

50 MPH: EPISODE 21

“HELL ON WHEELS (THE BUS: PART 1)”

Transcript (01:26:45)



KRIS TAPLEY

This is *50 MPH*!

[INTRO MUSIC]

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Pop quiz, hotshot!

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 you’re listening to an oral history of director Jan de Bont’s 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*, straight from the people who made it happen. Now, don’t forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let’s hit the road!

KRIS TAPLEY

Get in here, folks. We’re about to go for a ride. Today we’re finally going to launch into the production phase of *Speed*. First, however, there are a couple of people that I should really introduce and I just haven’t known where to bring them in. This feels like as good a place as any, so let’s quickly meet the other key members of Jack Traven and Harry Temple’s LAPD SWAT squad. I’m of course talking about, first and foremost, Lieutenant McMahon – oddly credited as Captain McMahon, though Jack calls him “Lieutenant” in the film – played by the great Joe Morton. There’s his right-hand man Norwood, played by Richard Lineback. And then there’s Robin, Harry’s cohort back at the police station, played by Margaret Medina. Let’s get these introductions knocked out so we’ve got them in the mix, and we’ll hear more from them as we go. We’ll start with the team leader, Joe Morton, a very recognizable film, TV and theater actor with 50 years in the business. You’ve seen him in movies like *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *Executive Decision*, *Ali* and *Justice League*, as well as series like *Eureka*, *Proof*, and most notably, *Scandal*, for which he won an Emmy Award. On stage, Joe debuted on Broadway in *Hair* way back in 1968 and landed a Tony nomination for *Raisin* in 1974. As you talk to people about Joe, you hear the words “consummate professional” uttered quite a lot, and he certainly brings plenty of gravitas to a movie like *Speed*. So, here’s Joe Morton talking about building his character in film.

JOE MORTON

I think *Speed* came to me because, maybe, *Terminator 2*. The interesting thing was the guys who ended up training me for *Speed*, in terms of being that particular SWAT guy, were the same guys who shot me in *Terminator 2*. My question to them really, pretty much, was – because I looked up SWAT teams – there was no Black lieutenant of any particular SWAT team anywhere in the United States. I mean, in putting together my own sort of story in terms of how this guy got where he got, and basically, he’s kind of like a Colin Powell where he was kind of speed-bumped through it and became a lieutenant, which was unusual even in itself. He was under a great deal of pressure to make sure that this kind of comes off in a positive way, because he was a first, if you will. I mean, that’s how I kept thinking of him, is he was the first Black guy to be a lieutenant of a SWAT team. The relationship between the Black community and the

police, even back then, was horrible. But I think I was just – I was looking to sort of pile up more positive images for, you know, Black characters in film. This was one of them. He was, you know, not just in charge, but he was a nice guy. He hung out with his, you know, fellow officers, etc., etc. So, that's kind of what drew me to it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Next up is Richard Lineback, who we heard from briefly last week. Not unlike Joe, Richard goes way back in the business, to TV appearances in *The Love Boat*, *The Waltons* and *M*A*S*H* in the '70s; *MacGyver*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Hunter* in the '80s; and *China Beach* and *NYPD Blue* in the '90s. He moved into movies more with *Speed* and *Natural Born Killers*, both in 1994, and later showed up in *Twister*, *Tin Cup* (a personal favorite) and *Varsity Blues*, among others. Here's Richard talking about joining the SWAT team for *Speed*.

RICHARD LINEBACK

It was the first movie, actually, that I was hired for the whole movie. So, it was my first, as they call it, run-of-the-film movie. So, that was very exciting in itself. You never knew what you were going to do. And, of course, you have to be very malleable in being able to change scenes, because you're also dependent – I think everything was pretty much on location, at least the stuff that I did. So, if you're on location and you're shooting in Los Angeles, you never know what you're going to be able to do, or all of a sudden, you know, the location might not be available. You had a call sheet and everything, but you never knew how it was really going to go down and that was always exciting.

