

“Oil the News That’s Fit to Print!”



Spotlight on... The Flim Flam Man

by Jim Stark

We’ve Moved!

After 21 years in the same building, we have outgrown our space and moved. We are right around the corner from our previous



building, so all our carriers (mail, UPS, FedEx, etc). still know where to find us and should still deliver your sample, even if it has the wrong address on it. But to be on the safe side, while you’re thinking about it, go find your extra kits and replace our old street address with our new one:
416 E. Pettit Ave.
Everything else stays the same!

It was a dark and stormy night...how dark and stormy it was about to become eluded me. I was in a sunny mood.

I had a date with Shirley, the dame I’d been watching pour coffee at the diner for months. The seams in her stockings were driving me nuts. “Hey Shirley, how ’bout you and me slipping out for a couple of drinks after work tonight?” When she said yes, I knew the old charm was alive and well. This babe was hot and I was the fireman.

I arrived at the diner at 9:00. Lightning backlit the run-down structure as the last of the neon lights blinked off. As the wind kicked up, she locked the diner and hustled over to my car, trying to keep the rain off her pink and gray dress. I leaned over and popped the right door open. When she slid over next to me my day brightened even more. We were off to the roadhouse, ten miles outside city limits.

She smiled, and I smiled back. “How about a little nip?” I asked as my hip flask magically appeared in my hand. “Yeah, sure” she said, grinning with a mischievous smirk on her ruby red lips. She took a long pull of brandy. “Ah,” she said, showing no sign of the slow burn she must have been feeling making its way toward her stomach. “That hits the spot!” When she handed the flask back, the lights of the city’s service station appeared out of the gloom.

As I swung the Packard onto the brightly lit lot, we rolled over the hose that rang the bell. Joe was snoozing with his feet propped on the desk and his hands clasped over his ample stomach. The bell woke him with a start. He grabbed a yellow smock and made tracks out into the weather. “Fill ’er up?” he shouted above the wind as he approached my half-open window.

“Yeah!” I answered, “and make it ethyl!” I was in an extravagant mood, and my anticipation of the night’s delights easily offset the higher 23.9¢ a gallon. I knew the Packard was low on oil, so I told him while he was at it, to put in a couple quarts of his special 30W. Joe bottled his own oil, but I’d heard it was premium stuff. It certainly looked expensive, coming out a brilliant blue straight from the bottle.

Joe set the pump, popped the hood, and added oil while the meter ticked off “dings” on its way to the \$4.00 total. Shirley and I passed the flask and made small talk. Guy Lombardo filled the air with soothing jazz from the six-button radio. This was going to be a night to remember.

Joe slammed the hood and I ponied up \$5.00 as he waited by the window. “Keep the change,” I said as I fired the engine and rolled up the window. We peeled rubber and wheeled onto the blacktop.

We were doing 65 when trouble started. A light vibration in the gas pedal soon turned into a roar. Before long the whole car was shaking like a

jitterbug and smoking like a condemned man. I pulled over to figure out what was going on. Next thing I knew, Shirley was out into the howling wind and running down the rain-swept berm. The engine was knocking like a landlord on rent day, so loud that I'd hardly noticed her departure. It took almost full throttle to catch up to her. "C'mon Shir!" I pleaded through the half-open door, getting pelted with rain in my face. "Get back in!"

"Get away from me, creep!" she screamed as the rain and wind plastered her hair to her head. "That thing's gonna blow!"

And that it did. I've heard a lot of bangs in my two decades as a private dick, but the sound of a rod shooting clean through the side of the block was the worst and most personal of them all. Oil exploded like a geyser out the hole. Once the fountain abated and the clattering and shaking stopped, I snapped the key off and Lombardo's music faded into the most deafening silence I'd ever heard. Shirley and all my hopes for the night faded into the rainy darkness.

Most guys would have bemoaned their bad luck, but not me. That Packard was my pride and joy, and flat-footed detective work is my trade. I wanted to know who or what was responsible for the demise of my wheels, and I was starting with Joe and his so-called premium oil.

Not wanting to arouse his suspicions, I kept up the friendly banter as I visited his shop the next day. "Say Joe, that oil you sell sure is pretty. It must be some grade-A stuff."

"Oh yeah," he drawled, one eye on the pinup calendar behind me. "Nothing but the best comes outta this shop."

"So where'd ya get it?" I asked.

"Oh, that's a trade secret," he replied, winking at me. "How's Shirley these days?"

I'd had enough of the fat man, so I bought a pack of cigarettes and said my goodbyes. That night, I drove back to the station and parked in a back lot, out of Joe's sight but in view of the 55-gallon drums out back. It had been a long day and I was beginning to doze when I was startled by a truck pulling up. The driver looked around before hopping out of the cab. His truck held 3 drums...heavy drums by the looks of it.

