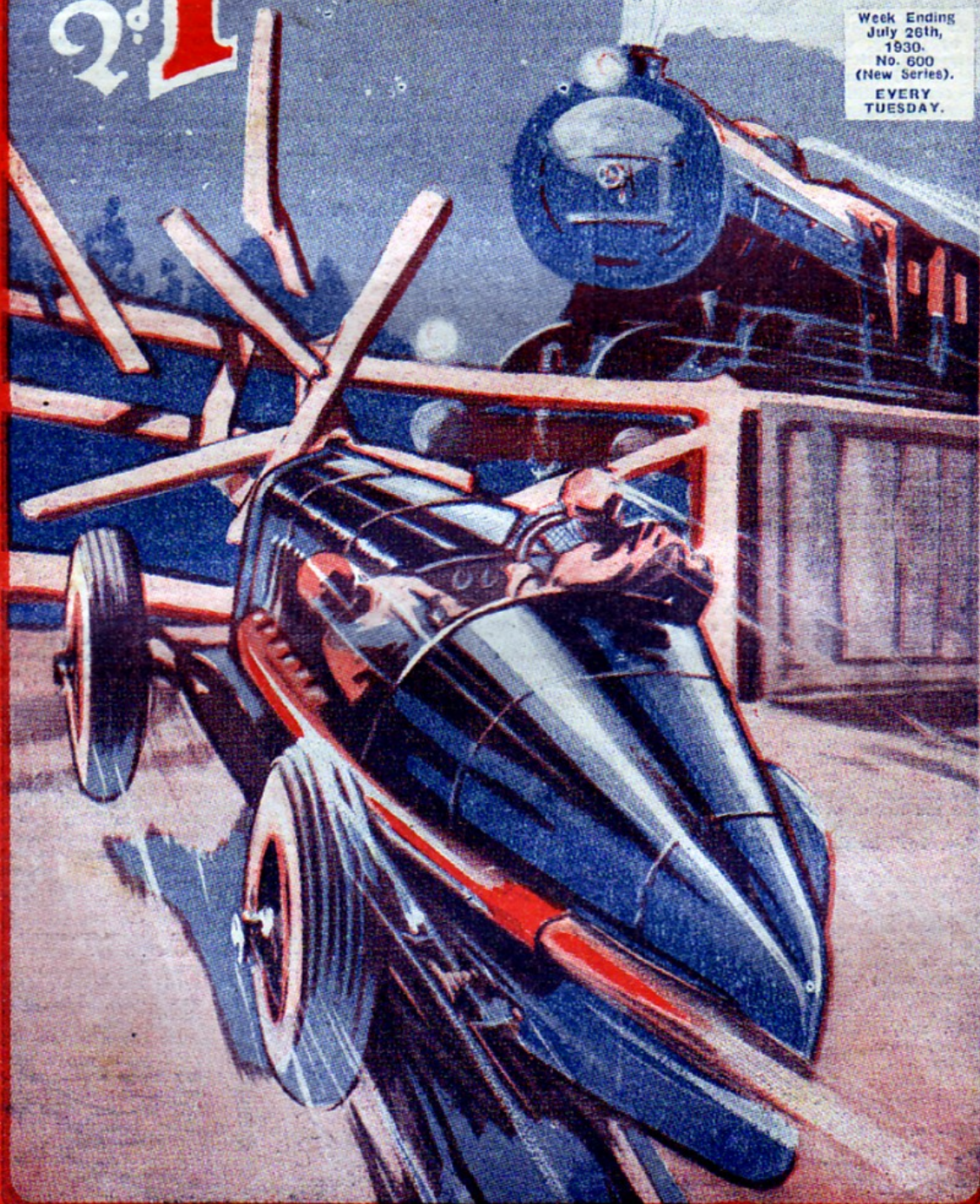


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"FIGHTING SPEED!" First of a Roaring New Motor-Racing Series!

THE RETURN of the RIO KID, Outlaw, IN—

A Rough-House in Plug Hat!

BY RALPH REDWAY.

The Horse Thief!

"LIGHT down!"

The Rio Kid was surprised. The Kid had ridden a long trail that day, and the alkali dust was thick on his goatskin chaps, and on his grey mustang. He had ridden by lonely ways, for Sassafras County was cow country, and more thinly settled than any other part of Texas that the Kid knew. He had seen no man that day, until he came in sight of the town of Plug Hat. The Kid was glad to see the cow-town, for outlaw as he was, and used to solitary trails, he liked the company of his fellow-men.

There were many cow-towns into which the Kid could not have ventured to ride; but he figured that in Plug Hat he was not likely to find trouble. For Plug Hat had a rich and juicy reputation, as the most lawless cow-town in all Texas; a town that law-officers disliked and avoided, and that was a law unto itself. And a town that sheriffs and marshals disliked was a spot where the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande was likely to find repose. Nobody there, he reckoned, was likely to know him; but even if he was known, he would be only one of the many breakers of the law who found a refuge from trouble in Plug Hat.

In that wild and lawless country, the Kid would not have been surprised at a hold-up on the trail, till he came in sight of the camp. But he was surprised now; for the town was scarce a hundred yards ahead of him, when a man stepped out of the mesquite, with a gun in his hand, and ordered him to light down.

The Kid grinned. He knew that Plug Hat was a wild place. But if a hold-up could take place in full view of the town, without interference, it was surely a wilder place than he had reckoned.

The Kid pulled in Side-Kicker; but he did not light down. He sat in the saddle and looked at the man with the gun.

"Say, bo!" he drawled. "Is this a joke?"

