

Gus Traps an Oil Hog

By MARTIN BUNN

GUS WILSON tore three coupons out of the A book handed to him by a worried-looking young fellow behind the wheel of an apparently well-kept sedan that had paused at the Model Garage gas pump.

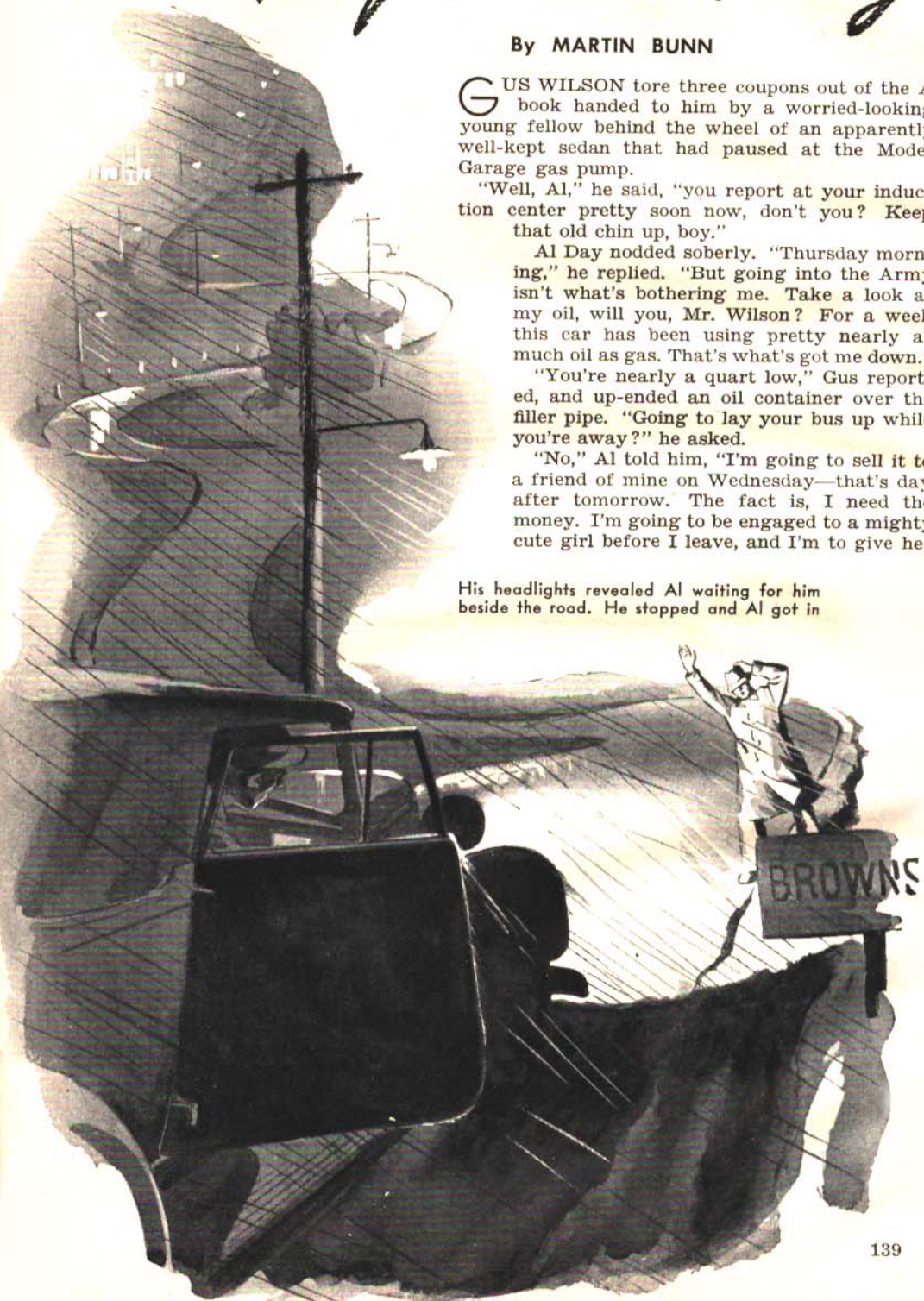
"Well, Al," he said, "you report at your induction center pretty soon now, don't you? Keep that old chin up, boy."