KRIS TAPLEY

And finally, Margaret Medina, or Peggy, as she's known. Margaret appeared in Dennis Hopper's *Colors* and Joel Schumacher's *Falling Down* before landing a role in *Speed* that was actually written for her. I need to lay some groundwork here. You know the stuff about the actors on the bus having those backstories that were eventually weeded out? One of them, Carlos Carrasco, plays a construction worker named Ortiz and he had this whole bit at the beginning when we meet him where he has this hot young wife. And I guess that was sort of supposed to be the joke, that this big, lumbering, older guy had this stunning young bride at home. Anyway, Margaret actually came in to audition for that role, which was originally featured in two scenes.

MARGARET MEDINA

I auditioned for Billy Hopkins, this casting director, and my agent said, "Please come in as white trash." And I was like, "What? I'm Latina. I mean, I'm not white trash. Clearly, this is a Latina face." And I was like, "OK, whatever." So, I wore white pumps with bows on them and then, like, these jeans that were, I don't know, just raggedy. And then the scene was where I had to seduce Carlos to come back for a quicky. Like, "Oh, honey, don't go to work today. Come back. La la la la la la la la." Then I had to go do the other scene, where they said, "Your husband is on that bus." And it was like, "Oh my God, he went to work this morning and that was the last time I saw him."

KRIS TAPLEY

The point with that second scene, by the way, is the character is being interviewed by a TV news crew. Anyway, after that, the casting directors and Mark Gordon led Margaret through an improv where she was a passenger on an elevator that suddenly dropped. So, if you've been paying attention given what some of the bus passenger folks said, with these secondary roles, they were also trying these actors out for potential elevator passengers in the opening sequence. Anyway, Margaret must have impressed them with her authoritative vibe in that improv. I'll let her explain.

MARGARET MEDINA

And so, then I didn't hear anything, didn't hear anything, and then my agent calls and says, "Guess what? You got that part in that movie *Speed*, that movie about the bomb on the bus." And I was like, "Oh my God, how silly. It's just going to be a silly, like, summer thing, whatever." And I go, "OK, great." And he's like, "But they wrote a part for you. They want you to be Jeff Daniels' partner. They want you to be a SWAT cop." I guess I showed, you know, cop mentality by taking charge. But it was great. It was great working with Jeff. He was really sweet and quiet. I was always in awe of him because he was a great actor in *Terms of Endearment*. I had a big crush on him. And he worked with, you know, Circle in the Square, a prominent theater actor and, you know, I come from theater, too. And he just was really focused and centered.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alright, again, I just couldn't figure out where to finally introduce that trio. But we've met them now, and we're off to make this movie. We're mostly going to be hearing from the crew today and for the next few weeks as we get into the practical applications of special effects and stunts and just the overall hell-on-wheels vibe of this production. This will be done in sections. Today's episode, sort of "The Bus: Part 1," will focus on all the bus material leading up to the big jump scene where Bus 2525 soars over a gap in the freeway. So, that's the first bus exploding, Jack commandeering a Jaguar, catching up to Bus 2525, jumping onto the bus, keeping that thing over 50 as it tears through city streets on the way to the 105 freeway. Next week's episode will be a deep-dive focus on the jump sequence itself, because who doesn't love a good action set piece? Then we'll move on to the airport, "The Bus: Part 2," if you will. That's Jack going under the bus, Harry getting blown away on the north side of the airport and, eventually, the bus's fiery demise. And then, we'll have two episodes centered on the elevator sequence and the subway sequence, respectively. After that, you'll know more about the making of *Speed* than you ever imagined. So, let's get into it. I'm going to throw a lot of stuff at you here but I know by now you can handle it. Now, what's the central feature here? A bus. Here's director Jan de Bont. He's talking about *Die Hard* at the beginning here, which, remember, he was the cinematographer on that film.

JAN DE BONT

On *Die Hard*, the building becomes the character as well, so it's not only the actors, good against bad. No, it's the whole building. And later, in *Twister*, it's nature. And in *Speed*, it's the bus. That bus is a character in the movie and you want to make it a character and I made a big effort to make it a character, and that's the reason why I wanted so many buses. I mean, like, to start with, I think we had 11 or 12 buses,

because I knew they were going to get hurt, and I still wanted them to look good at times.

