

# Gus

PATRICK HADLER

Probably no one on this earth has a more thankless job than the overland truck driver. I couldn't help thinking how much these knights of the concrete pathways and their roaring steeds were doing to ease crowded wartime shipping conditions as I watched that great lumbering fifteen ton monster roll noisily into a small country filling station on that boiling August afternoon. From its glass encased cab perched high above the gravel driveway stepped the young driver. He couldn't have been over twenty-two or three. His face was damp and grimy after the long straining hours of bouncing over the Illinois highways under the blazing prairie sun. The back of his gray shirt where he had leaned against the black leather seat was as wet as if he had fallen into a stream. After removing a pair of green sun glasses and lighting a cigarette, he strolled slowly into the station.

Inside the station he slowly opened the bright red cold-drinks cooler and pulled out a bottle of some fancy cola. The station operator came back in at length and greeted his friend Gus with a hearty slap on the back. The ensuing conversation dealt with lengths of time and distances

to large Midwestern cities. Gus had left St. Louis at six that morning, and was scheduled to arrive in Cincinnati with his great gasoline monster by midnight. Four hundred and ninety-six miles in eighteen hours may not seem like much of a feat, but in a fifteen ton semi-trailer truck, it's no picnic.

The conversation went on in low tones. Gus broke into laughter often showing a perfect set of gleaming white teeth. Other truckers on other lines that had passed through were the topic for probably five minutes. Finally Gus picked up his grey cap and dropping his cigarette on the station floor, strolled out of the little building. With a wave and a grin, he jumped up onto the high narrow running board and from there bounded into the cab. The starter turned over and with a roar the powerful engine started. Blue smoke coughed out of the exhaust pipe above and behind the cab. With another roar, the big machine rumbled out onto the flat hot highway and in a moment was gone over the next hill. Three hundred miles to the east lay Cincinnati. Three hundred miles of flat Illinois prairies and winding Indiana hills. It's a long way to Cincinnati in a semi-trailer truck; an awfully long way.