bag this weather. Soon as the kids get all this gear unloaded I'm heading for a nice, cozy motel over at Centerville."

Doc Garvey assigned some of the parka-

clad youngsters to gathering firewood, others to unloading tents and sleeping bags from the bus. Both chores were accompanied by boisterous, impromptu snowball fights. Gus went off to check the ice. Frank Hinchman stayed in the bus, scowling and reading a magazine.

As Gus came back up the river embankment to get a chain saw for cutting ice holes, he saw Hinchman ducking snowballs.

"You kids quit messing with my bus!"

he shouted at the frolicking youngsters, shaking a fist angrily.

Gus intervened. "Okay, now, boys. Get along and set up camp like Doc told you." When they scampered off, he turned to Hinchman. "They're good kids, Frank. Join us for supper and you'll see."

"You kidding, Gus? Soon as they get the rest of the stuff out I'm on my way."

Gus saw that Hinchman was shivering. "Why not warm yourself at the campfire, Frank? There's a pot of coffee brewing."

"Don't mind if I do," said Hinchman.

THE shadows of the boy's windbreaks lengthened across the ice and the clear blue winter sky had taken on a tinge of red. Gus looked at his wrist watch.

"About time to knock off, Doc."

"My stomach agrees with you," said Doc. He held up a string of fish. "I can almost smell these sizzling in the pan."

"That's all for today, boys," Gus called out. "Get your tackle together and head for camp." He picked up his own gear. "Come on, Doc."

Keeping an eye on their charges, they trudged across the snow-covered ice and up the river bank. At the top, Gus nudged his friend.

"Look, the bus is still there."

"About time you fellows came back." It was Hinchman, huddled close to a dying fire. "My bus won't start."

"What's wrong?" Gus asked.

"I'm no mechanic. Take a look at it."

Gus sighed. "Let's try starting her."

Hinchman climbed in and stepped on the starter. The engine caught, heaved, and died as if choked off.

"Sounds like fuel trouble," Gus said.

"Nonsense. I had this engine worked on yesterday—carburetor overhaul, new fuel pump." Hinchman's eyes narrowed. "Could it be ice in the gas line?"

"Could be," Gus said, "but I doubt it."

"I don't. It's those kids. You saw me

chase them away, I'll bet they poured water in my gas tank."

"Look here, Frank," Gus said. "Those boys are having the time of their lives. I'm sure they don't know or care if you exist. Besides, cold as it is today, water would freeze before it reached the bottom of the filler tube."

"Have it your way," said Hinchman. "Just so you get me out of here."

"Got any tools?"

Hinchman reached over, opened a dash compartment, and looked in. "Adjustable wrench, pliers, and a screwdriver."

"They'll have to do,"

Gus said. "Now, if we're going to check the fuel, ask one of the boys to let you have an air-mattress inflating pump."

WHEN Hinchman returned, Gus had removed the gas line from the fuel-pump inlet. Wrapping a glove around the air-pump hose, he jammed it into the gas-tank filler. Then he went back to the engine.

"Okay, Frank," he called. "Pump."

Gasoline began to dribble, then throbbed from the disconnected line.

"Was I right—about the ice?"

"Nope. Line's clean. Come and hold a flashlight for me."

Hinchman watched anxiously as Gus reconnected the line and unhooked the other side of the fuel pump. He grounded the solenoid to run the starter. Gas gushed in even pulses from the outlet.

"Looks like carburetor trouble, unless the line is clogged between the pump and the carburetor."

"Can you fix it?"

"I'll try, when I warm up my hands."

Gus stuck them into his jacket pockets.

Hinchman kicked a tire. "Damn that relief driver. He should have had this job, only his wife's having a baby." He kicked the tire again. "More kids!"

Gus felt like kicking Hinchman. Instead he got back to work. Finding the

Where'd it come from?



