

## **50 MPH: EPISODE 1**

### **“GETTING UP TO... SPEED”**

Transcript (00:19:39)



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#### **KRIS TAPLEY**

You're listening to *50 MPH*, an oral history of the making and legacy of director Jan de Bont's 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*.

#### **[INTRO MUSIC]**

#### **DENNIS HOPPER (as Howard Payne)**

Pop quiz, hot shot!

#### **DENNIS HOPPER (as Howard Payne)**

There's a bomb on a bus.

#### **JEFF DANIELS (as Harry Temple)**

You're deeply nuts, you know that?

#### **DENNIS HOPPER (as Howard Payne)**

Once the bus goes fifty miles an hour, the bomb is armed.

#### **SANDRA BULLOCK (as Annie)**

Stay on or get off?

#### **DENNIS HOPPER (as Howard Payne)**

If it drops below fifty...

#### **SANDRA BULLOCK (as Annie)**

Stay on or get off?!

#### **DENNIS HOPPER (as Howard Payne)**

...it blows up.

#### **ALAN RUCK (as Stephens)**

Oh, darn.

#### **DENNIS HOPPER (as Howard Payne)**

What do you do?

**KEANU REEVES (as Jack Traven)**

You have a hair trigger aimed at your head. What do you do?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as Howard Payne)**

What do you do?!

**KEANU REEVES (as Jack Traven)**

What do you do?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I'm your host, Kris Tapley, and across 50 episodes I'm going to take you on a breakneck journey from conception to execution, distribution and beyond — with the occasional detour here and there. Join me as I talk to the people who made it happen and discuss their memories of an electrifying thrill ride that defied expectations and became a global, star-making phenomenon. Through conversations with filmmakers, film scholars and film fans, I'll attempt to secure *Speed's* rightful place in the canon of action cinema on the way to celebrating its fast-approaching 30th anniversary in style. Now, don't forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let's hit the road!

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That is it. That is the mission statement of this project and I am indeed the guy who's going to drag you through it. My name is Kris Tapley and this is a podcast dedicated to an enduring action movie classic. Settle in and let me try to explain just what the hell you're listening to. OK, for the youth, in 1994 there was a movie called *Speed* and it ruled. It starred Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock before they were superstars and it had an explosive premise that lured audiences into theaters. You just heard it in the intro, but let's recap.

**SOUND: CLIP FROM *SPEED*:**

**DENNIS HOPPER (as Howard Payne)**

There's a bomb on a bus. Once the bus goes 50 miles an hour, the bomb is armed. If it drops below 50, it blows up.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Get used to that soundbite, by the way. You're probably gonna hear that a lot. So, June 10, 1994. A workhorse city bus tearing ass across Los Angeles. That's what launched the summer movie season that year. It was the epitome of the popcorn movie and I am obsessed with it. So, who am I? You might as well know. I am a longtime - too long - film journalist and writer in Los Angeles. You may have seen my stuff at *Variety* where I was formerly the awards editor and host of the film section's *Playback* podcast. You might also have come across my byline at the now defunct HitFix.com, where I served as editor-at-large and co-hosted the *Oscar Talk* podcast with *IndieWire's* Anne Thompson. At both *Variety* and *HitFix*, I headed up my own "In Contention" banner, which was an all-too-deep exploration and examination of the annual awards season for 15 years. And I also hosted the behind-the-scenes podcast *The Call Sheet* for Netflix.

All of that to say, talking to filmmakers and movie folks about their work has been my lane for the better part of two decades, and that's exactly what we're going to get up to around these parts for the next year.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

And, yes, I would say I'm entrenched in the fandom of certain movies just like anyone else. *Ghostbusters*, *Batman*, *Heat*, the usual. But *Speed* is very much up there. Here's my quick story. Tommy Willmont spoiled *Speed* for me at baseball practice. It would have been sometime in June, probably, of 1994. I was 12 years old. I remember we were over near the first-base line warming up or something and he says, "I saw *Speed*. Dennis Hopper gets his head knocked off at the end!" First of all, just think about that. You'd lose your shit if someone was like, "Dude, I saw *The Avengers*. Tony Stark dies at the end!" Like, before you saw it? Or anything like this. That's a pretty massive example but spoiler culture just wasn't a thing for me so I was just all the more pumped about seeing the movie. I knew *Speed* was coming. The TV spots were everywhere. That premise was out there doing a lot of legwork. I liked Keanu Reeves a lot. I was a big Point Break fan. And he had a new look here, which was interesting. Dennis Hopper was the bad guy. I don't think I had had that particular awakening yet with *Apocalypse Now* and *Blue Velvet* and whatnot. Honestly, he was probably King Koopa to me at that point. And no one really knew who Sandra Bullock. But I was into it. And I was even more into it after baseball practice that day.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

