

Bowser Takes An Auto Ride

Confident and Happy, He Goes Off With a Friend For a Little Spin in a Machine.

JOY TURNED TO TERROR

After a Few Close Shaves the Irascible One Decides He's Had Enough and Sinks Home Afoot.

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 I AM one of Mr. Bowser's friends. We have offices adjoining, and I have known the particulars of many of his published "scrapes" before they were put in print. On various occasions during the last three months I have invited Mr. Bowser to make a short trip with me in my auto, and, while he has made several dates, he has always failed me at the last moment. I have a suspicion that on each and every occasion Mrs. Bowser has found a way to discourage him. Three days ago, however, he informed me that he had found a great bargain in a machine and was thinking of buying it for use next spring. He was



"WE ARE NOW GOING AT THE RATE OF TEN MILES AN HOUR."

very enthusiastic over the matter and asked me to call at his house that evening and give him a little trip that he might see how the old thing worked. I was there at the minute named, and while Mr. Bowser was busy with a stranger Mrs. Bowser entertained me. We reached an understanding in the course of six or seven minutes. Mrs. Bowser is a woman prepared to meet any emergency. She had not opposed the purchase of a machine, but had made Mr. Bowser agree to take a ride in one before closing any bargain. Our brief conversation was interesting from several points of view, but mostly as to what was to happen to Mr. Bowser in the next hour.

"Well, Blank, here you are," he said as he finished his business with the stranger, "and I want you, before starting out, to assure Mrs. Bowser that riding in an auto is just as safe as sitting at home in a rocking chair."

"I have done that," I replied.
 "Yes," replied Mrs. Bowser, "he has satisfied me that all these cases of accident reported day after day are fixed up by the penny-a-line reporters and have not a word of truth in them. I did fear to have him go out, but now I think it perfectly safe—in fact, I presume he will enjoy himself."

"And if I do, you won't object to my buying an auto?" he asked.
 "No, I will not."

Mr. Bowser was as bland and complacent as a June bug when he took his seat beside me in the machine, but as I shaved the edge of a brick pile in turning around in getting away he braced his feet and got a better hold with his hands. When we turned the first corner I tickled the wheel of a moving van and made a white wings jump for the sidewalk, and Mr. Bowser said:

"You—you are sure you know all about this thing?"
 "My dear sir, haven't I been running it for months? Any child can run an auto. You are not a nervous man, are you?"

"Of course not, but I thought you were shaving things pretty close."
 "Not at all. You see that grocer's wagon down there? Well, that red-headed boy who drives it is known to me. He is getting too fresh and needs taking down a peg or two. I shan't run into the vehicle, but shave it rather close."

"But let me out first."
 "I couldn't possibly stop here in this crowd, you see; nothing whatever to be afraid of. We skip right along here—edge in a bit—make the red-headed boy think we are going to climb over the dashboard—and here we are, a hundred feet past him. I think I knocked a spoke out of a hind wheel, but am not sure. At any rate, the boy's hair was standing up as we passed, and he has received something of a shock. Are you enjoying yourself?"
 "I—I am trying to, but—but—"
 "You see, the sensation is new to you, and it will take a few minutes to get accustomed to it. It seems to you

that we are about to run into everything we run across, but I can assure you that it is an optical delusion. We are much safer than if on a steamer in mid-Atlantic. What's the matter?"
 Mr. Bowser had crouched down and uttered a shout.

"I thought we were going right over that street car!" he whispered.

"Oh, that was all right. I saw that I could clear the front of the car with half an inch to spare, and so I went ahead. Now, there is a lame man crossing the street 200 feet away. It probably seems to you that we are headed right for him and that in ten seconds more we shall pick him up and toss him sky high, but you'll observe that I just shave his coat tails and give him a bit of a jump. There's no need of your hanging on to the seat in the way you do."

"Are we headed toward home?"
 "Why, of course not. This is only the beginning of a ten or fifteen mile spin. You see that peanut cart on the corner? Well, its owner is always taking up more of the street than belongs to him, and I am going to give him a bit of a lesson."

"But—but—"
 "You are all right, Mr. Bowser, though I wish you'd had your eyes open when we struck the cart. It went ten feet high, and the look on the Italian's face was something to remember. Peanut carts are good things to practice on. This is exhilarating, isn't it?"
 "Yes, but I'd like to get home early, you know. I think Mrs. Bowser wants to play cards tonight."

"She said that I was to take you from fifteen to twenty miles so that you could thoroughly post yourself on the running of a machine. The first thing to get used to is the sensation of speed. We are now going at the rate of ten miles an hour, but it seems twice that to you, I suppose?"
 "It seems a thousand!"
 "But you'll get used to it. Now we are coming to a crossing of street car tracks and just in time to meet four different street cars. If you were out in your machine what would you do?"
 "Stop it and yell for the police!"
 groaned Mr. Bowser.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. You'd do just as I am doing—let those four motorists look out for themselves and drive right ahead. If they are not a mind to stop, then—"
 One car ran me down within an inch, but I escaped the other two by more than a foot, and for two minutes I am sure that Mr. Bowser didn't breathe. When I had the time to glance at him he was as pale as a dead man, and had his eyes hard shut.

"Now we are out of town and there's a good road before us, and I can show you some speed," I said.
 "Say, Blank," he whispered in reply, "I am sure that Mrs. Bowser wants me and will be mad if I don't come home."

"We'll head for home after our little spin."
 "But—but—how much will you take, cash down, to head for home?"
 "Why, Mr. Bowser, I thought you wanted to be an autoist."
 "I—I do, but, you see, if Mrs. Bowser wants to go to the theater tonight—"

I ran the machine into a shallow ditch and let it brush against the bushes, and Mr. Bowser went still whiter. I then ran over a stick of cord wood dropped from some farmer's wagon, and the poor man groaned like an ox in his last agony. Then I increased the speed to twenty-five miles an hour, and he slid off the seat and clung to my leg. Having carried out my promises to the letter, I ran the auto off the road and stopped it and said:

"Mr. Bowser, shall we put in another ten miles?"
 "For heaven's sake, no!" he replied as he came to life.
 "Nice moonlight evening, you know, and I am willing to stay out until midnight."

I got out to oil up a little and he followed. The next thing I knew he had slipped away into the bushes. I called to him again and again, but he did not answer. I went up the road for a mile, but no one had seen such a man as I described. I made many inquiries on my return and kept my eyes open for the man I wanted, but in vain. When I reported to Mrs. Bowser she smiled and said:

"You have my warmest thanks. It may take him two or three days, but he will get home at last. He may turn to fire escapes, burglar alarms, hair dyes and the dew cure, but I don't think he will buy an auto."
 And neither do I.

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