

IT'S NOT ALWAYS A CAR
OR THE DRIVER THAT IS
AT FAULT, GUS FINDS IN
TURNING UP THIS...



One for the Book

By MARTIN BUNN

STAN HICKS, the Model Garage's current grease monkey, is Gus Wilson's one brag. Stan is not quite eighteen, and Gus gave him a job last June, the day after he graduated from high school. He has a born knack of making machines run right. Gus appreciates that natural aptitude, and even more, the fact that Stan is always trying to learn.

Shortly after taking Stan on, Gus discovered that the kid was keeping a notebook on the job, writing down everything he told him about car work and looking up things in it instead of asking the same questions over and over again. It made a big hit with Gus. "That boy's going to get somewhere before he's through," Gus keeps saying.

So it was with no misgivings that Gus agreed to go over to the Edensville war plant on a truck job that he figured would keep him all day. He left Stan in charge of the shop at the Model Garage with only one admonition: "Take care of the jobs you're sure you can handle; leave the others for me."

Stan felt pretty big. His first job was cleaning fouled spark plugs, and he took it in stride. The next one, installing a fan belt, was another pushover.

Some time later a horn honked outside, and Stan hurried to answer the summons. An ancient green sedan had its battered radiator poked almost against the shop door. Behind its wheel lounged a husky youngster in work pants and a plaid shirt, and beside him sat a pretty girl wearing slacks.

Stan ignored the driver and addressed the girl: "What's cookin', good lookin'?"

She giggled instead of giving an answer. "Hey, jerk," the youth with her said, "I want to talk to the man in charge, not to the grease monkey!"

Stan's face got red. "That's me, Mac," he said. "I'm the man in charge. What's the trouble with this crate of yours—besides old age?"

"Stop trying to be funny, you two," the girl said. "Call your boss, will you?" she told Stan. "There's something the matter with this jalopy, and my brother—"

"Oh," Stan interrupted, "this guy's your brother, is he?"

She giggled again. "You didn't think I'd picked him for my share-your-car club, did you?" she asked.

The youth behind the wheel grinned widely. "Nuts to all this shootin' the breeze," he said. "I got to get this car fixed quick. She went sour on us going to work last night, and she was worse coming home this morning, and we've got to drive her back to make the graveyard shift tonight. Sis and I both work in the war plant over in Edensville, and we ain't either of us missed an hour's work since we've been there. Call your boss out here, will you, bud?"

"The boss is away for the day, and I'm running the shop," Stan told him. "Maybe I can fix you up. If I can't, I'll tell you so, and you can take it somewhere else. That's fair enough."

The boy thought it over for several seconds. Then his sister nudged him. "That's all right, Joe," she advised.

"Well then, feller," Joe told Stan, "going to the plant last night from home—we live out in Pleasanton—every time we'd get up to thirty the motor would lose its power and

start to miss. I thought it was a spark plug, but I found out it wasn't any one cylinder that was missing—first one would cut out and then another one. When I kept down to twenty-five, she ran all right without any missing.

"Coming back this morning she acted the same way, only worse. About halfway over here the heat began to climb, and by the time we got to a service station the radiator was darned near dry. While I was filling her up, the feller there told me you had a whiz of a trouble shooter here at the Model Garage. You ain't that guy, are you?"

"Nope," Stan said. "That's the boss, Gus Wilson. He's tops. But he's taught me all his stuff, so I guess I ought to be able to fix you up." He pushed back the sliding door. "Drive her in," he directed professionally.

Joe drove into the shop, and he and his sister got out of the car. "Never mind about me," she said, perching on Gus's workbench and fishing a mirror, a lipstick, and a pack of cigarettes out of a handbag. "Get the car fixed. I want to get home and get my beauty sleep."

Stan started checking. There didn't seem to be anything wrong with the ignition system. Both the fuel line and carburetor were all right. He looked disappointed. The girl giggled.

"Can't you find anything?" Joe demanded.

"You can't always tell with a car standing in the shop," Stan said. "I'll give it a road test."

Joe snorted. "Go ahead," he said. "Enjoy yourself. I'm going over to the diner and have breakfast. Coming, Bee?"

"No," Bee said. "I'd rather eat when we get home."

Joe went out. Stan got into the car and looked at Bee. "Want to come?" he invited.

"Why not?" she said, and got in.