I saw the movie with, I think, my dad shortly after that. And I loved it. I wasn't a big movie-goer before that. I was, like, one movie a year in the theater, that guy. I saw most movies for the first time on HBO, honestly, which we got for free for several years because the cable guy screwed. Those were the days. And there was actually a program called *HBO First Look*. It was a behind-the-scenes show that took you into the making of a movie for about 25 minutes. I didn't really come up reading *Starlog* magazine and things like that to peek behind the curtain of moviemaking. It was stuff like *HBO First Look*, really, and the episode on *Speed* really grabbed me because I had just seen the movie and I was like, "Oh, they had 11 buses or whatever and they all did different things depending on the stunt. Cool." That was the first year I remember going to the theater over and over again, and so *Speed* is just kind of that movie for me that made me curious about the filmmaking process. I guess that kind of thing never leaves you. It's a different movie for different people for different reasons. And regardless of my personal connection and affinity to this movie, I just think it deserves a little more love, a little more acknowledgment as part of the canon. Movies like *Die Hard* and *Terminator 2* enjoy agreed-upon status, and yeah, I said it. *Speed* needs to enter the chat. And so this is in part an effort to just wave the flag for a movie I love.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Alright, so, who is this for? Well, if you're a *Speed* fan, obviously you're going to be in heaven. If you like action movies and maybe you're a little uninspired by the contemporary landscape, or maybe not, this is way up your alley. If you are like me and you are hopelessly stuck in the '90s and it's just a straight-up affliction, welcome home.

You found your people. If you're interested in the filmmaking process and want to hear more about movie magic and all of that, you're going to get a boatload of that here. The typical order of business will be the minutiae of the making of this movie, not least of all because I'm a fan, but also, *Speed* is frankly a really good specimen to look at from all angles, not just what's on the screen.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

The TV writer with a high-concept idea and a dream. The hungry young producer eager for that first home run. The executives at two major Hollywood studios who developed the project for years. The cinematographer turned first-time director who had for a decade helped establish the Hollywood landscape he was about to shake up. His extraordinary department heads. His Oscar-nominated film editor. His Oscar-winning sound team. His computer- and practical-effects masterminds. The stars who made the film pop right off of the screen. The troupe of character actors who filled out that bus, who filled out that elevator. The marketing mavens who sold the movie to the world and turned it into a global sensation - and a shocking one at that. The people inspired and enthralled by *Speed* to this day, from film critics to film fans to filmmakers. We'll talk to all of them. Suffice it to say, this podcast has you covered where this movie is concerned.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Now, we're launching today, June 12, 2023, two days after the 29th anniversary of *Speed*. This is the plan: 50 episodes, one a week, save for a couple of holiday breaks. All of it leading up to the film's 30th anniversary next year on June 10, 2024. 50 episodes. 50 MPH. Get it? It will unfold as an oral history, a sort of chronological account of the film's conception, making, release, etc. I've interviewed more than 80 people for this project, copious hours with cast and crew members. Their stories will carry us through for the most part, but along the way, we're going to take a few "detours," as I've taken to calling them. Whether it's establishing the major players with special episodes dedicated to their dissection with top film critics and journalists, or interviewing authors with a dedicated lens on this subject matter, or just having a laugh examining the overall landscape into which *Speed* was born. It is... a lot. But it is also a blast, so hopefully that enthusiasm will translate and you will enjoy taking this ride with me. Because once we hit 50, it's over. That's right. It's a ticking clock. We have an expiration date. This will be a contained endeavor. So, let's live in the moment, shall we, folks?

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

You know, a lot of people had "pandemic projects," things that kept them busy or that they sort of forged out of the socially traumatizing era that we're slowly coming out of. Whether it was baking bread, learning to use nunchucks, starting a business, writing that screenplay, finally reading *Ulysses* or *Moby Dick*, building that...whatever it was. Everybody had their thing. I didn't realize it at the time but I guess this ended up being my pandemic coping device. And I'll get into all of that some other time, but, again, I hope you enjoy it.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

