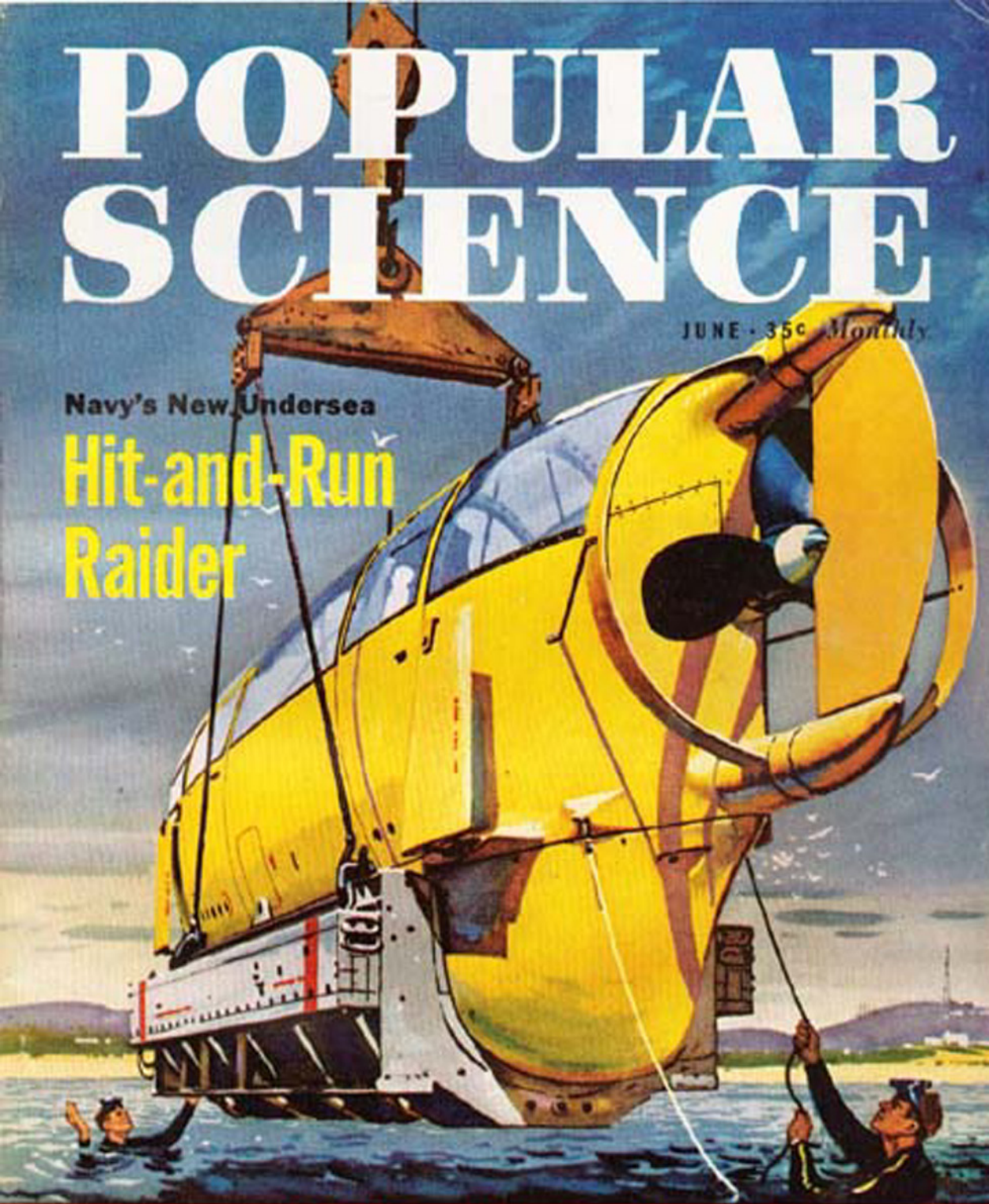


POPULAR SCIENCE

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Gus

"Want to stretch your legs?" Gus asked. "It'll take me half to three-quarters of an hour."

