

Illustrated by Arthur Jones.

A RACE

AGAINST TIME!

By Captain Malcolm Arnold



The Graphic Story of a Once-Famous Racing-Car's Last and Most Thrilling Speed-Burst

THE FIRST CHAPTER

The Old 'Bus

"DON'T let it happen again," Roy Maitland said. "I haven't got petrol and oil to waste on that old relict, you understand?"

Bill Stone shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, twiddling his cap between his capable hands.

"Yes, sir, I understand," he said. "But I—I didn't use a lot of petrol, sir, and—and it ain't fair to call 'Grey Goose' a relict. She just ticked over like a watch, sir."

"Ticked over be hanged!" said Roy. "I heard her from the bedroom."

He nodded his head towards the chauffeur.

"In any case, Bill, you've got quite enough to do here without wasting your energies on a has-been," he went on. "You're supposed to have finished work at six o'clock, but it must have been after ten o'clock when you were in the garage."

Bill drew a deep breath.

"I was only just playing about, Mr. Roy," he returned.

He moved towards the door, halting and glancing back at his master.

"What time do you want the car out this morning, sir? I suppose you're going up to the golf links, as usual?"

There was a certain suggestion of contempt in Bill's voice, which made Roy smile quietly to himself.

"Yes, I'll be going to the links, Bill," he returned. "I'll have the two-seater about eleven o'clock."

Bill went off, closing the study door behind him, and Roy Maitland, leaning back in the chair, smiled; then, crossing to the window, he was just in time to see Bill, with shoulders hunched up, go over towards the garage.

"Silly beggar!" Roy said to himself. "I suppose the temptation was too great. I shall have to get rid of the 'Grey Goose.'"

He took a turn up and down the study, his hands clasped behind his back, his pipe between his lips.

For four long years the garage behind that quiet little house, perched on the hills outside Aylesbury, had stabled that huge 100 h.p. Marden.

Under its waterproof covering it had stood in the corner of the big garage, a silent monument to the past—and a proof of a promise kept.

Roy Maitland had driven Grey Goose to victory in a great Tourist Trophy race, but it had been a victory dearly bought, for that particular race had seen a terrible accident, in which three famous drivers had met their death at a ghastly hair-pin bend, and the Grey Goose, eating the miles, had only just escaped sharing in the crash by the sheer skill of its cool, intrepid driver.

When the race was over, and the trophy was handed to Roy Maitland, he voiced his vow there and then. Never again would he enter into another competition in which brave men lost their lives for the sake of that demon King Speed.

Bill had been his mechanic then, just as he was now, and, when they returned to England, Grey Goose had been driven into the big garage, to find permanent quarters there.

It was pure sentiment that forbade Roy Maitland to sell the powerful monster, but from that day he had never even raised the sheet that concealed the long racing car.

Roy had taken over a large agricultural estate, and set his energies to work on farming, with the occasional relaxation of a round on the links.

To Bill Stone, a motorist first and always, the unexciting task of pursuing a perfectly harmless small white ball from green to green was the acme of contemptible waste of time and energy. Roy knew Bill's prejudices concerning golf, and had smiled at them often enough.

The little scene which had taken place this morning in the study was the outcome of certain observations which Roy had made. Within the past three or four months, he had noted that Bill had been spending long hours

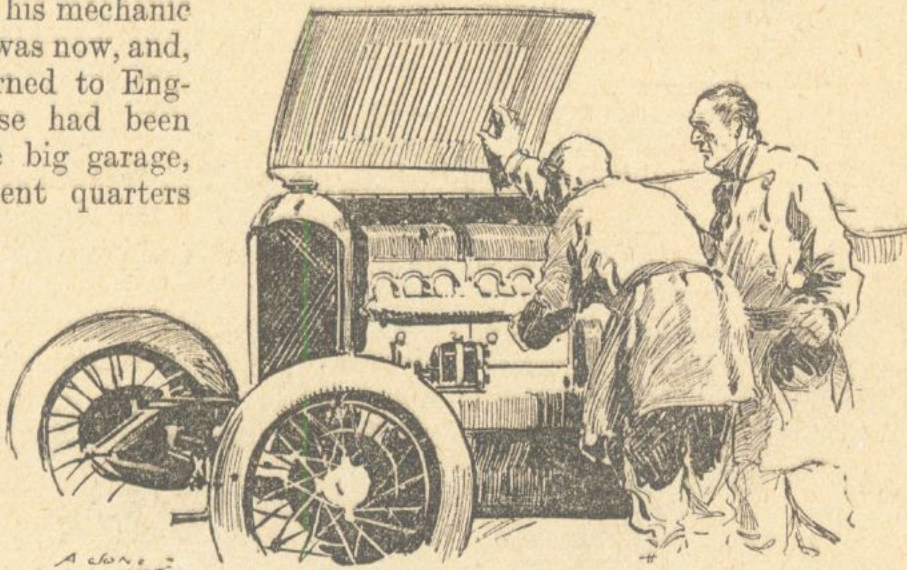
in the garage, with the doors closed and the electric light ablaze, but it was not until there had come to Roy's ears that deep-throated, familiar roar, that he realised what Bill was up to.

