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Gus Gets in Under the Wire

Tricky oil leaks, balky windshield wipers, and something he can't remember give Gus a hard time.

By Martin Bunn

THE morning was gray and gloomy. So was Gus Wilson's mood. He had awakened with an uneasy feeling that there was something important but unpleasant that he must attend to today. He tried to shake off the feeling but it returned with a nagging persistence.

By the time he reached the Model Garage, Gus had a first-class grouch stewing. He snapped a blunt reply to Stan Hick's cheerful greeting and he cut Greg Jones short when the grease monkey began to tell him about last night's basketball game.

Stan and Greg swapped surprised glances and shut up. They spoke to their usually good-natured boss only when it was absolutely necessary. Then they used an icy politeness that was disconcerting to Gus. Before ten o'clock, Stan and Greg had succeeded in making Gus feel like a heel.

As a result, he had worked up a good head of steam when his partner, Joe Clark, stepped out of the office a little while later. Joe was looking at a sheaf of papers he carried and didn't notice the blunt greeting Gus gave him.

"We'd better get this fixed up right now," Joe said, tapping the papers with his pen.

"I haven't time to fool around with a lot of your darn figures today," Gus growled. Even in his usual good humor, Gus detests paper work. "Can't you see I'm busy?" he went on. "Shop full of cars and they're all rush jobs—according to the owners."

"But . . ." Joe began.

"I don't care what it is," Gus cut in. "Whatever you've got, it'll have to wait until tomorrow—as far as I'm concerned, anyhow."

"Tomorrow'll be too late," his partner snapped, getting his hackles up.

Gus mumbled something that Joe couldn't make out and went on pulling the chain hoist.



"I don't care what it is," Gus cut in. "Whatever you've got, it'll have to wait until tomorrow."

Joe watched him for half a minute and then grinned sourly.

"All right, if that's the way you feel about it."

"That's the way I feel about it," Gus replied shortly.

Joe spun on his heel and marched back into the office, his back as stiff as a ramrod.

From that point on things got worse. The



day dragged along slowly and gloomily. One thing after another went wrong. By lunch time, Stan and Greg were snarling at each other. Gus knew it was his fault but somehow he couldn't bring himself to make the friendly overtures he knew would break the tension. Still burrowing in the back of his mind was the consciousness of something that had to be done today, but he couldn't bring it to the

surface. Every now and then he'd stop his work and try to concentrate on remembering it.

About four o'clock a horn blared outside. Greg pushed the door aside and an old sedan rolled into the shop. A fat man stepped out of it and began talking before he had both feet on the garage floor.

"After I been driving this bus for nearly ten

years, all of a sudden she turns into an oil hog," he complained. "I put in a quart and the next thing I know it's all gone. Where or how, I don't know, but I'm fed up with always buying oil."

"I'll take a look," Gus said. There's nothing that Gus enjoys more than a trouble hunt so he perked up a bit. "Ever notice any oil under your car after it's been parked—say overnight?" he asked.

"Not a drop," the owner told him. "I lose the oil on the road but I don't know how. Had a complete motor overhaul not long ago. The garage charged me plenty but they swore the car would be as good as new. It was after that she started eating oil."

How Many Ways Can You Lose Oil?

"Stan," Gus called, "come here and give me a hand, will you?"

"What's up, boss?" Stan asked as he came from the rear of the shop.

"Got another of those tricky oil leaks to find," Gus explained as he raised the hood. "Trot around back and see if the tailpipe is oily."

"What's that got to do with it?" the fat man asked.

"The blow-by past the piston rings and valve guides can push oil out of the crankcase," Gus told him, "and it will show up as an oil film in the end of the tailpipe."

"No oil back there," Stan reported.

"Well," Gus sighed, "we've got to do some careful looking."

Evidence suggested that the main-bearing seals were tight. So were the cap screws holding the oil pan. All visible gaskets seemed okay. Gus turned to the clutch housing.

"How could that have anything to do with it?" Stan asked. He'd almost forgotten the earlier unpleasantness.

"If the breather holes in the clutch housing are clogged with mud or grease," Gus answered, "that might cause the clutch assembly to suck oil. But this is okay."

"I didn't know there were so many ways of losing oil," the fat man said.

"There are dozens of ways," Gus said, "and some of them are very tough to find."

"How about that one we had last week?" Stan put in. "The breather pipe."

"Yeah," Gus said, "that was a real tough one. We had to work the paper dodge on it."

"What's this business about the breather pipe and the paper dodge?" the man wanted to know.

"Well," Gus began, "that car had been losing oil, too. I tried every test I knew to find the leak in the shop, but no soap. So we tied a big sheet of heavy wrapping paper under the engine and took the car on a road test. When you come back from a test like that and find oil spots on the paper, you usually can tell where the leak is."