KRIS TAPLEY

Let's pause right there. Yes, multiple buses were used to shoot this movie. That's not one bus you're watching the whole time. They had different ones tricked out for different stunts and purposes. This aspect was one of the first "how they made it" moviemaking things I remember discovering as a kid, which is just one of a few reasons this movie is so dear to me. Now, I've never gotten a definitive number of how many buses were used in this film. I'm sure I could sit and figure it out but I eventually got to the point with these interviews of treating it like a game to see how many different numbers I could get. I mean...

JOHN FRAZIER

You know, we had 10 buses.

ANDRZEJ BARTKOWIAK

We had nine buses that were designed for different things.

IAN BRYCE

X number of buses. I can't remember how many there were, like, six or something like that.

JULIA VERA

There were 11 buses involved in this.

ALAN RUCK

They had at least half a dozen different buses.

SONIA JACKSON

There were like 12, 13, 17 buses or something.

K.C. FOX

I know they said six or eight buses. I thought it was even more.

DAVID SARDI

I have a pretty clear memory of 15. It was right around there. It was way more than eight buses, for sure. That number's way too low.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alright, let's assume John Frazier, the special effects coordinator tasked with rigging and outfitting these buses has the clearest idea on the number. He said 10 at the top. I'll go ahead and have him walk us through the various usages.

JOHN FRAZIER

I'd have to think about what they all did, but it seems like the more we talk I go, "Oh, yeah, that was a bus. And that was a bus." Because the buses were cheap, but the time wasn't cheap. There was no changeovers or anything. When we went from one to another, it was just, drive the other bus in. They were all in my shop there at Experts in Sun Valley. We had them stashed everywhere. And all the buses did something different. The jump bus was set up just for the jump. And then we had one bus that we took the motor out of the back, and we put a Chevrolet motor inside on top, and then it was chain-drive on the side. Now, the reason for that was, we could raise that bus up underneath it almost two feet. The outside was the same, but we could lift the bus up to two feet high when Keanu was underneath it. The back end was hinged, and it was rubber, and it could flop open. And the front end was hinged, when we were doing the outside stuff. So, he could literally just float right underneath the bus and go out. It could suck him in and spit him right out the back. So, there was that bus, and then we had a bus that would, when he turned that corner and it went up on two wheels. That's another bus. Oh my God. Oh, yeah, we had the Popemobile. We called it the Popemobile. It was a Plexiglass box in front of the bus, and then we took the front of the bus off and the camera crew would get on this platform, which was the width of the bus and it was about eight feet long, maybe. But it was all Plexiglass. So, you got all natural sun inside the bus while they were shooting. Then we had another bus that you could literally drive from any position in the bus. We had a pod, like, with a seat, and depending on which way Jan was shooting, then we would just take the pod and move the pod to the other side of the bus. And then somebody else would drive the bus that day. We'd plug it in, wherever we would go. We had five or six different spots that we could just plug it into. And when they were doing shots from the outside looking in the bus, we couldn't have her driving the bus, so just somebody else, some ND guy was driving the bus from a different spot in the bus. There's no cables. It's all hydraulic. The steering was hydraulic. The brakes were hydraulic. The gas pedal, which was diesel fuel, was all – that's just a fuel line. Then, of course, we had the bus that, you know, that blew up. That was a special bus.

KRIS TAPLEY

Clearly, it was an undertaking. And I think he might have even missed a couple. Here's unit production manager Ian Bryce.

IAN BRYCE

There's a lot of people who do great work in mechanical special effects, and I think John has always been a pioneer and on the leading edge of figuring out how to make things big, but do it within, like, budgetary reason. Like, he was always great about that and, you know, that's why we've done so many movies together, because we're part of a team, right? And we all speak the same language and we all try to know what the director wants and how to try to give it to them or give them options and keep it in a budget box.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, how did they get ahold of all of these buses? After all, these things weren't in service at the time. They just had a look that Jan and production designer Jackson De

Govia liked, a quote, “rugged workhorse on the cusp of obsolescence,” as you’ll recall Jack saying. Let’s go back to Ian.