There was no other motor engine in the world that gave that curious vibrating note, the sound of mighty pistons, the deep, strong beat of power subdued.

The tall, athletic man had thrilled to it, as he had heard it through his bedroom window, and there had come into his heart a great longing—a longing that had to be checked and stifled if possible.

Grey Goose had called him, challenged him, and awakened an answering thrill.

"A promise is a promise, and a vow a vow," Roy Maitland told himself. "I'll race no more. But I'm not going to have Bill tempting me. Best thing I can do is to sell the old 'bus, and put an end to it."



Roy made a hasty examination of the engine. Neither rust nor dust was there. Grey Goose might have just come out of the machine shop! (See page 200.)

THE SECOND CHAPTER

The Only Chance

At eleven o'clock promptly Bill came round to the front of the house with the smart two-seater, and Roy appeared a moment later with his golf bag.

The run to the links was covered in about half an hour, and, as Roy made his way into the club-house, one of the servants came towards him.

"Someone's been ringing for you, Mr. Maitland," he said. "They got on to your house first, and telephoned here afterwards. They want you to ring them up at once."

The telephone number was in Mayfair, and

Roy recognised it; it was that of his uncle, Sir Stephen Vane.

Roy entered the telephone-box, called the number, and, after a wait of five or six minutes, he heard his uncle's voice.

"That you, Roy?"

"Yes, Uncle Stephen."

"Thank goodness I've got you. Listen to me, Roy. I'm in a terrible hole, and I want you to try and help me."

"What's the matter, Uncle Stephen?"

"It's—it's Cynthia."

Roy caught his breath sharply at the name. Cynthia Vane, Sir Stephen's only daughter, was to Roy Maitland the acme of womanly perfection. Two or three months before Roy had spent a few weeks with his uncle in London, and had made that most important discovery.

Cynthia had just returned from the Continent, and Roy had danced attendance on her, every day finding him deeper and deeper in the toils. He had never been able to discover what Cynthia's opinions of him were, and she had gone off with a friend to a seaside resort before Roy could test the matter.

He had made up his mind, however, that on his next visit to London he would take the plunge.

"Yes, what has happened to Cynthia?"

He heard his uncle groan.

"I've just seen her friend, May Harris," the old gentleman declared. "Cynthia is going off to America to-day, and here I am laid up with a rotten attack of gout, and can't move hand or foot."

"Off to America? But why?"

"I got it all out of May Harris," his uncle explained. "It appears that while they were on the Riviera they met a certain Captain Spartzi—some confounded Continental adventurer, I suppose; but he managed to turn that foolish girl's head, and you know how stubborn she is. The worst of it is that she's her own mistress now, and can do what she likes."

"In any case she's going to Liverpool, and has booked a passage on board the Cardenia for New York. I haven't a soul that I can send who would have any influence on Cynthia, Roy, but I know that she thinks a great deal of you."

Sir Stephen cleared his throat.

"I want to stop her, Roy," he said. "This fellow, Ivor Spartzi——"

"Ivor Spartzi?"

A sudden memory flashed into Roy's mind.

"I've heard that name before," he went on, "and I think I've met the rascal. If it's the same man, then, by Jove, he's an absolute rotter; a mere scheming adventurer living by his wits."

"That's just the sort of brute he would be," his uncle returned shortly. "The truth is that Cynthia and I haven't been getting on too well lately, Roy. I dare say I'm as much to blame as she is, but in any case I can't allow her to ruin her life, and I want you to help me."