The man who had stepped out of the mesquite was a powerful fellow, with a red beard, dressed in a cowman's flannel-shirt and chaps, with a stetson on the back of his tangled head. He looked as tough a galoot as the Kid had ever seen; but the Kid did not seem alarmed. More than one tough galoot had woke up the Kid for a gopher, and found him a cougar, all teeth and claws.

"Nary a joke!" answered the red-bearded man. The gun in his hand was half-raised. "I guess I want that hoss."

"He's sure a good hoss," agreed the Kid. "He's carried me a long way, and I guess he's carrying me farther, feller. Say, isn't that burg jest ahead of me Plug Hat?"

"You've said it! I guess you're a stranger here?"

"Sure!" assented the Kid.

"I reckoned so, or you wouldn't be riding a cayuse of that heft into the town." The red-bearded man eyed the Kid's mount, appreciatively. "Why, dog-gone my socks, I'll say that that mustang is the best piece of hoss-flesh I've seen for a dog's age."

"He's sure the best piece of hoss-

The red-bearded man grinned.

"You're sure some tenderfoot," he said. "How long you reckon you'd keep that cayuse, if you took him into the town?"

"Jest as long as I wanted, I reckon." "Sho! Waal, I'm telling you that the minute Cactus Carter set eyes on that hoss, he would want him."

"I ain't the pleasured of knowing Cactus Carter," said the Kid. "But I sure opine that if he took a fancy to my cayuse, he would have a lot of trouble with the rider."

"Aw, forget it!" said the red-bearded man. "Light

down, I'm telling you. It's jest my luck that I spotted you riding into town, and got hold of the hoss afore the other guys. Jest pure luck, I reckon. You don't want to worry any, stranger; you wouldn't keep that hoss till sundown, if I let you pass with him. You're only losing him ten minutes ahead of time. Now light down, afore I get tired of holdin' this gun."

The Kid laughed.

He had picked out Plug Hat as a place that sheriffs disliked, and therefore suitable for an outlaw who was tired of the llano and the chaparral. But it struck him that that advantage could be over-done. Seemingly it was a town into which no stranger could ride without being deprived of his horse on the spot. The Kid had struck some lawless places in his time; but he figured that Plug Hat was the limit.

"Feller," he said, "you sure do tickle me a whole lot. Mean to say you can corral my cayuse this-a-way, and the guys in that burg yonder won't string you up for hoss-stealing?"

"I guess if all the hoss-thieves in Plug Hat was strung up, there wouldn't be rope enough in Sassafras County," answered the red-bearded man. "But I didn't stop you to chew the rag—I stopped you for that cayuse. I guess I'd be sorry to spill your juice all over the trail; but I ain't waiting any longer. You lighting down?"

He raised the six-gun.

"I never was a guy to say no to a six-gun," answered the Kid, amiably. "If you say light down, feller, light down it is."

"That's sense," agreed the big cowman. "Seeing you're a stranger here, boy, I'll tell you it ain't healthy to sit arguin' with

BOYS! HERE'S YOUR OLD PAL
BACK AGAIN!

And He's Still The Slickest Man on the
Draw!

flesh in all Texas," answered the Kid. "I allow there ain't another critter between the Rio Grande and the Big Colorado, that could keep sight of his heels in a race."

"Waal, light down."

"Hold on your hosses a piece," suggested the Kid. "I've sure heard that Plug Hat is a rip-smorter of a burg; but are they all hoss-thieves in this country?"





Red Harris, when he's got a gat in his grip. You got me?"

"Sure!" assented the Kid.

And he alighted from the grey mustang.

There was a smile on the Kid's handsome, sunburnt face; there was no hint of resistance in his manner. So long as a six-gun was looking at him, the Kid was prepared to be amiable.

Red Harris thrust the revolver back into his holster, and stepped towards the horse. The Kid's smiling and submissive manner quite deceived him; moreover, the Kid did not look dangerous, to the eyes of the burly cowman. He looked a "kid" cowpuncher—almost too good-looking and neat and natty in his get-up for a cowpuncher. In the eyes of Red Harris he was the tenderest of tenderfeet. Red Harris gave all his attention to his prize.

"Say, this is some cayuso," he said, enthusiastically. "I guess you're a dog-goned bonehead to ride him into this country, stranger; but you sure do know hoss-flesh; you surely have picked out a prize cayuso. This hyer is jest luck, for I've sure lost my own cayuso at poker to Colorado Bill, and I was wanting a mount. Cactus Carter will sure cuss a whole lot when he sees this here critter; but first come, first served, I reckon."

"Go slow!" murmured the Kid, as the red-bearded man was about to mount the grey mustang.

"What—great gophers!" gasped Red Harris.

The muzzle of a gun, in the Kid's hand, touched Red Harris lightly in his belt.

"Don't!" smiled the Kid.

The levelled gun, with the Kid's eyes

smiling over it, warned the cowman not to draw. It dawned on him that this handsome boyish cowpuncher was not the tenderfoot he had supposed.

"Search me!" gasped Red Harris.

"That's my hoss!" said the Kid cheerily. "I ain't giving him away—not now I'm the man that's handlin' the gun. Leave that gat where it is, Mr. Harris, or there'll be a dead hoss-thief lying around on this trail before you can say 'no sugar in mine.'"

Red Harris breathed hard.

"Put 'em up!" said the Kid.

The ruffian eyed him savagely, sullenly, and his hands went up slowly above his head. The Kid had him covered; and though his eyes were smiling, the cowman could read death in them.

"That's better!" said the Kid. "I see you've been carefully brought

up, feller, and you know when to do what you're told!"

"You dog-goned durned skunk!" said Red Harris between his teeth.

"Can it!" said the Kid. "I ain't going to plug you, feller; not if you behave. I'm sure obliged to you for puttin' me wise to what I've got to look for in Plug Hat. I reckon I'll borrow your hardware!"

