

Gus Gets Back an Old

By MARTIN BUNN

JOE CLARK came through the office door into the Model Garage shop, a ledger under his arm and an expression of dissatisfaction on his face.

"Look here," he said to Gus Wilson, opening the ledger at a page he had marked with a blotter and pointing an inky forefinger at its neat entries.

Joe had picked a poor time to bother his partner. Gus was very much dressed up and in very bad humor. He was dressed up because George Knowles's daughter was being married that day at a high-noon church wedding and he had to go since George is one of his best friends. He was in bad humor because the only thing he wouldn't rather do than go to a wedding is go to a funeral. So he slanted a glum eye at the ledger and grunted: "Well, what about it? I don't see anything to get excited about."

"You wouldn't!" Joe snapped. "Look at this—not a single item charged on the Millers' account for two months. If Stan . . ."

Gus had to grin in spite of himself. "Lay off poor Stan. He didn't have anything to do with it," he told Joe. "Mrs. Miller is peeved

at me. I tried to give her a few useful hints on how to drive a car, and she got sore. But don't worry, she'll be back."

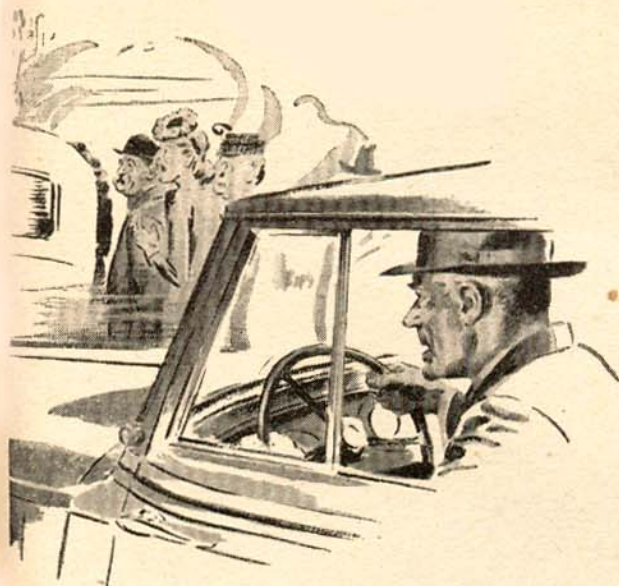
"Nice time to start a row," Joe grumbled, "when Henry's bought her that old Rolls Royce that's sure to need a lot of work to keep it running."

Gus grinned again. "That old Rolls is going to roll the Miller account right back into our laps," he commented. "You'd better get dressed or you'll be late for the wedding."

"Wedding!" snorted Joe. "I'm not going to any wedding. You're the social butterfly of this outfit. I've got work to do!"

That crack made Gus so mad that by the time he was able to think up a comeback Joe had disappeared into the office and slammed the door behind him. So Gus scowled at his reflection in the cracked mirror over the shop washbasin, gave his best blue necktie a final yank, snarled at Stan when the grinning grease monkey told him to be sure to kiss the bride, and climbed sulkily into his immaculate old convertible and drove away.

When he turned off the highway near the church, he saw he was involved in big doings. The quiet street had been transformed



Their heads snapped back sharply as the car let out a squeal and swished ahead.

Customer

into a one-way thoroughfare jammed from curb to curb with cars moving infrequently a foot at a time to the irascible honking of horns.

Gus glided into the center file of traffic and eased to a smooth stop before noticing that the car just ahead was an ancient Rolls Royce of the once famous but now almost forgotten Silver Ghost model. Mrs. Miller, resplendent in wedding-guest finery, was driving; Henry, her husband, was sitting beside her looking sheepish and apprehensive.

Cars on either side moved ahead, leaving the Rolls and Gus's own modest car. Mrs. Miller had used first-class timing in introducing her new-old classy bus—a couple of dozen friends, acquaintances, and bitter social rivals were clustered on the sidewalk and the church steps, surprise and envy on their faces. Responding to the sensation she was causing, Mrs. Miller was so busy dispensing smiles and fluttery waves of her hand that she didn't see Officer Jim McMahon beckoning her on. Finally the outraged cop put everything he had into a blast of his whistle and yelled: "Step on it, lady!"

The policeman's roar and the jab of her husband's elbow shocked Mrs. Miller into

a flurry of activity. She shifted into gear and let in the clutch—and then Gus saw her head and Henry's snap back sharply as the old car let out a squeal and swished suddenly ahead. All that saved Officer McMahon was that he used to be the star broad jumper on our high-school track team. The fender just scraped his coattails in his startled leap for life. He glared after the juggernaut and shook his head.

"Nuts to these high-society assignments," he complained. "They're too dangerous for a married man with children!"

Gus drove sedately to the parking space beyond the church. He was grinning.

"It won't be long now," he told himself as he left his car.

IT WASN'T long. About four o'clock that afternoon, his grouch gone because he was back in his work clothes and his shop, Gus was contentedly showing Stan how to machine a brake drum that had worn out of round when Mrs. Miller, still wearing her churchgoing best, came in with husband Henry in tow.