"What can I do, sir?" Roy asked helplessly. "It's too late for me to come to town now."

"Of course it is. The train leaves in under an hour, and it's the boat express. It'll go straight through to Liverpool. I've thought of wiring and getting her stopped—arrested—anything—but you know what that means, where Cynthia is concerned! She would never forgive me, and would probably take the first opportunity to marry that fellow out of spite!"

The old fellow's voice took on a thinner note.

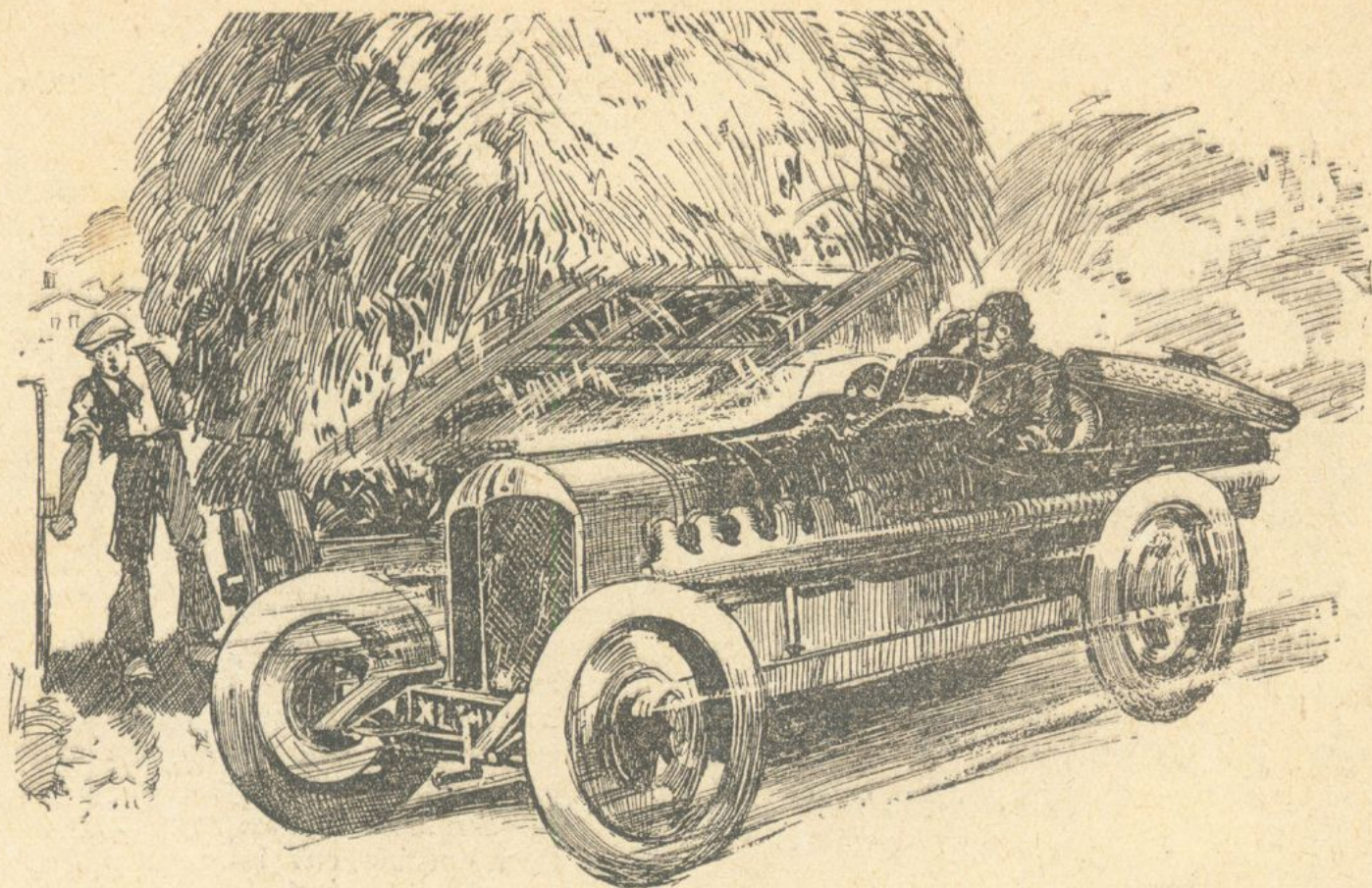
"And here I am, helpless—helpless! That's why I've rung you up, Roy. By hook or by crook you must get to Liverpool and reason it out with that foolish girl. How you are going to manage it, I don't know. If you were in London, you might get to Croydon and hire a 'plane, but you're stuck away there in Aylesbury——"

"Look here, Uncle Stephen, have I your consent to marry Cynthia if I get there in time?"