IAN BRYCE

We found this guy called Bus Bill, who literally just passed away last month, unfortunately. And, yeah, he wasn’t in the movie business, right? He was, like, a bus guy. But he had all these buses, and so Randy went and worked out all this deal stuff with Bus Bill.

KRIS TAPLEY

This is where transportation coordinator Randy Peters comes back into play. We’ve heard from him a couple of times now. Here’s his story of tracking down these buses, and you’ll hear in here the little-known fact that the buses that were outfitted for stunts were actually five feet shorter than the ones that were used for everything else that didn’t involve vehicular chaos, let’s say.

RANDY PETERS

I sent one of my captains over to Santa Monica bus, you know, the transit, to just kind of get some research, because we didn’t have that many guys working on movies like we do now and transportation was kind of, really, me and, you know, that was it. So, he comes back with a card from Bill Barillaro. You know, it sits on my desk for a couple weeks or something and finally I’m, like, getting desperate about buses, so I call. I had already been to A-Z Bus and everywhere and I’m, like – I called Bill and he was just about going bankrupt. He had a trust company out in Temecula. So, I said, “Well, you know what? I’m going to fly out there. I got an airplane. So, I’m going to come out and meet you one day.” So, I go out there, find, you know – he’s got these bus guys. They were just into, you know, these old GM buses. So, we find one and I’m looking at it and I’m like, “Oh my God, this thing’s a wreck.” But there was none around, you know? So, we got – he bought two of them for me. So, then we had to restore them all. You know, had to put clear glass in and all this. I had two mechanics, a father and son team that are still, you know, with me, are still good friends of mine and stuff. But that’s all we had. So, we were doing the paint. We did it all on stages at Fox, and, you know, De Govia would come in there and just nitpick everything, you know? So, anyway, we needed all these buses. We had two principals and then I got three more stunt buses, and they were 35-footers. So, exactly the same bus, but five feet shorter, and I could get tons of them. So, you know, Jack’s going, you know, “Nah, nah, we can’t do that. We can’t. Nah, we can’t do that.” So, I just – I said to Jan, “Jan, look, you see a difference in this?” “Nah, I don’t see a difference.” I said, “You good?” And that pissed Jack off. I said, “This is the only way you’re going to do it. These 40-footers you’re never going to find. The 35s are easier to drive. You know, I can make them all day long.” So, that was the stunt bus. Everything was just a little shorter. It was sucked in by five feet.

KRIS TAPLEY

Randy brought up Jack De Govia there, and I do get the feeling he and John Frazier were butting heads with Jack a lot. I guess it’s not surprising to have a special effects department and an art department at odds, particularly on a movie like this. You’re

talking about an ethos of “get it done” and an ethos of “make it look good,” and those can be vastly different perspectives at times.

RANDY PETERS

Well, those were '80s buses. So, I mean, the whole – just same thing. They wanted the interior changed. It was, just – Jack was just a nitpicker about it, you know? And to the fact where, so, the 35s had these smaller steering wheels and, you know, it was easier for a stunt person to hang on to it, you know? And Jack goes, “No, you’ve got to change them all. You’ve got to put the big one on there.” I’m like, “I ain’t doing it.” So, Jan’s walking by. I said, “Jan, come here.” I said, “What do you think? You see that? You gonna notice that steering wheel?” He goes, “No.” I go, “I’m gonna leave them on the stunt ones.” He goes, “Yeah, yeah, OK.” You know, art directors are notorious for just, fucking, want, want, want, want, I want it, I want it, I want it, do, do, do, spend it, not even see it. You know, I’m more realistic.

KRIS TAPLEY

Anyway, here’s Jack with some further thoughts on one particular design element: the font of the “2525” on the different sides of the bus.

