Your first look at the 1957 Ford
WHEN Gus Wilson heard the rumor that Pete Blinstock was getting so old that he was entering his second childhood he got a chuckle out of it. The rumor originated with Pete’s rather excitable neighbors, Ezra Hendricks and Tom Hanratty. These three old codgers, who owned adjoining farms at the edge of town, were really the best of friends. But they took great delight in needling each other unmercifully.

“I tell you, Gus,” Ezra Hendricks confided, his gray beard fairly crackling with indignation, “Pete’s getting so old that he’s beginning to slip his cable—acts like a Plymouth Rock pullet with her first egg.”

“That’s right, Gus,” Tom Hanratty declared. “Only yesterday he scooped up my bull and plastered it against a rail fence.”

“Scooped up your bull!” Gus breathed. “Now wait a minute, boys...”

“It’s a fact,” Hanratty insisted. “I was leading my bull across the road when here he came, around the corner and down the hill on two wheels in his old rattletrap, foxtail waving in the breeze, scooped up my bull on his front bumper and slewed it into the fence.”

“Foxtail!” Gus ejaculated. “Do you mean to tell me that Pete Blinstock is running around with a foxtail on his car?”

“Right,” Ezra declared. “And, if you ask me, with scrambled brains.”

“CAN you picture Pete Blinstock,” Stan Hicks, Gus’s helper, said, mirthfully, after the two men had left the Model Garage, “dashing around with a foxtail flying from his radio antenna?”

“Yes,” Gus chuckled, “I can. Since Ezra and Tom are always making fun of Pete’s car, it would be just like him to wave that foxtail in their faces just to get back at them. And it would be just like Tom Hanratty to lead his bull slowly across the road just as Pete Blinstock came along, to get a rise out of him.”

Gus didn’t see any of the three for a few days. Then, one afternoon, they drove into the Model Garage in Pete Blinstock’s car, buzzing like a trio of angry hornets.

“This has gone far enough!” Ezra Hendricks yelled, shaking his finger under Pete Blinstock’s nose.

“We’ve got the evidence on him this time, Gus,” Tom Hanratty declared, holding up three very lively White Leghorn pullets with their legs tied together.

GUS could hardly hear himself think with the yelling and the cackling of the outraged chickens.

“If you weren’t too dang tight to feed your chickens, Ezra Hendricks,” Pete roared, “they wouldn’t be pecking around in the county road where they could get scooped up—”

“Easy now,” Gus stepped into the mix-up with a broad grin. “What’s this really about?”

“My chickens,” Ezra said indignantly, “were taking dust baths in the road, but
the Livestock

long unless Gus solved the mystery of Pete Blinstock's crazy driving.

Ezra's chickens were taking dust baths in the road... Pete just leaned on the horn and swished in amongst 'em.
did Pete slow down? Not on your life. He just leaned on the horn and swished in amongst 'em."

"So," Hanratty said grimly, "me and Ezra got together for a showdown."

"Showdown my eye!" Blinstock retorted. "If they'd keep their stock out of the county road, Gus, everything would be all right. If there was another way around, besides down that hill in front of their places, I'd take it. But there isn't. Now and then my car slips out of gear on the downgrade, and before I can clap on the brakes, away we go.

"That's just one of his slippery alibis. There's nothing wrong with his car that hasn't been wrong since it came over on the Mayflower. And it's only been the past few days that he's taken to cutting up dodos with it, like a teen-ager."

"Maybe," Gus commented, rolling out his tool bench, "but I think we'd better take a look anyway."

Gus's first thought was to check and see if the studs which held the transmission to the bell housing were tight. When he found that they were, he checked the drive-shaft universal joint for wear and looseness. Finding nothing seriously wrong here, he then checked the U bolts at the rear springs, thinking that looseness might have caused them to shear the centering pin on one spring or the other, causing it to move about and throw the drive shaft out of line.

GUS found his mind occupied with Pete's statement that the car only flew out of gear on the particular hill in front of the farms of his two neighbors.