He heard the old fellow gasp; then a chuckle came over the wire.

"Marry her? Why, hang it, that's what I've been hoping you would do for this last three months, you young fool. And I think Cynthia was of the same mind. But you hung about, hemming and hawing. You never won your races that way, Roy, and you can't expect a girl to wait all her life!"

Roy slammed the receiver on the 'phone



A deft swing to the right and left, a wisp of hay brushing Bill's face as he ducked—and Grey Goose swung into the centre of the road again. (See page 201.)

and turned away, a grim smile on his tanned face.

So that was the position, was it?

His Uncle Stephen and—and Cynthia regarded him as a laggard in love.

He strode across the lounge and passed out of the club-house. Bill was backing the two-seater into line with the other cars when his master's voice hailed him.

"Here, Bill, quick! We're going home!"

Never were gears changed quicker, and there was a grin of anticipation on Bill's face as he swung the car to a halt in front of his master.

"No golf, Mr. Roy?"

"No, Bill," Roy returned, as he climbed into the seat. "Push along as quick as you can, Bill. We—we've got a job on!"

That run to the quiet little farm was carried out in quick time, and, instead of halting in front of the house, Roy directed Bill to run the two-seater into the garage; then, leaping from the vehicle, Roy pointed to the dark corner where the tarpaulin cover lay in limp folds over the Grey Goose.

"We're going to Liverpool, Bill," he said, "and Grey Goose is going to take us there! How long will you be getting her ready?"

Bill started up with a shout of delight.

"Taking out—Grey Goose, sir?" the mechanic broke out. "How long will I be—not ten minutes, Mister Roy! Why, I've had her greased and oiled and tuned up this last month, sir. I couldn't let the old beauty lie there and rust, blow me if I could! Give me—give me ten minutes!"

"Right!"

Roy turned and hurried across to the farm, going up to his bedroom, where he opened a long-locked trunk, and out of it he drew his old racing kit—overalls, close-fitting helmet-cap, goggles.

They had lain in that trunk from the moment he had discarded them after the great, tragic race, and something stirred in his heart as he began to make a swift change.

Mrs. Penbury, Roy's housekeeper, flung up her arms in sheer dismay when she saw the over-all-clad figure come running down the stairs.

"Oh, Mr. Roy, sir, what are you going to do? What are you going to do?" she demanded.

"I want some sandwiches, and a couple of thermos flasks, quick, Mrs. Penbury!" he said. "Bill and I are going out—for a spin."

Mrs. Penbury was about to speak again, when the loud roar of the 200 h.p. engine sounded, echoing round the farm, and the woman's kindly face blanched.

"You're not taking out that great, murderous brute, sir," she said.

Roy passed her, hurrying down the hall and out into the gravel space in front of the house.

Round the corner came the Grey Goose, sleek, powerful, grim, and Roy's heart fairly leaped as he saw the long, familiar bonnet, the huge tyres, and the low, racing frame.

Bill was at the steering-wheel, Bill in his greasy overalls, his racing cap drawn well down over his eyes, and a grin on his face that nothing could move.

"I've filled her up with petrol, Mr. Roy," he declared. "Listen to her. Ain't she a beauty?"

He brought the car to a halt and allowed the engine to race for a moment, the deep, reverberating roar increasing until it became a perfect tornado of sound.

The feather of blue smoke pulsing away from the exhaust indicated that Bill had spoken the truth when he said that Grey Goose needed nothing in the way of lubrication, and the body, clean and speckless, hinted of many quiet hours of toil on the part of the mechanic, toil that he need not have accomplished.

Roy made a hasty examination of the powerful racing engine. Neither rust nor dust was there. Grey Goose might have come out of the machine-shop, and Roy drew a deep breath of contentment.

Mrs. Penbury came hurrying to the car, with a small wicker basket crammed with sandwiches and a couple of thermos flasks.