With his left hand the Kid drew the revolver from the red-bearded man's belt. He dropped it in the trail and stamped a heavy heel on it.

Red Harris watched him savagely.

"You're safer without that," explained the Kid. "You sure might figure on spillin' lead, and then I should have to plug you for keeps, and I ain't come to Plug Hat a-shootin'. You get me?"

"Dog-gone you—"

"In the Frio country, where I was raised," said the Kid, "they hang hoss-thieves! I guess I feel powerful inclined to waste my trail-rope on you, Mr. Harris. I surely do!"

"You dog-goned—"

"I've told you to can it," said the Kid mildly. "You've said your piece, feller, and it's my turn to chew the rag. Put your paws together!"

"I guess—"

"I ain't waiting," said the Kid, making a motion with his six-gun, and the ruffian put his hands together, over his head; and the Kid, with his left hand, threw a loop of cord over them and drew them tight.

"Now step under this cottonwood," said the Kid.

"I guess—"

"Pronto!" rapped out the Kid. Red Harris stepped under the tree. The Kid reached up and tied the end of the cord to a bough.

"I guess that fixes you!" he

remarked "I sure opine that a hoss-thief ought to be strung up, but I'm letting you off light. You can stand there and cuss, Mister Harris, till somebody comes along and lets you loose. If nobody comes along the trail, I guess you'll worry loose by midnight!"

"You god-darned lobo wolf!" hissed Red Harris. He stood helpless under the tree, his bound hands fastened to the branch above his head. His eyes fairly burned at the Kid's cool, handsome face.

The Kid smiled.

"So-long!" he drawled. "I guess you've got time to do a lot of thinking, feller, and you better think that the next time you hold up a tenderfoot for his hoss, he may turn out a wildcat. So-long, feller!"

The Kid remounted Side-Kicker and rode off towards Plug Hat. Red Harris, left standing under the tree, yelled curses and threats after him, while he dragged and wrenched in vain at the cord that held him secure. His furious voice followed the Kid into the main—and only—street of Plug Hat.

Sharp Shooting!

THE sound of a voice, swearing steadily, greeted the ears of the Rio Kid as he walked into the Plug Hat hotel, leaving Side-Kicker hitched to the hitching-rail in front of the timber building. The Kid had heard plenty of "cuss-words" in his time, and was no stranger to the picturesque language of the cow country; but he had never heard a guy swear so fluently before, and he was interested. He glanced round him and sighted a fat man in shirt-sleeves, who stood by the bar, and who, he guessed, was the landlord of the shebang.

If the fat man was the landlord, he did not seem interested in the arrival of a new guest. His face was red and excited; he was evidently deeply perturbed about something. Taking no heed of the Kid, he continued to swear with undiminished fluency. Three or four other men were in the room, and they listened to him with respectful admiration for his flow of language, grinning to one another the while.

"Pop Short," said one of them. "you sure can cuss a whole lot! You sure can cuss off a bull buffalo's hind leg!"

The fat man still swore, unheeding. Evidently there was something serious the matter. The Rio Kid waited, and watched him for some minutes. He was not the guy to horn into any man's game, and if Mr. Short wanted to swear, it was not the Kid's funeral. But after waiting politely for a few minutes, the Kid grew restive. He wanted refreshment for himself and his steed, and his flow of language, picturesque as it was, was a poor substitute.

"Say, fellers," said the Kid, looking round, "where's the boss of this hyer shebang. I want to know?"

One of the loungers hooked his thumb towards the fat man.

"Stranger," he answered, "that's the guy you want. That's Pop Short!"

"Mr. Short," said the Kid politely, "I dislike interrupting a guy that can cuss like you do, and if there was another hotel in this burg, I'd sure let you run on till the cows come home. But—"

"The dog-goned scallywags!" said Pop Short. "The pesky skunks! The

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all-fired polece ! I guess it was some of Cactus Carter's gang that lifted my pinto! Yeh! And if I was as young as I used to be, I'd go hunting them up and down Plug Hat with a gat in my grip. And if there was a man in this yer burg that was worth calling a man, he sure would put paid to that horse-stealin', rustlin', cow-liftin' thief, Carter."

"Can it, Pop Short!" said one of the loungers. "It sure wouldn't be healthy for you to let Carter hear you calling him fancy names."

"What's the trouble, feller?" asked the Rio Kid curiously. "What's this guy Carter been doing?"

Mr. Short gave him attention at last. "He's lifted my pinto, or some of his friends have," he answered. "A guy can't call his hoss his own in this town."

"You won't get your cayuse back by cussin'," suggested the Kid. "Why not go to the town marshal?"

"Because there ain't one, you bonehead."

"Then you want to go to the sheriff!"

"Guess again!" snarled Mr. Short.

"Well, what's the matter with going to the sheriff?" asked the Kid. He was really curious. The Kid disliked sheriffs himself, but he saw no reason why the landlord of the Plug Hat should share his dislike.

"Because there ain't no sheriff, you jay!" answered Mr. Short. "There ain't been never more than two sheriffs in Sassafras county, and both of them died with their boots on; and I ain't heard of any galoot that is anxious for the job since. If you was to offer it with a bag of dollars sticking on to it, I guess you wouldn't find nobody to take it!"

"Search me!" said the Kid, in surprise.

Mr. Short resumed swearing. He seemed to find some relief in this for the loss of his pinto.

"Feller," said the Kid, "you'll be losin' your voice if you keep on cussin' that way. Ain't there a man in this town who's white enough to stand for sheriff, and ain't there white men enough to elect him if he stood?"