"That's okay," said the thin-faced man. "I'll stay in the car."



FRY GUYOT

Turns Private Eye



By Martin Bunn

"I TELL you the guy's smart," argued State Trooper Jerry Corcoran.

Gus Wilson smiled. "Maybe he isn't so smart. Could be just that the police are getting lazy, so all-fired dependent on scientific aids that you've forgotten old-fashioned detective work."

"Okay, I'll get out my deerstalker cap and magnifying glass," Jerry said, recognizing the Model Garage owner's good-natured ribbing.

"No, I mean it," Gus countered, running a cloth over the trooper's windshield. "If the two-way radio, FBI fingerprint file, or some other gadget doesn't dump the criminal right in your front yard, you're stumped, and blame it on the smartness of the 'one that got away.' Like when you go fishing."

Jerry gunned the engine of his patrol car. "Any time I arrest a thug in my front yard, I'll buy you that new glass fly rod down at Harley's Sporting Goods." He pulled away and headed north up the highway toward the state police barracks.

"What's it all about, Gus?" asked Stan Hicks, his young assistant, sticking his head out from under the grease rack, on which stood a pickup truck.

"The Tasty Grill was held up a little while ago and the bandit made a clean getaway. The state police are setting up roadblocks. Only trouble is the witnesses can't agree on the model, make, year or color of the car."

OUTSIDE, a car braked and a door slammed. "Think we got a customer, Gus," said Stan, putting down his grease gun. A moment later a thin-faced man walked into the garage.

"How about washing my car, Mac?" he asked, in a gravelly voice. "And a tuneup after."

"Right away, mister," said Gus. "You



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take care of the laundry, Stan, while I finish up this lube job."

Gus had finished the pickup and was putting his tools away when Stan came back from the wash rack. "Was that car dirty!" he said. "But you should see it now with the mud off. Some paint job!"

"Pretty flashy, eh?"

"I wanna tell you. By the way, do we have a 1949 Plymouth hood insignia? Fellow says some kids stole his."

"Might have," Gus said. "Look in the drawer of that old chest in the back room."

The man with the '49 Plymouth drove in, guided by hand motions. Gus whistled softly as his eyes ran over the car.

"Pretty snappy," he said.

"Yeah." The driver made no attempt to get out.

"Want to stretch your legs?" Gus asked.

"It'll take me half to three-quarters of an hour."

"That's okay. I'll stay in the car."

AS GUS went to work he was struck by the excellent condition of the engine. It was clean. He checked the spark plugs. Perfect. His eyes took in such features as a brand-new battery and a new fan belt. Carburetor and fuel line were both clean. Rolling over the engine analyzer he paused at the open car window. "Car's in pretty good shape," he remarked.

"Yeah," was the laconic reply. The man had his nose buried in a newspaper.

"Looks like you had a tuneup not long ago," Gus persisted.

"I like my car to run good."

Stan appeared. "I found an insignia, Gus, only one we had."

"Okay, put it on. There's something I want to check at the rear end."

Stan had the hood up again when his boss came back and continued with the tuneup. He took off the distributor head and examined the points. They were set perfectly and timed to the split second.

Gus pulled his car thoughtfully, then walked up to the man. "You need a new set of points, maybe?"

"If you say so, Mac. But get on with the job and don't ask so many questions."

That's odd, Gus mused. He must know he doesn't need new points, yet he's going to let me put them in. He hollered to Stan. "Get me a set of points for a '49 Plymouth."

When Gus had replaced the points he examined the old ones. Looking at the composition bushing, the part that pivots on the upright pin of the distributor plate, he noticed that it had been reamed, probably with extra-fine sandpaper.

Stan was looking over his shoulder. "But, Gus, you didn't . . ." The Model Garage owner shut him up with a kick on the ankle, lowered the hood, and stepped to the window of the car.

"I guess that's it," he said. "I'll make out the bill."

"Never mind, Mac." He handed Gus a twenty, backed off the rack, drove out of the garage, and with a screech of rubber headed north up the highway.