"Where are you going, sir? Where are you going?" the old dame demanded, as Roy swung into position behind the huge steering-wheel.

He leaned forward and laughed.

"We're going to Liverpool," he returned, "and I—I may bring someone back with me, Mrs. Penbury."

THE THIRD CHAPTER

A Duel of Speed!

A GLANCE at his wrist-watch told Roy that he had a quarter of an hour's start on the boat express. There were also the miles that divided Aylesbury from London as an additional advantage, but he had to cross half England through some of the most congested parts, and he knew that the slightest hitch, the least mishap, would be fatal.

From Aylesbury the Grey Goose was heading for Buckingham, covering the seventeen miles through Winslow just under the half-hour, then to Rugby, and on to Stafford.

Through villages and towns the great Grey Goose drummed its way, checked here and there when it reached the more congested parts, then opening out later when long, empty stretches of undulating roadway ribboned away beneath its flying wheels.

Roy had deliberately chosen roads that would keep him in touch with the railway, and here and there he struck bad patches of surface that made Bill groan for the safety of the tyres.

One long hill between Rugby and Stafford was being negotiated when, half-way down, there came lumbering out through the gateway of a field a huge hay-cart.

It was being backed out, the driver standing at the head of his horse. Slowly the heavy waggon emerged, and Bill gave one warning shout to the intent, silent figure at the wheel.

"Look out, Mr. Roy!" he called.

The Grey Goose was skimming downhill like a thing of life, and Bill caught at the side of the car to steady himself.

He watched his master out of the corner of his eye, for here was one of those grim tests that tried the nerve of the skilled.

To brake and endeavour to check speed would have been the act of the unseasoned. By a miracle a spill might have been avoided, but it would mean many minutes delay. Bill



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A DUEL OF SPEED
Racing Car Versus Express Train I

saw that well-shaped foot thrust down on the throttle, and Grey Goose leaped forward in response!

A deft swing to the right and left, a wisp of hay brushing Bill's face as he ducked, a momentary vision of that huge wagon looming like a cliff above them, and Grey Goose swung into the centre of the road again, and from the field there came the startled bawl of the horrified carter.

At the foot of the hill Roy glanced sideways at Bill. The mechanic was lying back in his seat breathing heavily, but the broad, ugly face widened into a grin and Bill nodded.

He was quite satisfied now. His master had not lost that old, quick, assured touch, that swift-ness of decision which rises almost to genius.

A long, toilsome climb followed, a grinding piece of collar work that steadied the flying monster and sent breaths of hot, petrol-tainted air into the driver's lungs.

One hundred h.p. chained under a bonnet, straining to its task, generates immense heat. Little puffs of steam wafted away from the radiator as they reached the top. The Grey Goose was boiling, and no wonder. It was eating up the miles like the monster it was, and Bill busied himself with the oil-pump for a few seconds.

Another long sweep down-hill served to cool the engine a trifle, for Roy shut down the throttle and opened the air-inlet wide, allowing the Grey Goose to run down on its own momentum.

On the level below they gathered up speed again, then, on rounding a bend there came another test.

Ahead of them, barely two hundred yards off, was a steam-roller drawn up close to the hedge, and in front of it across the road was a huge boom suspended on two heavy trestles.

A knot of workmen were seated under the hedge, eating their lunch. They had not started to break up the road, but had erected that barrier as a proof of their intention.

Bill heard the shout that went up from the road-makers, and one thickset man leapt forward, waving a useless red flag.