"I guess there's plenty of guys in this burg would be glad to elect a sheriff," answered Mr. Short. "But I guess if they elected one, they'd have to bury him the next day, and nobody's houin' for a front place in the town cemetery!"

"Oh, sho!" said the Kid. "Well, I've heard that this town of Plug Hat was a warm corner, but it sure does look to be like the hot place with the lid off. But if there ain't any marshal and there ain't any sheriff, you surely want to go and look for that hoss-thief with a gun, feller!"

"Say, you got a lot to say for a kid cowpuncher," remarked one of the men in the room, coming towards the Kid. "I reckon you're the guy that Red Harris went to meet on the trail when he saw you coming down the hill."

"I'm that guy!" assented the Kid.

"Then I guess you've hoofed it into town."

"I guess not," said the Kid, smiling. "I've sure ridden into this burg on the back of my cayuse, feller!"

"Then what was Harris doing to let you get away with it?"

"The last I saw of Mr. Harris, feller, he was standin' under a cottonwood with his hands tied to a branch, cussing like our friend here," said the Kid. "That's how I left him."

The Plug Hat man stared at the Kid.

"And who tied him up?" he demanded.

"This very identical guy," answered the Kid.

"I guess that's a durned lie," said the Plug Hat man. "Harris wouldn't make more'n a small mouthful of a kid cowpuncher like you. I guess—"

"Let the puncher alone, Colorado Bill!" said Mr. Short. "What do you want to be kicking up a rookus for, the minute the feller puts his nose into town?"

"Aw, don't you worry about this infant, Mr. Short," said the Kid. "This guy don't mean any harm, and he's going to ask pardon for saying that what I said was a durned lie!"

"You reckon?" grinned Colorado Bill. "I reckon!" assented the Kid. "Because if you don't, I've got a gun here that will make you wish you hadn't forgotten your nice manners to a stranger!"

"You dog-goned young bonehead!" roared Pop Short, forgetting even the loss of his pinto in his anxiety for his new guest. "Don't you draw on him, Bill—I tell you I won't have my floor all mussed up!"

Colorado Bill's hand was already on his gun.

"Take Mr. Short's advice, feller," said the Kid. "Don't pull that gun—it won't be healthy."

"By thunder!" said Colorado Bill, and he dragged his gun from the holster.

Crack!

There was plenty of men in Plug Hat who were swift on the draw. But the swiftness of the Rio Kid seemed like magic.

Colorado's gun was only half out of its holster when the Kid fired.

There was a roar from the cowman as the gun was smashed out of his hand by the bullet.

It flew across the room and dropped on the sanded floor, and Colorado stood clutching his right hand with his left, uttering howl on howl of agony. The shock had jarred his arm from wrist to shoulder, and for the moment he figured that his hand was shot off.

The Kid smiled at him over his smoking gun, with a wary eye at the same time on the other men in the room. He was watchful for anyone to draw a gun. But no other guns were drawn. The Plug Hat men were staring blankly at the kid cowpuncher who was so wonderfully quick "on the shoot."

"Carry me home to die!" ejaculated Mr. Short. "Say, bo, where did you learn to pull a gun like that? Why, that beats Cactus Carter."

"Feller," answered the Kid, "I was pullin' a gun before I stood as high as a cowman's cinch."

"Ooooooh!" roared Colorado Bill.

"Oooooooch!"

He rubbed his numbed right hand, astonished to find that it was still there.

"Say, you don't want to make a fuss," drawled the Kid. "You ain't hurt, feller, though I guess that gun of yours will never be any use again. You want to nurse your arm a piece, that's all. You want to be pleased that I didn't shoot your fingers off. But I'm a peaceable galoot, and I didn't come to Plug Hat a-shooting."

Colorado Bill glared at him and nursed his numbed arm. The Kid smiled and holstered his gun and turned to the landlord.

"Mr. Short," he said, "now our friend here is through, I guess I want to see about fodder for me and my cayuse."

"Your cayuse?" said Pop Short.

"Where'd you leave your cayuse?"

"Hitched on the rail outside."

The hotel-keeper grinned sourly.

"You sure are a tenderfoot, and you don't know Plug Hat," he said. "You won't need any fodder for your cayuse."

"And why not?" asked the Kid.

"Because I reckon he's not there now," answered the landlord. "No cayuse that was ever hitched in Plug Hat ever stayed hitched more'n a minute."

"Oh, great gophers!" ejaculated the Kid.

He rushed to the door, while the men in the Plug Hat hotel chuckled—even Colorado joined in the chuckle as he nursed his arm.

The Kid stared out at the hitching-rail. Pop Short's statement was well-founded. The rail was untenanted, and Side-Kicker had disappeared.

The Kid Horns In!

THE Rio Kid's brow set grimly. Many and strange had been his experiences in the wild cow country, but Plug Hat Camp was a new thing even in the Kid's experience.

Certainly, the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande was not likely to be troubled by the law in such a warm corner. Evidently there was no law in Plug Hat but the law of the Colt, and the man who was the quickest to draw it. But lawlessness carried to the extent of cinching a galoot's cayuse got the Kid's goat. The Kid had not come to Plug Hat to hunt for trouble; indeed, the Kid, wild as his reputation was, never did hunt for trouble. But trouble had a way of dogging his trail and coming to him unsought. And now it had come again. For the Kid, peaceable as his intentions were, was the last man in Texas to have his horseflesh lifted without raising Cain.

He looked along the rugged street, dusty and hot in the glowing red sunset of Texas. At a distance was the plaza, an open space in the centre of the town, with the signs of several saloons in full view.

