

*Under the raised hood
of the old car,
Gus saw a powerful,
souped-up engine.*

That dark night, the Model Garageman worked as he had

Gus Beats the Gun

By Martin Bunn

A CHILLY wind-driven rain swirled in the headlight beams of Gus Wilson's truck as he was returning from a late service call in the country. Suddenly the husky proprietor of the Model Garage jerked erect in his seat and jammed on the brakes as a figure dashed onto the highway, signaling with a flashlight. Gus cut the wheel sharply and pulled up on the shoulder.

As he rolled down the window, the flashlight, which had been moving over the lettering on the truck, came to rest on his face. The blinding beam of light moved closer—until it blazed into Gus's eyes from an arm's length away.

"Move over," a quiet voice ordered.



never worked before . . . to put two killers back on the road.

The beam lowered slightly and in its light Gus saw a hand holding an automatic. It was pointed at his chest. For a moment, panic seized him.

"Sure," Gus said, easing from behind the wheel carefully. The man got into the driver's seat and the flash beam winked off.

"The gun is in my lap," he said softly as he shifted into gear. "I can reach it quick. So don't try any tricks."

They drove down the highway in silence. At last the man said, "We saw you pass by on your way out. We figured you'd be coming back pretty soon. We need a mechanic."

They were turning off the highway now,

into a forested area where folks came in summertime for picnics.

"Why the gun?" Gus asked. "Without it, I might not have suspected who you are."

"With the papers full of our pictures? And descriptions going out on radio and TV?" The man snorted. "That's a laugh."

Gus turned a thoughtful eye on him. "I guess you're right," he said. "Two toughies, wanted for murder. I'd say you were the tall one, six foot two, dark hair, dark suit, brown hat. You're Slade, aren't you?"

A soft chuckle answered him. "How right you are, friend."

Ahead of them, the headlights lit up a

small clearing. A blue coupe stood in the center, a man leaning against it. He came out now to the truck.

"Douse those lights, you fool!" he called sharply.

As the lights flicked out, a flashlight appeared in his hand. Its beam played over Gus's face. "Get down, grease monkey, and get to work," the man said harshly. "We didn't bring you out here to go on a picnic."

As Gus eased himself to the ground, the soft-voiced Slade said, "He knows who we are."

"That so?" the man said. He reached out a powerful hand and grasped the front of Gus's coveralls, twisting the cloth, squeezing Gus's chest. For a long moment he gazed thoughtfully into Gus's face.

The sound of wind and rain lashing the trees came to Gus now in the silence. He felt the awful remoteness of this lonely spot. What was to stop these men from killing him? He knew them—Warren Slade and Sidney Bascom, wanted by the police of three states for murder. The soft-spoken Slade, standing behind Gus now with a gun in his back, had shot down a bank teller during a holdup. His partner had seriously wounded a guard.

It was Gus who finally broke the silence. "Let go," he said. "Let's take a look at the car."

SLOWLY Bascom's grip relaxed on Gus's coveralls. "It's the lights," he said. "If they hadn't gone out, we'd have been through the net by now and far away. Your job is to fix the lights."

"Lights or no lights," Gus said grimly, "they'll pick you up. The police will have roadblocks set up."

"Roadblocks!" Behind Gus, Slade chuckled. "I can spot them a mile away at night. Out here in the sticks they don't have enough cops to block all the roads. If we run into any, we can turn around and go the other way. Our car will outrun any cop car. Fix those lights and we'll take care of everything. Get going."

Gus turned slowly, reached into the truck for his tool kit and walked toward the blue coupe. Slade moved carefully behind him while Bascom played his light on the car. It was an old model, a car not apt to attract police attention. Its appearance was deceptive, for under the raised hood of the old car Gus saw a powerful,

souped-up engine—four-barrel carburetors, special head, overdrive . . . the works. This job could probably outrun most police cars.

The thought bore heavily on Gus's mind as he reached inside the coupe to turn on the light switch. No lights came on. Gus played his pencil light over the dashboard, noting that the ammeter showed no discharge. Maybe, he thought, there was nothing wrong but a loose connection or a dirty circuit breaker, something he could fix in a moment. And then this pair would be on their way to rob and kill again.

SLADE'S light played over Gus's face. "Any tricks, mister," he said in his soft voice, "and you bleed."

"I'm no fool," Gus said heavily, squeezing in under the dash, peering up at the maze of wires and instruments. Presently he backed out, pawed through his kit, went in again and came out to turn on the light switch. Twin headlight beams sprang into the stormy woods. Bascom cursed as he leaped to turn the switch.

"The rope, Sid," Slade said. "Tie him up—tight." Bascom took a rope from the coupe, came forward in the dim glow of the parking lights, then halted.