Joe appeared around the side of the building. "Got yer new shipment here, pal," said the driver, a cigarette hanging from his mouth. "It's about time!" exclaimed Joe. "People can't get enough of this stuff. Is it dyed, like I said?"

"Yes indeedy," smiled the driver. "Bright blue, nothing but the best." He tapped his ashes into one of the drums.

"Watch it!" growled Joe. "We don't need anything obvious floating around in this oil."

The two men unloaded the drums and rolled them into the station, unaware that Sam Slade, gumshoe extraordinaire, was on the scene. As the driver and Joe finished their business, I'd seen enough. I slipped into the front of the building while they were out back and dipped a sample of the oil into a clean Brylcreem jar I'd brought along. That night I packaged up the oil and sent it off to a lab. I wanted to find out just what was in this stuff. My Packard, God rest her soul, deserved to know the truth.

When the lab results came back a few days later, I was astounded. I'm no chemist, but I know that virgin oil should be fairly clean. This was stuff I would not use in my lawn mower. I would, however, feed it Joe, and I went to confront him, lab results in hand.

I stormed into the station, one hand on my gun and one hand waving the lab results in front of me. "What's the big idea, Joe?" I yelled, waking him from yet another snooze in broad daylight. "What kind of snake oil are you selling around here?"

Joe took one look at the lab results in my hand and blanched. "I, well, we...uh, that is..." he stammered, before I cut him off. "I know all about the likes of you," I raged. "This is nothing but waste oil from another garage, isn't it? Isn't it?"



“We clean it!” he protested, eyeing my gun fearfully. “We do! We filter it and it’s good as new!”

“Where does it come from?” I took a step closer and shot him a menacing scowl. Joe turned red and didn’t say anything. “I asked you a question,” I reminded him. He still didn’t say anything, despite the cold specter of steel sitting inches from his face. “I saw your man unloading drums the other night. It’s waste oil from the station down in Plymouth, ain’t it?” Joe nodded slowly, his face saying more than any words could.

“Get out of the oil business, Joe. It don’t suit you. And you owe me a new Packard.” Joe watched morosely as I walked to the back of the building and shot holes in all his drums of oil. The bright blue oil ran out, pooling on the floor around the tools and magazines stacked on the floor. I turned on my heel and walked to the front. As I got on my bicycle and pedaled away, I thought about the Flim Flam Man. No good can come from a man like that. My days with Shirley were over, but at least I could save another man and his date from the fate of my Packard.

A new Packard showed up in my drive the next month. If I’ve learned anything, it’s this: Oil brand generally does not matter for us regular guys. Most genuine oil companies know what they’re doing. But when oil is packaged by the Flim Flam Man, beware!

Report of the Month

What’s wrong with this sample of virgin oil? Read the caption below to find out.

(To learn where the various elements might be coming from, [click here.](#))

Elements in Parts Per Million	M/HR ON OIL	0	UNIT/ LOCATION AVERAGES					UNIVERSAL AVERAGES
	M/HR ON UNIT	0						
	SAMPLE DATE	9/28/05						
	ALUMINUM	16	0					1
	CHROMIUM	0	0					0
	IRON	17	1					1
	COPPER	0	0					0
	LEAD	0	0					1
	TIN	1	0					0
	MOLYBDENUM	0	54					60
	NICKEL	0	0					0
	POTASSIUM	50	0					1
	BORON	0	67					59
	SILICON	83	4					4
	SODIUM	68	15					6
	CALCIUM	22	1576					1804
	MAGNESIUM	0	73					104
	PHOSPHORUS	55	662					710
	ZINC	10	776					811
	BARIUM	1	0					0

Properties	TEST	cST VISCOSITY @ 40 C	SUS VISCOSITY@ 100 C	cST VISCOSITY@ 100 C	SUS VISCOSITY @ 210 F	FLASHPOINT IN F	FUEL %	ANTI- FREEZE %	WATER %	INSOLUBLES %
	VALUES SHOULD BE				59-65	>375	-<2.0	0.0	0.0	<0.6
	TESTED VALUES WERE				48.3	360	-	?	0.0	0.1

Our story about the Flim Flam man was inspired by this report. This is a sample of 10W/30 virgin oil, straight out of the bottle. We like to pick up unknown oil brands that we find at gas stations and run them to see what they're like. We don't find real dogs very often, but this one sure was. A better question than "What's wrong with this oil" is, "Is there anything right with this oil?" It appears to be waste oil that was filtered. While it's possible the sodium and potassium are additives, but we don't know any legitimate oil that uses them at these levels. We think it's more likely they are from antifreeze. But that's not all that's wrong with this oil! Not only does it contain metals (aluminum and iron) and antifreeze, there is barely any additive package to speak of (see calcium, phosphorus, and zinc). The unit/location averages and universal averages show more typical additive packages for gas engine oil. In addition, although they labeled the oil as 10W/30, the viscosity read more like a light 20W or even an ATF. It contained solids--see insolubles at 0.1%. We have one word for this oil: Yuck.

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