There was a crowd in the plaza, gathered chiefly outside the Red Flare Saloon. Thirty or forty men were standing crowded round a man who was mounted on a cask, and round the outskirts of the crowd were a dozen or more on horseback. Something was going on in the plaza. Even at that distance the buzz of voices and the sound of laughter reached the ears of the Rio Kid.

He turned back into the lumber hotel.

"Say, Mr. Short," said the Kid. "I sure don't see my cayuse, and I guess some guy has rustled him. Mebbe you could tell me where to look for him?"

"Mebbe," answered the landlord. "But I guess you don't want to look for the cayuse, Mister—Mister—"

"Brown!" said the Kid amiably. Even in a hot place like Plug Hat, the Kid did not care to announce his real name.

"Waal, Mr. Brown, your best guess is to buy another hoss and ride out of town," said Mr. Short. "There's a plenty hosses for sale in Plug Hat—any day in the week, Mr. Brown."

"I ain't doubting that," said the Kid. "I guess from what I've seen of this yer burg, there'll always be hosses for sale here."

"You've said it," grinned Colorado

Bill, "and if you've got a fancy for your own cayuse, you can sure buy him at the auction."

"The auction?" repeated the Kid.

"I guess he's being sold already," grinned the cowman. "I can hear the boys in the plaza, and I guess that means an auction. Cactus Carter always auctions a hoss when he lifts it off a stranger, and I reckon it was Cactus lifted your cayuse."

"I guess I saw a whole caboodle of guys in the plaza," said the Kid, his frown deepening. "If they're selling my hoss, it won't be healthy for the guy that sells him, or for the guy that buys him, either."

"I reckon you'll be in time for the sale if you hump along," answered Colorado.

"Can it, Colorado," interrupted Pop Short. "If the puncher aims to horn in and make trouble, Cactus will fix him for the cemetery, and you're wise to it, dog-gone you. Mister Brown, you take my advice and get out of town without meeting up with Cactus."

The Kid smiled; a grim smile.

"I ain't getting out of this town yet,"

he said, "and if I was, I guess I wouldn't be hitting the trail without my cayuse."

"Aw, don't act foolish," said Pop Short. "I tell you Cactus is a gunman, and if you worry him any, you're a dead puncher. Look here, if you're set on getting that cayuse, you can buy him — if you're heeled. But buy him peaceable."

The Kid laughed.

"This sure is some town, where a guy is wanted to buy his own hoss," he said. "If I buy that hoss, feller, all I shall give for him will be a chunk of lead."

The Rio Kid swung out of the hotel and walked up the rugged, dusty street towards the plaza.

"Say, I'm going to see Cactus shoot him up!" remarked Colorado Bill, and he followed the Kid, and the rest of

the loungers in the lumber hotel went the same way. Pop Short shook his head sadly. Mr. Short, like other peaceable residents in Plug Hat, would have been glad enough if a stranger had come to town, who was able to play Cactus Carter at his own game—which was gun-play. But he did not figure that this boyish-looking puncher could do it. Cactus was a "killer," with a reputation as wide as Sassafras county, and he was acknowledged leader of the whole lawless element in Plug Hat. Mr. Short's opinion was that "Texas Brown" was going straight to be accommodated with a place in the camp cemetery.

The Kid walked coolly up the dusty street and reached the plaza. He stopped on the edge of the crowd to take his bearings before he horned in. The Kid meant business, but he was wary, and not in a hurry.

He looked keenly and curiously at the man mounted on the cask. The man was rather a slim fellow, dressed with rather more elegance than most of the men of Plug Hat; and he packed two guns. His face was hard, clean-shaven but for a little black moustache, and the eyes were keen, sharp, searching, and cold as ice; the eyes of a professional gunman. The Kid nudged a burly cowman near him, and asked:

"Say, who's that galoot, feller?"

The cowman stared.

The Rio Kid shoved forward.

Two or three rough fellows stared round at him. "I advised him not to shove, with incoats attached. But the Kid smiled amiably.

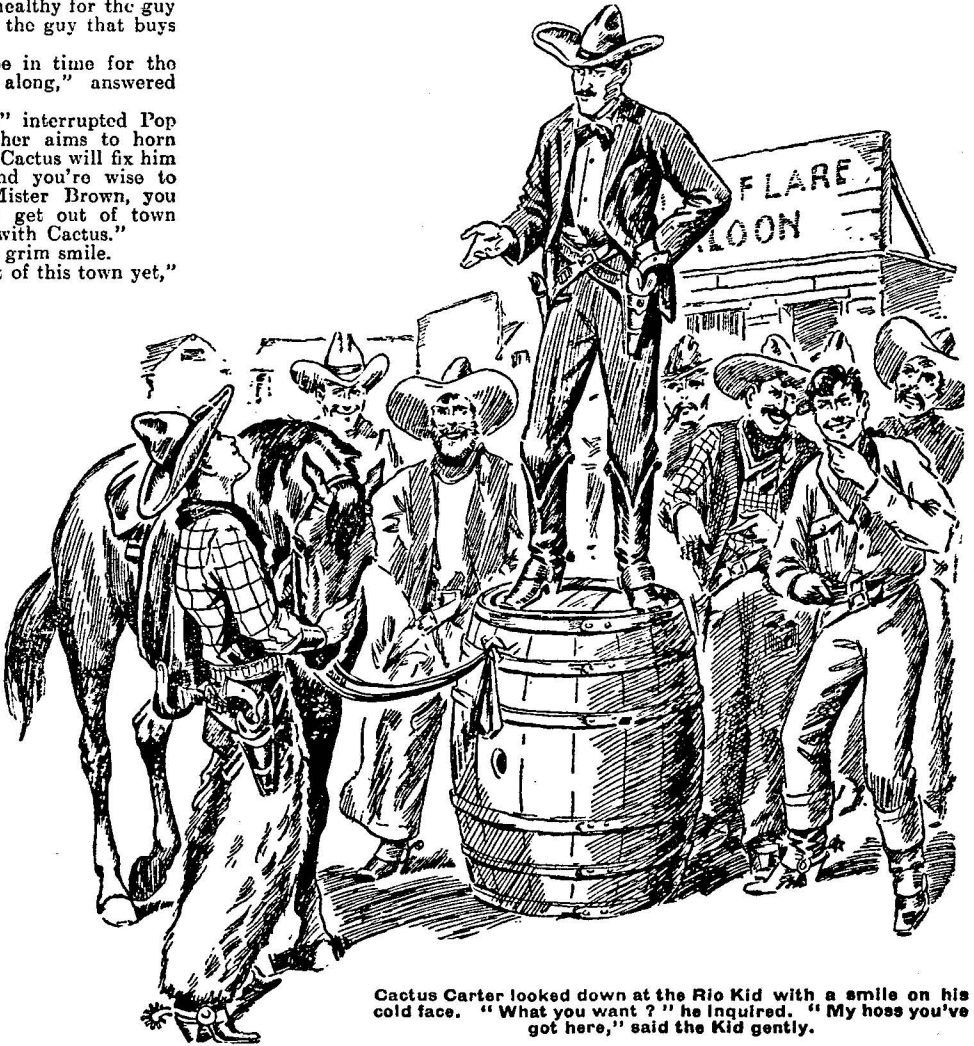
"I sure want to see the hoss," he said. "You see, fellers, that's my hoss, and I've called for him."