GUS dashed to the office telephone, Stan following him. "Give me the state police barracks." Drumming nervously on the desk he waited for the connection, then asked for Jerry Corcoran.

"Jerry, I want that new fishing rod." There was a sputtering at the other end.

"Cut the comedy," Jerry exploded. "That guy who held up the Tasty Grill is still loose and we're busy."

"Take it easy, Constable," Gus continued. "Can you see the highway from where you're sitting?"

"Yes, but . . ."
"Is a '49 Plymouth with a fresh paint job sputtering and jerking up the road?"

"Why—er—yes! How did you know?"
"Skip it. Now, if my guess is right, he'll be coming to a dead stop . . ."

"He just did!" exclaimed Corcoran. ". . . and he'll get out and raise the hood . . ."

"He is. He's doing it! Is this a gag, Gus?"

"No gag, Jerry. I'll give you the answer if you'll admit one thing."

"What's that?"
"Is he in your front yard?"

"Sure, sure, but . . ."

"Okay. Now don't ask any questions. I'm serious. Go out there and arrest him. Unless I miss my guess he's the guy who held up the Tasty Grill."

Gus sat down in a chair and mopped his forehead. "Whew!" he exclaimed, turning to Stan. "Remind me never to play detective again. It's too hard on the blood pressure."

"What tipped you off, Gus?"
"Elementary, my dear Stanley. I fig-



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ured things weren't adding up right. Why would a fellow with a new shiny finish let it get all covered with mud?"

"Driving in this rainy weather we've had," Stan suggested. "Trucks and passing cars can throw a lot of mud."

"Then why wouldn't he have mud and caked dust on the underside of the car? There wasn't any. It was clean."

"Oh."

"To hide, that's why. He was smart, as Jerry said. Witnesses wouldn't be able to describe the color of a car covered with mud—on purpose. A car wash was as good as having it repainted. And then

causes the bushing to bind and the points can't move. And I helped it by easing off spring tension."

"I get it," Stan said. "But suppose the car hadn't conked out right in front of the barracks or he'd turned off on a side road?"

Gus filled his pipe, lighted it, and took a long draw. Expelling a lungful of smoke, he said, "I thought of that, and I admit I hedged my bet a little."

"You pulled another trick?"

Gus nodded. "While you were putting the shield on in front I stuffed his exhaust pipe with waste. After a couple of

miles the exhaust gases would have built up back pressure and overheated the engine."

Stan grinned. "He didn't have a chance."

"Not much," Gus agreed. "Even if the points gimmick hadn't worked, he wouldn't have gotten far. And with the police having a description of both the man and the car, they'd have nabbed him."

A police siren broke the evening stillness as Gus was



"Hey—watch where you're goin' when you back up!"

there was the shield, another bit of identification he removed."

"But he might have gotten clean away," Stan protested.

GUS chuckled. "Not with the points I installed. The ones I took out had the composition bushing reamed. It was too snug. The ones I put in were snug, too, but I didn't ream."

"I noticed that."

"That's why I shut you up, Stan. Remember the trouble we had with Judge Trumbull's '49 Plymouth? We put in new points, tuned the motor. It ran fine for a few minutes, then stalled. That's when I learned about reaming. I figured our friend would head north, back to the scene of the crime where he wasn't expected—and get just about to the police barracks. After just a little use, friction

washing up, ready to call it a day. Jerry Corcoran pulled up in front of the Model Garage and climbed out of the patrol car carrying a glass fly rod.

"You sure earned this," he said, handing Gus the fishing gear.

"Got your man, eh?"

"Thanks to you. He had the money on him and we got positive identification from the Tasty Grill owner and three customers."

Gus began to assemble the rod.

"I don't know how you did it," the trooper went on, "but you and I are due for a good long talk—and I want straight answers."

"The only answer," said Gus balancing the fly rod, "is good, old-fashioned detective work. So long, Constable. I've other fish to catch."

Next Month: Gus meets a medicine man.