JACKSON DE GOVIA

The typeface on the roof, I see it now and I know it’s wrong. It’s not the right period. But it’s so fucking beautiful, I can’t resist, you know? That’s why I did it, because I knew it would be seen by a traveling helicopter, and most of the industrial typefaces were much too thin. They didn’t have any heft to them. And that one, even though I see it now and I say, “Well, it wouldn’t have been that typeface. You know, they wouldn’t have painted it that way,” but still, it seems – I don’t know. This bus is unique. I’m looking at it now on my television. It’s a shot of the face of the bus. The “2525” across the bottom of the window is perfect. You really read that, as you might not in a modern font. There’s something about it that’s husky and I don’t know. I just fell in love with it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, we have our buses. We need to rig them. You heard John Frazier talking about that pod that he could move all over the bus for the stunt driver, depending on the shot. This is called a “blind drive” system and he and Randy had to conceive and execute it.

JOHN FRAZIER

You know, you’ll see a lot of these behind the scenes where some stunt guy is on the roof driving the car or whatever. That’s the first time that was done. We were driving the bus from the top of the roof. And now they do it all the time. You know, they do those rigs all the time.

RANDY PETERS

Then they were gonna have to put a big pump in there and all this shit to drive the blind drive. And Bill came over and he goes, “Well, no, why don’t you just use the pump up off the bus?” Nobody knew that but Bill. And my guys named him Bus Bill. So, Bus Bill, he

wasn't on as a Teamster or anything, so I had to pay him every time he came out. He was charging me whatever it was.

KRIS TAPLEY

Trust me, on a movie like *Speed*, I really wish I could talk to a guy named Bus Bill. Rest in peace, Bill. Here's Ian Bryce.

IAN BRYCE

What you don't see on the screen, obviously, is all of the repair work that had to be done, constantly. There was one time where I think the bus was coming off the off-ramp and there's cars, like, all in the off-ramp, and so the bus is, like, sideswiping them as they're going along and hitting the fence. And so, I mean, what people don't realize is that night that bus has to go in the shop, you know? And have all those repairs made and Bondo and whatever you've got time for to get it back out at six o'clock in the morning. So, Randy had crews working not just on the set for repairs and maintenance, but he had guys working all night, just like Frazier did, like, rigging stunts. So, that was a round-the-clock operation because, you know, you've only got a limited number of assets to play with, and if one gets broken, you've got to fix it.

KRIS TAPLEY

OK, I think we've covered it. We've got our rigged buses. Who's going to drive them? It's not Sandra Bullock. I should introduce our stunt drivers, Gil Combs and Donna Evans. Any time you see that bus in *Speed*, one of these two is driving it. Let me start with Gil Combs. As a third-generation stunt man, Gil has stories. His grandfather started in the business during the silent era as a stunt double but his real talent was in horse training. He became the main wrangler on the Universal lot, running shows like *Wagon Train*, *The Virginian* and *The Lone Ranger*. Silver, the white stallion in *The Lone Ranger*? Gil's grandfather "made" that horse, as they say. He trained him. Gil's father, meanwhile, Gary Combs, got his start doubling William Shatner in *Star Trek*, performing stunts in movies like *The Wild Bunch* and *Midway* and later coordinating the stunts for others like *Blade Runner* and *RoboCop*. Gary got his son, Gil, started in the business. Gil grew up with Hal Needham and Burt Lancaster hanging around the house, and on that note, he has some complicated feelings about Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. Anyway, I could listen to him talk for hours. He's retired now but he had a long career performing stunts in movies like *Convoy*, *The Blues Brothers*, *The Untouchables*, *Die Hard*, *Dick Tracy*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* – I mean, I'm barely into the '90s now – *Congo*, *Independence Day*, *Armageddon*, *Mission: Impossible II*, *The Matrix Reloaded* – you get the picture. Most of the time on *Speed*, Gil was controlling the bus from one of these plug-and-drive pod spots. Here's Gil talking about how he got the gig through stunt coordinator Gary Hymes and you'll see he can really dig in on a story so I'll tend to let him cook.