"Great gophers! You the tenderfoot that rode that cayuse into town?"

"Yep!"

There was a roar of laughter.

"Here, Cactus!" yelled Mesquite.



Cactus Carter looked down at the Rio Kid with a smile on his cold face. "What you want?" he inquired. "My hoss you've got here," said the Kid gently.

"You're a stranger hyer, if you don't know Cactus Carter," he answered.

"I sure guessed he was Carter, but I wanted to know," said the Kid. "Say, he's selling a cayuse?"

"Yep! There it is, tied to the cask."

The Kid pushed a little forward, and through the crowd he sighted Side-Kicker, tethered to the cask on which the gunman stood.

"Say, gents!" Cactus Carter was speaking. "I sure want you to walk up with your bids. Don't keep me here all night. Mesquite yonder said two hundred dollars for this mustang. Who's the next?"

"Two-twenty!" called out a voice.

"Two-twenty I'm bid for this cayuse!" said Cactus Carter, who was evidently used to conducting auctions. "Who's making it two-fifty?"

"Here's the tenderfoot, and he's called for the hoss."

Way was made for the Kid at once. He was allowed a free passage through the crowd to reach the auctioneer.

He arrived in the open space round the cask. And Side-Kicker turned his head, and whinnied to his master. The Kid stroked the mustang's glossy neck.

Cactus Carter, from the top of the cask, looked down at him, with a faint smile on his cold face.

"What you want?" he inquired.

"This hyer cayuse," answered the Kid gently.

"Bidding for him?"

"I sure never struck a town in Texas afore, sir, where a guy's hoss was stole under his nose, and offered for sale ten minutes after!" said the Kid.

"Mebbe," answered the man on the

ask—"mebbe. You're learning, boy. If you ain't bidding for the hoss, stand back!"

"I ain't bidding for the hoss," said the Kid mildly, "and I ain't standing back a whole lot, neither. Gents, I'm a stranger in this hyer town, and I only want to know. If this hyer is a joke that you guys play on strangers, why, I'm ready to laugh as loud as any galoot hyer. But if it's business, I jest want to say that I don't stand for it."

There was another roar of laughter. "Say, boy, you hit the horizon while you're all in one piece," said Cactus.

"But I want to know," persisted the Kid. "I guess it's only polite to put a guy wise. Mean to say that a stranger can't ride into this hyer burg without having his cayuse lifted off him this-a-way?"

"Jest that," said Cactus. "And s'pose a guy don't stand for it, what's likely to happen to him?" asked the Kid, in the same mild tone.

"Suthin' sudden," answered the man on the cask, with a grin. "There was a stranger hyer yesterday who raised objections. He's in the camp cemetery now."

"Sho!" ejaculated the Kid. "Now stand back!"

"Not in your lifetime!" answered the Kid. "I'm done asking questions. Now I want my hoss."

"How much you bid?"

"Nothing, unless it's a pill from a Colt," said the Kid. He glanced round at the staring crowd. "Gentlemen, this sale is off. This hyer critter ain't for sale now. This critter is mine, and any galoot that says he ain't mine has got to back it up with a gun!"

Beaten to the Draw!

THE Rio Kid spoke quietly, but clearly, and every man in the Plug Hat crowd heard him. There was a swaying back of the crowd. They had been gathered thick round the auctioneer's rostrum; but in a moment, as it seemed, there was a wide lane left in the throng. The Plug Hat men were accustomed to getting promptly out of the line of fire.

The Kid was left well alone, facing the cold-eyed man on the cask. The latter was eyeing him searchingly.

The Kid stood in an easy, almost careless attitude, but his hands were very close to the walnut butts of his guns, low-slung in the holsters. His eyes were on Cactus Carter's warily.

A glint was in the icy eyes of the man on the cask.

"Say, puncher," he said quietly, "you're shooting off your mouth a whole lot for a kid. I guess you want to get back to your ranch in a hurry."

"That's where you miss your guess, Mr. Carter," answered the Kid cheerfully. "I've come to Plug Hat to stay a while; and I ain't hitting the trail nohow. Jest now I want this hoss."