Al Day nodded soberly. "Thursday morning," he replied. "But going into the Army isn't what's bothering me. Take a look at my oil, will you, Mr. Wilson? For a week this car has been using pretty nearly as much oil as gas. That's what's got me down."

"You're nearly a quart low," Gus reported, and up-ended an oil container over the filler pipe. "Going to lay your bus up while you're away?" he asked.

"No," Al told him, "I'm going to sell it to a friend of mine on Wednesday—that's day after tomorrow. The fact is, I need the money. I'm going to be engaged to a mighty cute girl before I leave, and I'm to give her

His headlights revealed Al waiting for him beside the road. He stopped and Al got in



an engagement ring at a party at her house Wednesday night. It's her birthday."

"Congratulations," Gus said, and extended his hand.

"I've paid a deposit on the ring," Al went on, "and I figured to pay the balance with the money I'd get for this car. Now I'm behind the eight ball. The guy who is supposed to buy the car thinks it's in first-class condition, like it was a week ago. Why, I've even just had the tires recapped. It wouldn't be square of me not to tell him something's happened to make it eat up oil. And when I tell him, he'll call off the deal. What can I do, Mr. Wilson?"

"That's easy," Gus reassured him. "It can't be anything serious. Have you noticed any oil on your garage floor recently?"

"No, sir, not a drop," Al said. "I've looked every morning, and I've checked everything else I can think of, too. How about you looking it over, Mr. Wilson? But I'll have to have it back by evening. My girl lives in Brownsville, 10 miles out in the country, and I'm seeing her every night until I leave."

"I've promised a job for tonight," Gus told him, "and I have my hands full tomorrow, too. But suppose you bring your bus back here in the morning and let Stan look it over—Stan's just a grease monkey, but he's learning fast. I'll give him a hand if I can, and if he can't find the trouble, why you bring it back after your date tomorrow night, and I'll tackle it myself."

THE next day when Al drove in, Gus checked the oil again, and shook his head. "You've lost another quart somehow," he said. "How about your oil-pressure gauge?"

"That's how I first found out that something was haywire," Al explained. "One day the gauge didn't show any pressure at all, and a check showed there was hardly any oil left in the crankcase. Since then I've watched the gauge. It's been all right, but I've had to put in a quart of oil every day that I've driven more than a few blocks."

"How about the days you *didn't* drive more than a few blocks?" Gus demanded.

"Those days it didn't use any oil," Al said. He hesitated for a moment. "Here's something that sounds screwy, Mr. Wilson: the bus uses twice as much oil when I drive out to my girl's house than it does when I drive down to the city and back, but the distance is just about the same. The only difference is that Peggy—that's my girl—lives on the twistiest old road in the State, and the highway to the city is nearly straight. But that doesn't add up to anything, does it?"

Gus laughed. "Not likely," he said.

He turned to Al's car as the youth left. After making sure there were no telltale oil spots beneath the motor, Gus examined

the oil pump on the side of the engine and found it to be in good condition with all connections tight. Then he called Stan Hicks, the Model Garage's current grease monkey, told him what he had learned from Al, and instructed him to make a thorough check.

Stan went over the cap screws securing the lower part of the crankcase. He saw that they were a trifle loose and that there were indications that a little oil had seeped out around them.

"That's the stuff," he told himself. "First thing I look at turns out to be it."

He tightened the cap screws, but remembered Gus's orders and continued his examination. Then he made sure that the valve-cover plate fitted snugly, and that the timing-gear housing was tight. Starting up the engine, he ran it at varying speeds while he listened, but it purred smoothly without knocks that would have indicated a misaligned connecting rod, worn or loose bearings, or loose tappets from which oil might leak. He got out of the car and eyed the exhaust pipe, but no blue smoke, sure sign of excessive oil consumption, came from it. An inspection of the spark plugs showed that they weren't sooty. He put in a quart of oil and looked up Gus.

"It was the first thing I looked at, Mr. Wilson," Stan reported. "But just to make sure, I made a thorough check. The only place oil was leaking was at the cap screws holding the bottom part of the crankcase. They are all right now, and the rest of the oil system is as tight as a drum."