And by the way, I mentioned Tim Burton's *Batman* a minute ago. I can't help but note that this podcast is premiering the very same week that Michael Keaton returns to that role in Andy Muschietti's *The Flash*. That movie, *Batman*, was a big one for me and obviously a lot of people my age, and we're all cruising through our 40s now getting our turn at the nostalgia trough. But you can't help but look around and wonder what we're reconciling as of late with these reprises, because this stuff is clearly in the water. Michael Keaton returning to the cowl 35 years later. Tom Cruise returning to the cockpit 35 years later. What they did with *Spider-Man: No Way Home* was kind of amazing, bridging a couple of eras with a story that just made that work for it. It's just interesting to see how things as disparate as multiverse storytelling and sturdy pop culture character excavations are being leveraged to squeeze every last drop out of these memories before we're so far over the hill, we finally start looking ahead. So, yes, to an extent, like everything else, this is an overt exercise in nostalgia for me. But I hope it rises just a little bit above that and, if nothing else, helps you kill a half-hour or so every week.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

You can reach me any time, by the way. Send me a line, maybe we'll read some stuff on the show. I'm at kris@50mphpodcast.com. That's Kris with a K: K-R-I-S @ 5-0 podcast.com That's obviously our website, where you can get all our episodes and more. And we're also over on Twitter @50MPHPod. Oh, and I would suggest, obviously, if you plan to listen to this, you should see *Speed*. If you've never seen it, I will straight-up buy you a copy. But, as of today, anyway, it's streaming over on Hulu, so you can watch it there any time. And if you've seen it, it's never a bad time to revisit it. So, I'd also suggest you go back. Let's call that the homework this week. Watch *Speed*. There are far worse ways to spend two hours.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

OK, with that long preamble out of the way, I'm going to bow out with a collection of what you can expect on the podcast. Next week we'll christen the proceedings with *Los Angeles Times* film critic Justin Chang and a long overview of *Speed*, which you're not going to want to miss. That should be a great way to break the champagne on the hull of this thing. After that, we'll be here every Monday digging into a new facet of *Speed*. So, set an alarm, and don't miss the bus.

## **GRAHAM YOST**

And then I said, you know, I've got this idea about this bomb on a bus.

## **[OUTRO MUSIC]**

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

Coming soon on 50 MPH!

## **JOHN WRIGHT**

The thing that amazed me is how little faith Fox had in that movie.

**MARK GORDON**

You know, I read the script and I was just floored by the way Graham wrote action.

**ALLISON LYON**

We sent out the script, you know, to different studios, and people were, like, “What are you thinking?”

**RISA BRAMON GARCIA**

In the audition, it was magic between them. There was no question. And then it was, like, the fight to make it happen.

**SANDRA BULLOCK**

I think we were sort of ridiculed a little bit for, you know, the low-budget bomb-on-the-bus movie. You know, not that I cared. Not that I cared. Again, I was just so happy to have a job.

**JAN DE BONT**

I thought he was a very unlikely action hero, somebody who just happens to run into it and has to deal with it.

**KEANU REEVES**

Jan always gave us so many things to react to. Like, there was a bus that would lean over. There was a day when we were crashing through cars.

**JEFF DANIELS**

It was a job. The career was floundering and I just told the agent, “I need something.” And, you know, next thing I know I’m wearing SWAT gear and bursting into a building. I’m going, “I don’t know what I’m doing, but here I am.”

**MARK HARRIS**

He has over 200 credits. It’s a really interesting indication of how many different worlds he lived in.

**JOE MORTON**

The joke I used to tell about this movie was that people would say, “Well, what did you do in the film?” And I said, “Basically what I did in the film was, ‘Jaaaaaaaack!’”

**GLENN PLUMMER**

He gave me a tip on a joke. I played the dialogue the way he said play it, and it was the funniest part in the whole God damn movie when I told Keanu to take that phone. I said, “Take the phone.” That was Jan!

**DAVE DRZEWIECKI**

His success as a cinematographer, then his success as a director, I would totally call him an auteur.

**JOHN FRAZIER**

Every page, you'd earmark the page because there was something there for you. You know, you'd turn the page and then it says, "The bus does this." And it was like, "Boy, this is going to be a ride."

**BOYD SHERMIS**

You had to really think hard about how you were going to do this stuff. These days it's sort of lost the charm of the challenge of, you know, laying awake at night and trying to figure out a way of, "How am I going to do this?"

**JACKSON DE GOVIA**

There's a gut-level artistry. You know, it was just - it was a peak.

**MARK MANCINA**

The first thing I came up with was the little bit, the "bum-bum-bum-bum-bum-bum," like a little tag that just sounded like the bus racing through the town.

**GREGG LANDAKER**

He says, "We've got 21 days total all in." And I went, "Ugh, man, what I'm seeing as far as sound effects-wise in this movie? How are we going to do it?"