There was a breathless hush in the plaza of Plug Hat. All the crowd knew now that it would be gun-play.

Cactus Carter made no motion to touch a gun. There was a faint smile on his face, and his hands hung carelessly at his sides. But all knew his swiftness on the draw. And every moment they expected to see a gun leap from his holster, and ring out the death-knell of the boy puncher who defied him so recklessly. Well they knew that Cactus Carter's apparent carelessness was only due to the fact that he was assured that the life of the puncher was in his hands, to take when he pleased.

The Kid made a movement as if to unhitch the rope that tethered the grey mustang to the heavy cask.

"Don't touch that rope, puncher,"

Ever heard of an Outlaw becoming a Sheriff? Gee, No!



Ever heard of a BOY Outlaw wearing the Sheriff's star! Surely Not!

Well, next week you'll hear all about it in the most thrilling tale of Texas ever written—

"THE RIO KID SHERIFF!"

said Cactus Carter; and his voice was soft and almost pleasant.

"Why not?" asked the Kid. "The critter's mine, and I'm sure going to take him back to the shebang yonder."

"I guess not," smiled Carter.

"But afore I go," continued the Kid, "I'd be powerful glad if some guy would tell me who cinched my hoss? I sure want to kick that hoss thief across the plaza."

"I guess you don't want to hoof it a long way to find that galoot," said Cactus Carter.

"Mebbe it was!"

"Mebbe it was."

"You look the sort of dog-goned, pizen skunk that would steal a hoss," remarked the Kid, in a casual tone. "I guess in any other burg you'd have been strung up, Mr. Carter, jest on your looks."

There was a buzz in the crowd, and the gunman caught his breath. It was the first time, since Cactus Carter had been king-pin in Plug Hat, that he had been talked to like this.

The hardening of his face, the glint-

ing of his eyes, warned the Kid, used to such signs, that he was about to draw. But the Kid drawled cheerily:

"Yep! I'll say you look a born lobo-wolf, Mr. Carter, and I guess I needn't look any farther for a hoss thief. I don't stand for hoss stealin', Mr. Carter. You get down off'n that cask and I'll boot you across the plaza, jest like I said! You sure ain't worth dirtyin' a cowman's boots on! But you got to learn to keep your thievin' hands off my hoss!"

Like lightning the gunman's hand moved.

But swift as he was the Kid was swifter. Cactus Carter's gun was out of the holster; but the Kid's Colt was looking him in the face before his hand could rise.

The Kid did not speak; but his eyes gleamed over his gun, and Cactus Carter kept his hand down.

Had he lifted it, he knew that a bullet would have crashed through his brain before he could fire.

Cactus Carter, who had never been beaten to the draw before, knew when he had met his master. His face whitened, not with fear, but with deadly rage; his eyes scintillated at the Kid. But he kept his hand, with the gun in it, down at his side.

There was a gasping of deep-drawn breath in the Plug Hat crowd. Cactus Carter was standing helpless under a gun—the first time any eye in Plug Hat had seen such a sight. For a second or two there was no sound but that startled gasp from the watching crowd.

"Drop that gun!"

The Kid spoke suddenly, sharply.

The gun crashed to the ground beside the cask. The Kid uttered no threat; the threat was in his eyes, and his levelled Colt. Cactus Carter's life hung on a thread; and life was dear.

He still remained calm; only the pallor of his face, the burning of his eyes betraying his deadly rage. Why the Kid did not shoot was a mystery to the staring onlookers, for by the law of the Colt—the only law in that lawless cow-town—he was entitled to shoot his enemy dead as soon as he made a motion towards a gun. But the Rio Kid had his own ways, and they were not the ways of Plug Hat.

"Now the other," said the Kid.

Cactus Carter, in silence, lifted his other gun from the holster, and dropped it to the ground. The action was watched in awed silence by a hundred pairs of eyes.

"That sure is sense," remarked the Kid pleasantly. "You're a good little man, Mister Carter, and you know how to do as you're told. I ain't got no hunch to spill your juice, so long as you behave."

Cactus Carter drew a hissing breath. "Now hump down off'n that cask," said the Kid. "I ain't going to spill your juice, feller, if you don't make

(Continued on page 11.)

That Mad Drive!

THE blue shape of the hurtling Connaught split the greyness of the road like an azure streak. Behind the wheel Jack sat, with his foot hard down on the throttle pedal, Cope at his side with his injured arm wrapped about in cloths to protect it.

Fifty miles lay behind them, and Jack had driven faultlessly, never losing a second. Cope had worked out how much time they had for the journey, and Jack now knew that half a minute's delay would make them miss the boat they were trying to catch, and on which they now intended to ship the entire car.

They had one hundred miles still to travel, and a shade over two hours in which to do the distance. Already Jack was handling the machine as though he had been born driving it. He had forgotten the faint nervousness with which he had started.

The fierce crackle of the exhaust, the booming of the engine, and the shrill whine of the supercharger were music which spurred him on. They had no hooter, but the noise that the racing machine made was more than sufficient warning at cross-roads.

They overhauled fast traffic as though it were standing still. Jack took curves wide, hugging the side of the road, and they were travelling at something very close to 100 m.p.h. when they plunged over the Welsh border.