"Yeah?" said the fat man.

"Sure," said Gus. "Just untie the paper and hold it over the engine in the same relative position. Then notice where the spots are and check the engine parts under them."

"It sure found that one," Stan said.

"What was the trouble?" the new customer asked.

"The engine's rear breather pipe," Gus replied. "You never could have found it by checking in the shop. Had to take the car out and run it. When the car was moving, the wind stream across the outlet of the rear breather pipe built up a vacuum in the pipe that caused the oil leakage. A few small holes drilled in the pipe stopped the vacuum from forming and ended the leak. It's a simple cure but a tough leak to locate."

"Maybe that's where my leak is," the owner said.

"Nope," said Gus. "There isn't any oil on the pipe. There would be if you were losing it there. I checked."

"Then let's get started with the paper test," he urged.

"Not so fast," said Gus. "I want to check the oil lines first. Start the engine, Stan." Gus bent over the engine again and began checking the oil lines and fittings. After a few minutes he straightened up.

"Find it?" the owner asked.

"Yep," Gus answered, "here's your oil thief." He pointed to the nut securing the input line to the oil filter. "I found a thin film of oil on this line and it led to the nut. When your engine was reassembled after that overhaul, the nut wasn't tightened enough. That caused a leak when the pressure was high and the oil was warm—say at fairly high-speed road driving. At low speeds or when the oil was cold, the fitting didn't leak. A little tightening will fix it up all right."

Rain Brings More Trouble

"So that's what's been wasting my oil," the fat man groaned. Then as Gus turned from tightening the nut, the man said: "This has been one tough day, hasn't it?"

Gus looked at the fat man closely and then,



without knowing why, he agreed with him.

"Well, I've got it done, anyhow," the man added as he climbed into his car.

"What—the day?" Gus asked.

"Are you kidding?" the man grinned, putting his car into gear.

As the shop door closed behind the old sedan, even the weather took a turn for the worse. The gray murk thickened into an icy rain driven by a howling March wind. Sheets of water lashed down on the highway and rattled against the shop windows.

Before long there was another horn squawking outside the shop door. Stan opened the door to let in a water-streaming coupe with its headlights burning. Joe Williams, the City Alarm's local reporter, jumped out. Gus noticed that Williams, too, looked like he'd had a rough day. What's the matter with everybody, Gus wondered.

"Never thought I'd make it here," Williams said. "What a rain!"

"What happened?" Gus asked.

"Couple of miles up the highway my windshield wipers almost stopped working. I couldn't see where I was going." The reporter glanced at the shop clock and let out a yelp. "For the love of Mike, fix those wipers quick, Gus. I've got to get to the post office to catch the 5:30 mail. It's the last one out."

"I'll do my best," Gus said, "but I never make promises about slow wipers until I find what makes 'em slow. Sometimes you can fix 'em quick, sometimes not."

"This just can't take a long time," the reporter groaned.

Gus Wakes at the Count

While Williams hopped around nervously, Gus checked the wiper hose for air leaks, but found none. He disconnected the wiper motor, examined it, and replaced it. Nothing seemed to be wrong with the motor, but when he switched on the wiper, the blades still swept slowly across the windshield.

"How about it?" Williams asked.

"It might be," Gus said, "that the manifold vacuum is low. Finding out why and fixing it might take a long time."

"I tell you," Williams almost screamed, "that I'll be sunk if I don't catch that 5:30 mail. There must be something you can do. Come on—pull a miracle out of your hat. You've done it before."

While the reporter raved, Gus disconnected the hose. He held it up to the light, looked through it, and laughed. The hose showed no outside bulge but the inch nearest the intake manifold was so swollen inside that the aperture was almost closed. Gus handed the hose to Williams and told him to take a look.

"The heat and manifold fumes broke down the rubber," Gus said. He cut off the swollen section and replaced the hose. The wipers swept back and forth vigorously.

"Open that door!" Williams yelled, jumping into his car. "I'll pay you on my way back. No time now. I've got to catch that mail. If your return isn't postmarked the fifteenth, it means a fine."

Gus watched the coupe shoot out of the shop.

"Return . . . fine . . . what's the matter with that guy?" he muttered. Then it dawned on him. "Holy cow!" he yelled. "Joe! Joe Clark!"

"What's biting you now?" his partner asked from the office door.

"I've forgotten to make out my income tax and it's got to go in today. You'll have to help me. I always get it all balled up. I've known all day there was something that I had to do, but I couldn't . . ."

"All you've got to do is sign your name," Joe laughed. "Don't you remember you gave me the dope right after the first of the year? It's made out and I tried to get you to sign it this morning, but you were so crusty that . . ."

"Never mind that now," Gus snapped. "Gimme the blank and a pen. I've got to get that 5:30 mail. You don't want to see me pay a fine, do you?"

END