Gus lighted his pipe. "I don't see how a quart of oil a day could have dripped out at the cap screws," he said, "but I suppose that's as likely an explanation as any."

GUS was out when Al came for his car, and there was no word from the youth all day, but at 10 o'clock that evening, just as Gus was ready to go home, the office phone rang. Al was on the wire, and his voice echoed despondency.

"I'm in an awful spot, Mr. Wilson," he said. "I just checked my oil, and the crankcase is practically dry! I'm at my girl's house, and the Brownsville garage is shut for the night. I've got a date at ten tomorrow morning with the guy who's going to buy my car. What had I better do?"

"Keep your shirt on and don't try to drive without any oil," Gus told him. "I'll bring some oil out to you . . . Oh, that's all right, I never get tired. You'll be waiting for me at the edge of town? O. K."

Gus hung up, put a can of oil in his roadster, and started. It was raining hard. A couple of miles out of town he turned off the highway onto the country road—and remembered what Al had said about it being

the twistiest road in the State. But Gus took the turns at an even pace, and within 20 minutes his headlights revealed Al waiting for him beside the road. Gus stopped and Al jumped in.

"Say, Mr. Wilson," he cautioned, "if Peggy's father comes out, don't say anything about my having to sell the car to buy that ring. He's awfully old-fashioned . . . but here we are now."

Al's car was parked under a street light, its front wheels turned sharply into the curb to hold it on the steep grade. A pretty girl in a raincoat got out of the sedan and came toward them when Gus stopped his roadster behind it.

"This is Peggy Mildren, Mr. Wilson," Al said.

Peggy smiled mournfully. "Oh, Mr. Wilson," she pleaded, "please get Al's car fixed so he can sell it in the morning."

The import of her entreaty was not lost on Gus. "Don't worry," he said. "It will be sold, all right. That's a promise."

He got his can of oil and began to empty it into the sedan's crankcase. "Why the deuce," he asked himself, "did I say that? I don't know what's the matter with this bus, and the chances are I'll have to buy it myself to make good." Gus is soft-hearted, especially where youngsters are concerned.

When he had filled the crankcase, he turned to Al. "That'll get you to the garage," he said. "I'm going home to bed. Here's the shop key. Drive your car in and leave the key at the diner across the road. I'll get at your job the first thing in the morning."

He smiled at Peggy and got into his roadster. "It'll be all right," he said.

Al Day was waiting in front of the Model Garage when Gus arrived the next morning. In the shop they found Stan scowling at Al's car.

"What's happened to this jalopy since I fixed it?" Stan demanded. "Look how it's leaked all over the floor."

Gus stared at the pool of oil, noticing that the front wheels of the car were cut sharply to one side, just as Al had left them. Without a word, he hurried into his work clothes, told Stan to back the car away from the oil, and crawled under the machine.

"Cut the wheels—sharp," he directed after a few seconds. "That's O. K." He wriggled out from beneath, and instructed Stan to run the car up on the greasing rack.

"I'm losing my grip," Gus told Al. "You gave me a clue when you said your car lost more oil on a twisty road than on a straight one, but I was too dumb to get it. The new recaps on your front tires helped to fool me, too. The wheels are out of line, but you hadn't driven enough on the recaps to make excessive wear show up.

"But, anyway, I've found the trouble now, and it won't take more than half an hour to fix it. Somehow you bent the tie rod. The rod kept rubbing against the front of the oil pan until at last it rubbed a little hole in it, and then the oil dripped out."

Al looked doubtful. "Why didn't the oil drip out when the car was standing in my garage?" he asked.

"For the same reason that your car wasted more oil on a twisty road," Gus said. "When the wheels were straight, the rod was over the hole, so no oil could be lost. But as soon as the wheels were turned either way, the rod moved from the hole and the oil ran out . . . Well, I'll straighten the tie rod and see that the wheels run true again. Then I'll solder a thick piece of shim over the hole, and you can sell the car to your friend with a clear conscience. You can buy Peggy that ring, and you won't have anything to worry about except the war—and I know that doesn't bother you."

"Gee," said Al, "I knew you'd be able to fix it, Mr. Wilson. Thanks a million."

Gus shook his head. "You've lost another quart," he told Al