"Oh, Mr. Wilson," she gushed, "I saw you at the wedding—and wasn't it just too, too *beautiful!*—and it set me to thinking how *sad* it is when old friends allow even the *tiniest* little bit of misunderstanding to come between them! When I saw you in church today—and looking very handsome, too, wasn't he, Henry dear?—I said to myself, 'I'll let bygones be bygones, and I'll take the first step . . .'"

"That's fine of you, Mrs. Miller," Gus interrupted. "Let's forget the whole thing. After all, I'm paid to fix cars, not to tell people how they should drive 'em."

"You mustn't feel that way, you positively *mustn't!*" Mrs. Miller told him. "The advice you give is always so *valuable*. Oh, that reminds me—we've got a new car, Mr. Wilson. Well, not exactly a new one, but it's a Rolls Royce. Just think, Mr. Wilson, poor little suburban me with a *real Rolls Royce!* When I saw it down in the city I fell right in love with it—it looked so, so *aristocratic!*—and I made Henry buy it for me. It's a marvelous car, but you just can't *imagine* the disconcerting things it does!"

"Oh, yes, I can," Gus said, grinning. "I was right behind you this noon when you nearly ran that cop up a tree."

Mrs. Miller's face reddened to match her rouge. "Oh," she said weakly, "so you know. Well, it was very embarrassing because I promised Gloria Knowles—I should say Mrs.



Then he took out the piston rod and held it up. It was coated with gummy deposit.

Wilburn now, shouldn't I?—that she and Cecil could use it for their wedding trip."

Henry Miller opened his mouth for the first time. "I phoned the concern I bought it from," he said glumly, "and they told me a new clutch would cost \$600. Holy suffering cats—six hundred smackers for a clutch, and I only paid two hundred for the car!"

"Henry!" his wife reproved. "We promised the salesman we'd keep the price confidential because it was such a *wonderful* bargain."

"Bargain!" Henry grunted. "The clutch ain't all that's the matter with that bus, Gus. Its carburetor's shot, too. Swell bargain!"

"Maybe things aren't quite as bad as they seem," Gus told him encouragingly. "I had a lot to do with Rolls cars in the old days. There's never been a finer automobile than these old Silver Ghosts, but you have to be on to a few of their peculiarities to get anywhere with them, and although there are a lot of them still around, mighty few present-day mechanics know anything about them. Stan! Drive Mrs. Miller's car in."

Stan drove it in and got out shaking his head. "It looks like a million," he told Gus in a low voice, "but it acts like a wreck."

Gus turned a flash lamp on the clutch housing for a few seconds. "Thought so," he muttered; then he raised his voice: "Stan, get that large syringe and fill it with heavy oil." When Stan brought it, Gus inserted the syringe nozzle in the peephole in the clutch housing and squirted in the oil.

"Back in a minute," he told the Millers. He started the engine, threw in the clutch, backed out of the shop and down the driveway, and drove back without a jerk.

Henry Miller's mouth was gaping. "What—what did you do to it?" he asked.

"These old Silver Ghosts have leather-cone clutches that are as smooth as velvet—until the leather dries out," Gus explained. "Then they squeal and grab. If you remember to squirt about a pint of oil into your clutch once a month you won't have any trouble."

"I'll do it, all right," Henry agreed quickly.

"So will I," Stan put in, grinning widely. "Whenever I get hung up on a clutch job, I'll just squirt the clutch housing full."

"No, you won't," Gus told the grease monkey, gripping his arm hard. "Get that fool notion out of your head. Oil stops a leather-cone clutch from grabbing—but there are mighty few leather-cone clutches. Don't you go squirting oil on dry-disk clutches, or you'll make more trouble than you ever dreamed of!"

Stan was impressed by his seriousness. "O. K., boss, I'll remember," he promised.

"Now let's have a look at that carburetor." Gus raised the hood and examined it. "Yes, it's the old piston-plunger type that you can take apart and reassemble without a single tool. Watch what I do, Henry. The same thing should be done about every six weeks or as soon as your engine starts to miss and buck. You can do it as well as I can."

He unscrewed a part, removed a gasket, and then released the piston rod from the throttle linkage by withdrawing a pull pin, took out the piston rod, and held it up. It was covered with a gummy deposit.

"The piston controls the air flow to the mixing bowl," he told Henry, "and when it gets gummy up like this it makes a Rolls Royce act like a jalopy on its last trip to the junkyard. This is the way to fix it." He soaked a piece of clean rag in clean gasoline and with it wiped the gummy stuff off the rod. Then he reinserted the piston rod, pushed back the pull pin, and returned the gasket to its place.

"That's the job," he said.

FIVE minutes later Mrs. Miller drove out of the shop with her old car running as smoothly as the last off the assembly line.

"I've always said," her husband remarked, "that when it comes to making a bus run right, there's nobody like Gus Wilson."

"But *precisely!*" Mrs. Miller agreed.