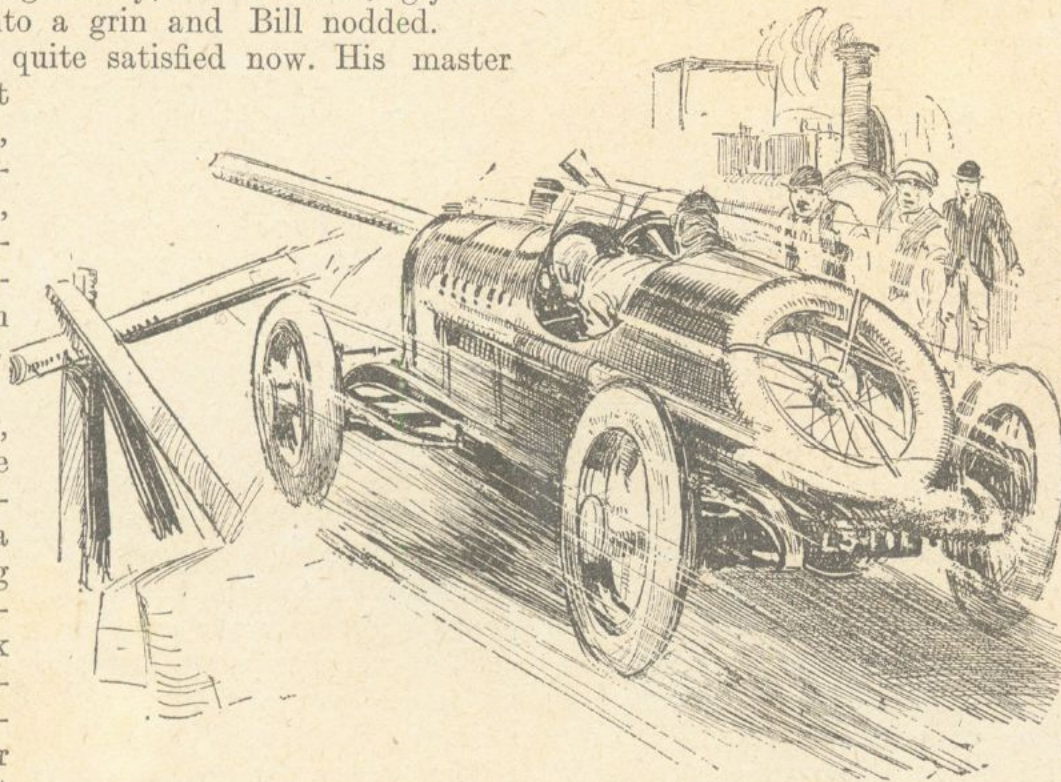
A car moving at sixty miles an hour doesn't take long to cover a hundred yards! Before the foreman of the gang had stum-

bled out of the ditch, Grey Goose was charging headlong for the barrier, and here again Roy gave proofs of his keen driver instinct.

He smashed into that thin trunk amidships, the stout radiator taking the shock full on its bull nose.

There was a rending crash as the boom shot away from its supports. It leaped into the air, quivering at the impact, and the great car tore on like a flash, passing the steam roller and the group of affrighted workmen.

The boom crashed to earth again, grazing



There was a rending crash as the boom shot away from its supports and leaped into the air, while the great car tore on like a flash! (See this page.)

the rear wheels, and, in a smother of dust, Grey Goose continued on its way.

"Hope that crash won't start our radiator leaking!" muttered Bill, when he had recovered his breath. "I wonder what we're going to come against next?"

Driver and mechanic and pulsing monster were covered now with a coating of grey dust. Bill's lips were grimed and cracked, and the lean, handsome face of the man at the wheel was drawn and tense as he peered through his goggles along the road.

They swung into a stretch that ran beside the railway, and presently Bill heard the rumble of distant wheels on the embankment. Glancing back over his shoulder, the mechanic caught sight of a pillar of white smoke in the distance.

It came nearer and nearer, and at last Bill could see the huge engine, with its lines of passenger coaches. Closer and closer the great express drew, and Bill recognised it finally.

Leaning forward, he touched Roy on the arm.

"It—it's the express, sir. She's overhauling us at last!"

The long, grim race against time had been well fought, but that mighty engine, hurtling over the smooth, glimmering rails, had overhauled its challenger.

Nearer and nearer the great passenger train drew, until at last it was running level with the speeding monster on the road. Foot by foot, yard by yard, the powerful railway engine drew ahead, and Bill saw the faces of the passengers peering out from the compartments at the racing car below.

Grey Goose had been climbing a slight rise, and now it reached a level, and Roy saw a long stretch of roadway ahead. Grey Goose began to put on speed then, and Bill saw the speed indicator mount step by step steadily.

Fifty — fifty-two — fifty-five — fifty-eight — sixty — sixty-two!

The great express train began to drop to the rear. Coach after coach was caught up and passed, the trail of dust rising behind Grey Goose growing into a column, a thick, dense cloud.

On and on, with the wind shrieking in

their ears, and the roar of the exhaust deafening them to all other sounds. On and on, down the lonely road, flashed the racer, revelling in another lease of life.