"Let's go for a drive," Gus said. "We'll go along. Gus," Ezra announced firmly. "We want to be on hand when you get the goods on him."

With the trio in the car with him, Gus drove around town, putting the car down the Pine Street hill. Everything seemed to perform perfectly, except the brakes, which certainly did need attention. In fact, Gus was vaguely disturbed because things functioned too perfectly. It seemed to Gus that the last time he had driven Pete's car the clutch had been grabby, and that he had recommended that it be worked over. It occurred to Gus that the hill before Ezra's and Tom's places broke over a rocky ridge

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and that it made driving pretty rough.
Accordingly, he drove Pete's car out
to a hill that was similar and started
down it, putting the car against com-
pression. He was halfway down when it
suddenly jumped out of gear. The sud-
den release of the holding power of com-
pression caused the car to shoot away
like a rocket. Gus slammed on the brakes
and managed to come to a shrieking halt
that caused the chickens to cackle loudly
in protest.
"There," Pete crowed. "You see, it
does slip out of gear."
"Probably," Ezra said sourly, "pulled
out of line by that foxtail waving in the
breeze."
"I didn't put that thing up there," Pete
protested, "and I wouldn't have left it up
there if you fellows hadn't got your wind
up over it so much."
"You didn't put it up there?" Gus
quivered.
"No," Blintock said. "Tony Triesta
hung it there—you know Tony, Gus."

Gus did know Tony, a lad who lived
down the road from Pete a couple
of miles, who had a shine on a girl over
in Stanfield, and a great yen to become
a mechanic like Gus.
"How," Gus queried, "did Tony hap-
pen to do that?"
"Well," Pete said, sort of shamefaced
at being caught in a kindly deed, "you
see, Tony hasn't a car of his own and
he was in a lather to take that girl friend
of his out in Stanfield. So I let him use
my car over a weekend. He tied the foxtail
on the thing. He's a nice boy, Gus, and
proud. He didn't want to be holden to me for the use of the car, so he paid me back by putting in a new clutch plate."
"He put in a new clutch plate!" Gus
breathed. "I see."

Gus did see. Tony, in his zeal to be-
come a mechanic, had rigged up a
workshop in his father's machine shed,
where he tinkered on his friends' cars, and worked on the farm machinery.

"Maybe," Gus said thoughtfully, "we'd
better have a look at your transmission.
Let's go back to the garage.

WHEN Gus pulled the four studs that
held the transmission to the bell
housing, slid the transmission back and
shone a light on the two milled faces,
he found a small bit of gravel, crushed
by the pressure when the stud had been
tightened. He cleaned the milled faces
and bolted the transmission tight against
the bell housing.
"That shop of Tony's—" he asked Pete,
"it has a gravel floor, doesn't it?"
Pete nodded.
"Well," said Gus, "when Tony put in
your new clutch plate he picked up a bit
of gravel—just enough to tip the trans-
mission over out of line with the clutch.
That threw the car out of gear when go-
ing downhill against compression."
"But it's all fixed now, eh, Gus?" Pete
wanted to know.
"No," Gus said flatly, "it's not. It
won't jump out of gear any more, but
you have no business, Pete, running
around with such poor brakes, and you
know it."
"You might as well talk to a post,
Gus," Ezra Hendricks cackled. "Pete's
so tight that he wouldn't dig up the
money for a brake job unless you hog-
tied him and pried it out of him with a
crowbar."
"Is that so?" Pete shoved his nose
practically into Ezra's bushy whiskers.
"Well, I'll show you a thing or two.
Gus, put on the best brake lining you've
got. Ezra Hendricks, get your whiskers
out of my face or I'll...

Gus winked broadly at Stan Hicks as
he prepared to do the brake job. The
three old codgers watched him for a
few minutes, and then went down to the
drugstore together for an ice cream soda.
"Human nature," Stan Hicks remarked,
"is sure peculiar."
"Isn't it, though?" Gus chuckled as he
pulled a rear wheel.

NEXT MONTH: Gus joins the rescue squad.