**BOYD SHERMIS**

We didn't have time to do anything. We were working seven days a week around the clock, quite literally.

**RON BRINKMANN**

I guess you'd call it old-school filmmaking, before you did everything digital but after you could do some things digital, so it was kind of a fun little mix of it.

**K.C. FOX**

The security guy came out and said, you know, "You guys are going to be shooting in the bravo tango area. That means if we get a bomb threat, you have to vacate the area."

**JOHN FRAZIER**

It was, like, "Abort! Abort! Abort!" She was 10 feet, 15 feet from being toast.

**JULIA VERA**

Some of these things were so realistic to us because we had not been told what was coming up next.

**ALAN RUCK**

We had the whole 105 freeway as our backlot because the Department of Motor Vehicles hadn't opened it yet, and so Fox made an arrangement with them and we had it for like a month.

**GLENN PLUMMER**

The first thing they told Keanu not to do was jump to the bus. “Don’t jump to the bus.” First thing he did was jump to the bus.

**GARY HYMES**

There was another moment with Keanu and, you know, he just looks at me and he goes, “I don’t think I can do this, Gary.”

**PATRICK FISCHLER**

They were really pulling us through this small space. That’s the kind of stuff that Jan does is he creates an adrenaline that is real.

**SIMONE GAD**

Well, we did do our own stunts because we had to walk this tiny little plank from the bus to another area and it was very dangerous.

**JACKSON DE GOVIA**

No, I don’t think you should take those risks. It’s like rodeo, you know? You’re dealing with something where people can get hurt.

**MARK GORDON**

I don’t take anything away from him as a filmmaker on that movie, I just thought he was an asshole.

**CARLOS CARRASCO**

That’s like a stupid thing to do. That kind of demeans the whole character, or lessens him, but, you know, I didn’t have the real estate, you know, to face off with Jan and go, “Well, my character wouldn’t do that.”

**BETH GRANT**

I did not like my character. I was glad she died. All she did was care about herself and whine. “What about the rest of us? What about the rest of us?” I mean...

**PAUL ATTANASIO**

It really put the doctor in script doctor. I would come in and I would be like, “Here’s where it hurts.”

**JORGE SARALEGUI**

He made the script clearly worse. You know, just thinking about it infuriates me.

**LAURIE MACDONALD**

It’s very tough, once the basic story has been laid out, to get that credit.



**PAUL VERHOEVEN**

I was there at the premiere of *Speed* and I was sitting next to him and I remember I was stunned, basically, by how good it was.

**GUILLERMO DEL TORO**

I think *Speed* is one of these perfect perpetual movement machines. A brilliant exercise in action film. There's a very peculiar and meticulous planning in this.

**BILGE EBIRI**

He becomes one of these filmmakers who, like, doesn't mind danger on set.

**ALEX PAPPADEMAS**

You can see movies exploring what the future of screen masculinity is going to be through the way that Keanu is used in this movie.

**KATE ERBLAND**

And then all of a sudden it's like, she's a movie star. She's like a fully-formed movie star.

**MARK HARRIS**

*Speed* is just so much fun to watch. It's such a pleasure to see it unfold. It's so economical.

**NICK DE SEMLYEN**

It just moves and moves and it's so clever and nimbly plotted.

**KEANU REEVES**

It feels like that came from a more innocent time.

**BOB HOFFMAN**

You're talking about a film that dramatically overachieved.

**BILL MECHANIC**

It's genre picture, but it's not like anything else that existed at the time. Just like *Die Hard* in its day was a different type of action picture. And they have longevity because they're unique.

**BETH GRANT**

It is a hugely iconic movie. I mean, it just is.

**JOSS WHEDON**

*Speed* is, I think, with *Die Hard*, the sea change.

**ALEX PAPPADEMAS**

I remember this being — I couldn't breathe while I was watching this movie because it was so fast and so intense and so just didn't let up.

**IAN FAILES**

And I just thought, immediately after seeing it, that it was a perfect film. I couldn't believe it worked as a film.

**JOE MORTON**

It is very simple but it just works from beginning to end.

**GUILLERMO DEL TORO**

I think *Speed* is right up there. Top 10 action movies, as we understand them.

**JUSTIN CHANG**

As I was just watching it, there was always this sense of, like, "Oh, this camera is just in the right place the whole time in this movie." Every moment of it feels real.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

All of that and more, 50 weeks, 50 episodes on *50 MPH*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Thanks so much for listening. 50 MPH is written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I'm @kristapley. That's Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website [50mphpodcast.com](http://50mphpodcast.com). If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We'll see you next time.