It drew level with the engine, and, leaning out of the cab, the fireman waved a grimy paw to the grey car below. Bill answered that gesture, then the engine slipped out of his vision, and the Grey Goose went on—alone!

On the left of the road the ground rose sharply, forming a high bank. Ahead, there suddenly appeared a bend, carrying the road away from the railway line—a swift, treacherous turn.

"Look out, sir! Look out!"

Bill, with his eyes on the speedometer, saw that the needle had not dropped, and he glanced at the set, grim face of the driver.

Would Roy dare to take that bend at the terrific pace he was moving at?

Bill lay back, swaying out to the left, then round came the front wheels in a lock, and the car skidded from one side of the road to the other as it took the bend.

The shock and surge almost lifted Bill out of his seat.

For a moment Grey Goose seemed to stand still, as its wheels tore up the soft road surface. That awful skid had carried it almost on to the ditch on the right, and one wheel hung dangerously over the soft ground, then the cool, powerful wrists of Roy swung the steering-wheel round again, and Grey Goose recovered itself, leaping away from danger.

The passengers on the express train had seen that amazing display of nerve, and from compartment after compartment there arose a cheer, involuntary acknowledgment of skill and courage that a Britisher will always give vent to.

Three minutes later the railway track and the express had vanished, and Grey Goose was swarming down another stretch of lonely road that ran through tall masses of trees.

"Sandwich, Bill?"

The cool voice brought Bill out of his dreams and he reached for the little wicker basket, opening it. They had been on the road for hours, and neither had broken their fast since the early morning.

Bill fed his master, for those strong, sure

hands could not move from the steering-wheel, and the pile of sandwiches vanished swiftly, as did the contents of the thermos flasks.

They slammed through Crewe, avoiding the main streets, and came out again near to the railway line. And so the last stage of the grim race began.

There were many sections of that road when the Grey Goose touched seventy, and Bill prayed for the safety of the overtaxed tyres.

All that man could do he had done for the Grey Goose, but this punishing, tearing conflict, this ceaseless thrust across England, without halt or breathing space, was more than any car could be expected to stand up to.

In addition, his fears as to the damage the radiator might have sustained in the barrier crash some miles back were only too well founded. The shock had strained the radiator badly, and started a serious leak, so that for many miles now the precious cooling-water had been leaking away, causing the long-suffering engine to become seriously overheated.

At last ominous rattlings and complaining notes from the engine told the trained ear of Bill that Grey Goose was reaching the end of her tether.

"She'll fiop—blinkin' well flop like a house of cards," the mechanic told himself. "It ain't fair—not by a long chalk it ain't fair! He'll drive her to death."

And that is what Roy Maitland did do.

Through the traffic-filled streets of the great seaport thundered Grey Goose, dust-covered, smoking. As they reached the broad roadway that led to the docks, Bill felt that ominous pulling, that sensation of inertia, which can never be mistaken.

Through the gates to the dock, on towards the railway platform, Grey Goose headed, its powerful engine running now with a halting, irregular note.

Outside the station, Roy switched off the quivering, pulsing monster, and leaped from his seat, his face twisted into a look of grim content.

"She's done, old chap!" he said to Bill. "Bearings all gone to blazes! But, by James! we've won. Look!"

A throaty beat sounded, and, clattering over the points, came the long boat express, gliding for the platform.

But Bill had no eyes for express or platform or carriages; he had climbed out of the car, and was staring with dimmed eyes at the wonderful machine that had been his pride.

He knew that irretrievable damage had been done to that wonderful, carefully-tended engine.

Old Grey Goose would fly no more.

Ten minutes later, a grimed, greasy figure in overalls had side-tracked a white-faced, tremulous girl in one corner of the platform, and was talking to her earnestly, entreatingly.

What Roy said to Cynthia Maitland need not be recorded, but the result was that, presently Bill, moaning over his ruined monster, heard a soft voice by his side, and looked round into Cynthia's tear-filled eyes.

"And you—you are sure that it—it will never run again?" Cynthia asked.

Bill looked first at her, then at his master, and the burly mechanic squared his shoulders.

"That don't matter, Miss Cynthia," he said. "After all, it—it was only—only an old 'bus, and its job was done!"



THE END.