Pointing, he growled, "Why no tail lights?" Ferocity came to his sharply hewn features as he moved on Gus with upraised fist. The brawny mechanic turned, shoulders hunched to meet the attack.

"Hold it!" Slade broke in. "How about it, grease monkey? Why no tail lights?"

"You had a blown fuse," Gus said quietly. "Probably a short in the tail-light wire—it will probably blow again."

"Find it and fix it then," Slade ordered. "Fast."

"Maybe I can find it fast and maybe not," Gus said warily. "The quickest way would be to forget the old wire and run a new hot lead to the tail lights."

Slade studied Gus's face for a long moment. "Okay," he said at last.

GUS got a roll of wire from his truck, worked under the dash a few moments, then crawled beneath the car. He emerged at the rear, dripping wet. He turned on the light switch again. This time the twin tail lights glowed.

"Good," Slade said with satisfaction.

"Now tie him up, Sid, and we'll roll."

"Tie a man up in this storm," Gus protested, "and he'll get pneumonia before he's found."

"Tie him," Slade repeated, agate eyes hard above the soft voice.

They tied him in the cab of the service truck and left him. Gus lay there, listening to the storm, wondering how long it would be before he was found. Stan Hicks, his helper in the Model Garage, would think that he had been delayed and might close shop and go home. Gus realized he might be here a long time. Somewhere out there on the highways, he knew, would be men like Officer Jerry Corcoran. They might spot the blue coupe, but what then? Gus tried to visualize what might happen.

ON A night like this, the police would not dare to park a car across the highway without flares to warn the innocent. The deadly pair would be warned, and would flee in the other direction. With escape routes carefully planned, a hideout waiting and their speed, they could make it.

An inner voice reproached Gus. If he had not repaired the coupe's lights, Slade and Bascom could not have stirred.

As time passed, the chill began to bite into his bones. He fought the rope that held him, but it had been too cleverly tied. It seemed to Gus that hours passed before he heard a car, saw its lights moving among the trees.

"Gus," Jerry Corcoran called. "Are you there?"

Gus yelled, "Here. Did you get them?"

"Are you hurt?" Corcoran asked as he worked on Gus's bonds. "No? Good! They told us that they'd tied you up in here. They saw our roadblock and tried to turn back. But something went wrong with their car. They couldn't get it into reverse."

"I know," Gus said. He began chafing his hands and stamping his feet to stimulate circulation. "They wanted me to fix their lights. But when I fixed them I cut the wire to their tail lights under the dash, so that I'd have an excuse to get under the car with wire in my hands to rewire the tail lights."

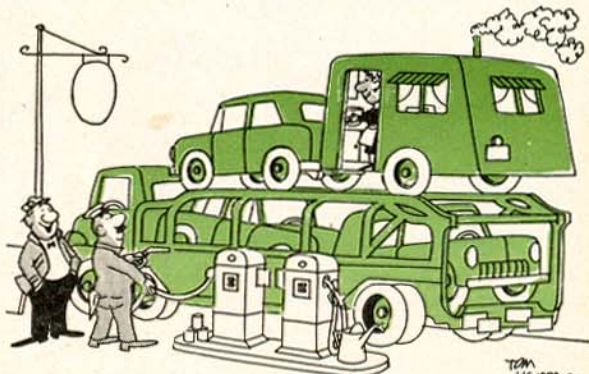
Corcoran was puzzled. "What's that

got to do with their not being able to back up?"

Gus chuckled. "I merely put the cut tail-light wire together again while the lights were turned off. Then, while I was crawling under the car, I strung a hot wire to their overdrive solenoid."

"Come again?" Corcoran queried.

"You see," Gus explained, "when an overdrive-equipped car reaches about 25 miles an hour speed, a governor activates a solenoid to put the drive into overdrive, and at the same time bring about a re-



"Then she said, 'But you promised to take me to Florida...'"

verse-gear lockout. I'd run into a few cases where, through a shorted governor, this solenoid was activated when the car was standing still, or traveling below overdrive speed. In these cases you couldn't get into reverse gear at any speed. My wiring eliminated the governor, put juice directly to the solenoid, but permitted the car to move forward in overdrive gears. I figured that sooner or later they'd have to get into reverse to dodge you fellows."

"WELL I'll be..." Jerry Corcoran began. Then, remembering Gus's ordeal, he said, "Jump in, Gus, I'm taking you in before you catch pneumonia."

"I'll drive my truck. I'm okay now," Gus said, getting in and starting the engine. "It's got a good heater, and—you know something, Jerry?—since you told me the news I'm not as cold as I was."

"That I can believe," Officer Corcoran said fervently.

The lights of both vehicles began creeping out of the trees toward the highway. Gus Wilson looked relieved—and a little pleased with himself.

END
Next Month: Gus tackles an antique.