Stan backed the car out and drove up the highway, trying to keep his mind on the performance of the engine. It ran smoothly at twenty-five, but missed at thirty. After they had gone a mile, Bee spoke for the first time. "Take a look at the thermometer," she said. "It's over in the red."

"Yeah—I was watching it," Stan lied. "The radiator needs water. We'll stop at



that service station up ahead and get it."

Stan filled the radiator, and they drove on. He speeded up to thirty, and held that speed for a mile with the engine missing badly. Then he stopped, got out, and raised the hood. He saw that the cylinder heads were wet. But when he checked the radiator hose connection, he shook his head—the clamps were tight. Then he noticed something else—that water was oozing out of the hose from a dozen small holes.

He got back into the car jauntily.

"Well?" Bee asked.

"I've got it licked," Stan told her confidently. "Your radiator hose is rotten, and water leaks out. That doesn't make any difference—except that the radiator runs dry and the engine overheats—when you're driving real slow. But when you get up to thirty, the air from the fan gets strong enough to spray water over the engine, and that makes the plugs short. Get it?"

"No," Bee said. "But I think you're wonderful to have found the trouble after Joe couldn't."

"Oh, that's nothing—all in the day's work," Stan told her airily. "It all depends on the sort of training a man's had."

Gus and Stan were busy in the shop a few mornings later when Gus's partner, Joe Clark, who takes care of the office, came in. "There's a fellow named Chisholm on the phone," he announced. "He says his car stalled about halfway between Pleasanton and Edensville last night. He wants us to send the wrecker. He's coming on the bus. He says Stan knows him."

"Sure, I know him," Stan confirmed. "He's the fellow whose radiator hose I replaced—the one I told you about, Mr. Wilson."

When Stan maneuvered the green sedan into the Model Garage shop an hour later, he found Joe and Bee Chisholm there.

Gus raised the hood, looked at the engine, and nodded. "The cylinder head is cracked. Didn't you know your radiator was dry?"

"Why should I?" Joe Chisholm demanded. "Stan put in a new hose."

GUS SAYS:

With new tires scarce and growing scarcer, a car owner nowadays must do more than drive carefully, watch air pressure, and switch regularly from wheel to wheel. If he wants to keep rolling, he'd better get tires recapped before they're worn down to the fabric—it may be too late then!

"Well," Gus said, "the cylinder head will have to be replaced. It'll be an expensive job, and it will take several days to get a new head."

Joe looked at his sister. "What are we going to do for a car?" he said.

"We've got to get over to the plant every night," she added. "We've got a record."

"You can use my car," Stan offered. "It's a ramblin' wreck, but it'll get you there and back if you treat it nice."

"Say—thanks," Joe said.

Gus had his head under the raised hood. He straightened up. "Where do you keep this car of yours?" he asked.

"In our stable—Pop's got a farm," Joe told him.

"Any mice in there?" Gus inquired.

"Sure—it's lousy with 'em," Joe admitted.

"Why?"

"Just curiosity," Gus said. "By the way—there won't be any charge for the cylinder head."

"What?" yelled Joe. "Say—thanks!"

"Scram, you kids," Gus said. "I'm busy."

Stan walked to the shop door with the two Chisholms, and came back grinning. "Say, boss," he asked, "why aren't you going to charge for this job?"

"Because I forgot to tell you something important," Gus said. "It's one for the book—so get that notebook of yours and write it down. Ready? Here it is: Just finding trouble and fixing it isn't enough. Never let a job go out of the shop without finding out what caused the trouble—and without trying to do something to keep it from causing it again. . . Got that down?"

"Yes," Stan said. "But what's it all about?"

"Take a look at that radiator hose," Gus directed. "Full of little holes again, isn't it? Mice chewed those holes, same as they did in the old one—they like rubber hose for some reason. All the water had leaked out of the cooling system before your friend Joe drove his car out of the stable. That's why the engine heated up so badly that the head cracked. You should have found out that mice chewed holes in the old hose, and put wire screens around the new one to keep them from chewing it."

Stan looked so downhearted that Gus felt sorry for him. "It was my fault for not telling you," he said. "Forget it—or, better, remember it for next time. . . Let's see what you've put down in that book of yours."

Stan handed him the notebook. Gus looked at it, and his eyebrows went up. "Pleasanton 243-J," he read. "What's that—code?"

Stan got red. "Y-you're on the w-wrong p-page," he stuttered. "T-turn over!"