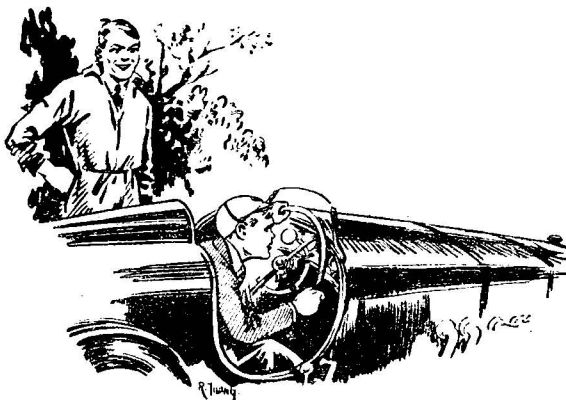
They cleared the wild hills of Bettys-Coed, and Cope guided Jack over a short cut that missed Bangor and brought them to Menai Bridge—with twenty-five miles to go and twenty minutes in which to do the distance.

"Kick her wide open, or we miss the boat!" Cope yelled.

"All right!" was Jack's answer, and his goggled gaze bored past the windshield as he watched the straight road.

They were doing a hundred again before he reached the end of the straight,

IT'S JACK KING'S AMBITION TO GET INTO A MOTOR WORKS AND BECOME A PUKKAH RACING "CRACK." YOU'VE READ HOW HE CAN HANDLE A CAR.—THE POINT IS, WILL HE GET A CHANCE OF DRIVING A RACER ON THE SPEEDWAY?



SEE

"JACK KING—SKID KID!"

By ALFRED EDGAR,

next week's tale of smashing motor-racing adventure, featuring our schoolboy speed merchant!

and saw an empty-looking village ahead. He hurtled through it, and braked madly for a bend, changing down. Screaming in gear, the car spun around it, then opened up once more along another straight.

Faster and faster yet they travelled. They passed the hundred miles-an-hour mark and flung without easing their speed into a long curve. They were almost clear of it when Cope let out a yell:

"Level crossing!"

It showed in front—white gates closed across the road! And Jack saw a train bearing down! The crossing was fifty yards ahead.

Jack's right foot stamped the throttle pedal full down to the floorboards. Cope ducked in his seat. Jack huddled down and held the car like a projectile for the gates. They came at him like a

white screen. He tightened his grip on the wheel, and set his teeth as he saw the train almost entering the crossing.

There was the fraction of a second of suspense, then the blue Connaught hit the barrier in the very centre. Woodwork splintered and flew out. The car leaped high—and hurtled on!

Jack saw the buffers of the locomotive level with his head. He saw the smoke-box, its pounding drivers, the clattering bogey-wheels—and the other gates opposite.

The engine was on them. It seemed as though it must strike the car and grind it to debris under its steel-flanged wheels—then they were past it, the second gate was shattering as though it was made of cardboard.

The car ripped through, skidded, straightened under Jack's quick hands, and plunged on with the throttle kicked wide open.

Behind them, broken woodwork was still flying about the crossing.

"After that, we ought to catch the boat!" Cope panted.

And they did!

The following day Jack learned that No. 1 car in the Connaught team had won the Ulster Grand Prix—and that Phil Hartz had finished nowhere.

He sat with the paper before him, picturing the scene as the winning machine raced home—and he reminded himself that he had helped the car to victory with the spare supercharger from the machine he had driven.

"Cope told me that even Mr. Franklin himself couldn't have handled the car better than I did," he murmured. "And he said I must have plenty of nerve, the way I split those gates. Well, that settles it! I'm going to make dad get me a job in a motor works, and I'm going to be a racing driver. I don't know how I'll wangle it—but I'm going to do it!"

THE END.

A ROUGH HOUSE IN PLUG HAT!

(Continued from page 6.)

me; but if you don't jump to do as you're told, you're a dead horse thief. You get me?"

Cactus Carter, still in dead silence, stepped down from his rostrum.

"Now let that hoss loose."

For a second the gunman hesitated. The eyes of all Plug Hat were on him, breathlessly. On more than one face there was a mocking look. Men who had trembled at a glance from the ice-cold eyes, were grinning now.

The bitter humiliation of his defeat, of obeying the orders of the boy puncher, was almost too much for the desperado. But he read death in the clear, steady eyes of the Rio Kid, and his hesitation was brief.

He cast loose the mustang.

"Gents," said the Kid amiably, with

a glance at the staring faces round him, "I'm powerful sorry to spoil your fun, but this sale's off, like I told you. I ain't come to Plug Hat huntin' for trouble, but I don't stand for horse-stealin', and I'm sure going to boot Mr. Carter across the plaza, like I said, jest to warn him to keep his thievin' hands off a guy's cayuse."

He made a stride at the gunman.

With his left hand, the revolver in his right, the Kid grasped Cactus Carter and spun him round.

Crash!

There was a yell from the gunman, and a roar of laughter from the crowd as the cowpuncher's heavy boot landed on Cactus Carter.

The gunman staggered away.

The Kid followed him, and his boot crashed again, and yet again, till the gunman, panting, desperate, fairly took to his heels, and fled across the plaza.

The Kid, with a smile holstered his gun, and leaped on the back of Side-Kicker. No man in Plug Hat was disposed to contest with him the owner-

ship of the grey mustang, since the defeat of Cactus Carter.

"Say, Kid!" called out Colorado Bill. The burly cowman seemed to have forgotten his own defeat, in his admiration for the puncher who had beaten Cactus Carter to the draw. "Say, you want to hit the trail afore Cactus gets hold of a gun agin! Say, you want to ride, puncher!"

The Kid laughed.

"I guess I ain't hitting the trail a whole lot," he said. "I'm sure stopping a piece in this hyer burg. If Cactus wants me agin, he will sure find me to home."

With a clatter of hoofs and a jingle of spurs the Rio Kid dashed away down the street towards the lumber hotel. He left the crowd in a buzz behind him. It was the biggest excitement that had ever struck the cowtown. And before the sun had set, on every lip was the name of "Texas Brown," the stranger in Plug Hat.

THE END.

THE POPULAR.—No. 600.