Pockets: Those useful catch-alls once meant a specific quantity of wool—half-a-bagful, or about 182 pounds. As pockets gradually were adopted for transporting general merchandise they shrank in size. It was a short step from that to being hand-carried or belt-attached, and eventually they were sewn right into clothing.

wrench flats on the flexible fuel line rounded off at the carburetor end, he wrenched on the carburetor inlet fitting itself. With his lips to the line, he blew back into it. No obstruction.

Then Gus had a hunch. "Let me have the flashlight." Moving into a position so Hinchman couldn't see, he groped into the open carburetor inlet hole with the screwdriver.

"Afraid it's carburetor trouble, Frank," he said, straightening up. "No job to tackle tonight."

BEFORE Hinchman could argue the point, one of the boys came running. "Hey, Mr. Wilson! Doc says to tell you

keep waiting—only until you're ready to bed down in the bus, of course."

It wasn't long before Hinchman was snoring. "Better zip him up," Doc said. "It's time we all hit the sack."

HINCHMAN woke up fighting the confinement of his sleeping bag. He sat up, shielding his eyes from the early-morning sun. Gus came over, warming his hands on a steaming cup of coffee.

"Hey, Gus. What am I doing here? I'm supposed to be in the bus."

"Doc and I weren't going to carry you there, Frank."

"Guess I fell asleep," Hinchman said sleepily. His nose twitched. "Say, what's that smell?"

"Bacon and eggs, hot cakes and coffee, Mr. Hinchman," said one of the boys.

Gus watched the bus owner shovel in the food, talking to the boys between mouthfuls. Frank Hinchman was smiling.

"I don't believe it," Doc Garvey said. "I even think I heard the old cuss laugh."

"Glad he's in a good mood," Gus said, "because I'm going to have to tell him I fixed his school bus last night."

"You did what?"

Gus dug a tiny tube-shaped brass screen out of his pocket. One end was open. The other had a recessed brass cup.

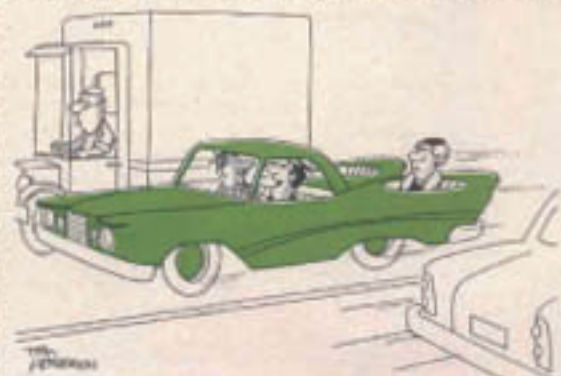
"The open end of this filter screen should have been pushed over a shoulder on the end of the carburetor fuel-inlet fitting," Gus explained. "When I removed the fitting, the screen didn't come out with it. I fished it out."

"Was that the fix?" Doc asked. "You could have started the car then?"

Gus nodded. "There's a little spring to hold the filter screen over the end of the fitting. Someone who worked on Frank's bus forgot to put it in. The screen worked itself off the end and surges of gas forced the capped end up against the inlet hole, cutting off the fuel supply. When the float chamber emptied, the engine quit."

Doc grinned. "Gus the Good Samaritan. What if it had turned out to be a frozen line?"

"That would have been easy, Doc. The big problem was thawing out the driver."



"Cost me quite a bit to have it done, but I felt my mother-in-law was worth it."

chow's on. We're having fried fish, skillet bread, and potatoes baked in the coals."

"How about it, Frank? Sounds mighty good to me."

"Got to eat, I guess," Hinchman said grudgingly.

Half an hour later the boys were gathered around the campfire singing "Old MacDonald Had a Farm."

Gus filled a pipe and struck a match. "Had enough to eat, Frank?"

"I can hardly move," Hinchman said. "Must admit I don't remember when food tasted so good." He yawned. "Did those boys really cook everything, Doc?"

"Yep, right from cleaning the fish."

"Wonder how cold it is."

"Last time I looked at the thermometer it was 18 degrees," Doc said.

Gus got up. "Here's an extra sleeping bag, Frank. Might as well crawl in and