GIL COMBS

I don't think I've ever been involved in something that had so many different places for the driver to be. And I don't think that it's out of school for me to say how I came to drive the bus. That wasn't the plan. And frankly, I think everybody that was on the set the very

first day, including myself, were quite surprised who he had chosen to drive the bus. I won't say who it is, but I'll leave that to Gary or someone else if they want to mention it. But all the buses had been set up for this guy. I'm about six-one and this guy, he was about a good six inches, maybe seven inches shorter than me. So, the first day, we're all out there on the 105. I was in an ND car. Most of the guys were there for ND traffic around behind the bus.

KRIS TAPLEY

Just to jump in here, ND cars, are nondescript cars. Cars driven by stunt folks that are there to fill out the freeway.

GIL COMBS

And that particular day, they had the bus set up with an outrigger that they put out to the side of the bus. Because they actually were in the bus shooting stuff with, you know, the actors. And on that outrigger was this ballast stuff that powers the big bright lights inside. And there were probably six, seven, eight of them on this outrigger on one side of the bus. They did a bunch of runs up and down with a lot of Bill Young's people parked there and stunt people, too. And anyway, on one of the runs, the guy that Hymes had driving got a little too close to this big side wall, this big cinderblock wall. And he tore all the ballast off. Just destroyed it. So, everybody was pretty stunned. Jan de Bont was just completely out of his mind. Went off. And he basically fired the guy on the spot. And so, there was a little while there where all the big mucky mucks got together there in the middle of the freeway to decide, "OK, what are we going to shoot now?" Because obviously, that changed their schedule substantially. And the next thing we hear on the radio is that we're breaking early for lunch. So, we broke for lunch, went down off the freeway, got down to wherever base camp was. And I remember I went and got my food. I sit down with my tray. I'm sitting at the table with all my – all the stunt guys around me, Jophery was there, God rest his soul, and Brian Smrz and all the cast of characters that all worked for Hymes all the time. And I could see Gary Hymes coming. He was making a beeline for me. And, you know, I was already a little bit – I'll be honest with you. It's been 30 years, but I was a little miffed. I think everybody that was there figured I was gonna drive the bus. But I, you know – I wasn't asked. That's fine. It happens, you know? I was still gonna work on the show, because Gary's a good friend. And I seen him coming, and I already – I knew immediately what he was going to say. He says, "Gil, would you consider driving the bus for a little while." He said, "Because they fired" – and again, I won't say his name. And I said, "Well, I heard, Gary. I heard that he was gone." I said, "You know what, Gary? Yeah, I'll give it a try." I said, "I'll drive it until I crash it and then you can get somebody else."

KRIS TAPLEY

And now let's hear a little from Donna Evans. Donna got into the business through her sister, Debbie. They were both raised racing motorcycles competitively at a young age and they're widely known as two of the best stunt women in the business. Donna's list of credits includes *Lethal Weapon*, *Total Recall*, *Jurassic Park* and *Charlie's Angels*, and she's doubled actresses like Sharon Stone, Gwyneth Paltrow and, indeed, Sandra

Bullock over the years. Whenever you see a longer shot of Annie and she's actually driving the bus, you're typically looking at Donna.

DONNA EVANS

There were two units running the whole time when we were doing the bus stuff, before we got to the subway stuff, and so, Gil did a lot of the first-unit stuff. He did some second-unit stuff as well, but when they needed Sandra – the Sandra Bullock double – in the front, then I would do a lot of the driving. So, it's kind of a mix between Gil and I. It's kind of difficult because when I was on second unit, I was doing a bunch of stuff and I didn't know what he was doing and he didn't know what I was doing. So – and it kind of crosses over. I'm literally going through this stuff and thinking, "Oh, yeah, oh, wait, wait, I did hit the baby carriage." You know, I have the emblem from the baby carriage. I don't know if you see that shot, but it's funny. It's got a little porcelain flower emblem on it. And I like to – when I do stuff, you know, if there's some little piece of thing that reminds me of it. I actually have that in one of my keepsake boxes.

KRIS TAPLEY

Donna also, by the way, is the one riding the escape hatch out from underneath the bus with fellow stunt performer Brian Smrz, but we'll come to that later. Now that we've heard from both of them, there will be more stories from Gil and Donna to come, but let's forge ahead for now. Here's cinematographer Andrzej Bartkowiak to start us off talking about the camera rigging and lighting design challenges.

ANDRZEJ BARTKOWIAK

I always light from outside. But bus was moving, so we had to rig bounce cards sticking way out so they could bounce into the bus, into the actors, nice and soft light. I mean the roof of the car was just loaded with equipment. It was top-heavy, you know, with 18Ks bouncing in. And, of course, you know, hard light had to come once in a while, and then, of course, all the ambient light, because, bus was really moving, which was natural light that made everything real, because the light, you know, as you drive on the 105, it changes. The environment changes. So, you have different colors bouncing and different angles.

KRIS TAPLEY

Director Jan de Bont.

JAN DE BONT

Obviously, I wanted to be able to make sure I could see outside the windows, because, a passenger, the outside world is the most important. That's all they see. So, the light level between the inside and the outside, which was, at the time, really hard to match – you have to darken the windows. But then, if you darken the windows, you cannot use that bus anymore for from outside in, because you wouldn't see anything inside the bus. So, we had all those different buses lit already to go for a particular situation. That was hard to get a really good balance, so it looks natural, I mean, and real.

KRIS TAPLEY

On this point, I want to bring in a couple more new voices. First, here is the gaffer of *Speed*, Chris Strong. A gaffer is the chief electrician on a film set responsible for executing the lighting design plan. Chris got his start in the '70s and rose to prominence alongside Andrzej on films like *Prizzi's Honor*, *Twins* and *Falling Down* before moving on to work with David Fincher on movies like *Seven*, *The Game*, *Zodiac* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, among many others.

CHRIS STRONG

The problem is, if you're looking outside, it's probably five or six, seven stops over-exposure. And you don't get any natural light from outside unless the sun is hitting. It's just ambience. We had to balance the inside of the bus to the outside. So, what we do is we just put all the 4x4s with 4K PARs on both sides of the bus, just to help lifting the ambience, you know? So, it felt like the light coming in from outside was pretty balanced to what you see outside. Otherwise, outside, there would be no definition. It would be just completely blown-out white. So, basically, it was like a 400-amp or 500-amp Lowboy generator on a very tiny, low trailer. And we hid the cable up by the back windows. We put the big pipe rig on top and, you know, we attached all the lights to that. Then they put all the bounce cards attached to the pipe rig. It's a pretty healthy deal. And then, like I said, it was hiding the generator so you never saw it behind us. And there were times, too, when it started to get too dark outside. So, we'd have to run out there with, like, a pickup and stop the entire bus, and on top, give guys diffusion to put in the lights to keep it balancing. And so that became the challenge. Some days it was, you know, perfectly sunny there. Other days it was totally overcast, being right next to the beach. It was a challenge, but it was quite interesting.

KRIS TAPLEY

I'll share a few photos of this rig at our website, 50mphpodcast.com. It's quite a sight to behold. Next, I wanted to bring in art director John Jensen to explain a creative dolly track system they devised for the bus. Just to rattle off a few of his credits: *Die Hard*, *Hudson Hawk*, *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, *Hudson Hawk with a Vengeance* – just kidding – and *Walk the Line*.

JOHN JENSEN

They wanted to hang a camera on a track inside the interior bus. Usually, the grab handle up high on the interior of the bus is straight-forward and it's up. Well, this time we had to do a little "J" configuration with it so it came straight down and then came into the aisle, and then up again as a rail going down the center of the bus. You can see it in some of the shots. It's unusual for a bus, but they needed it to put a dolly on to track their camera up and down the bus, so that they could just hang the camera there.

JAN DE BONT

That idea of the Popemobile, doing this whole tent in the front, the reason I got that is because I had to do something similar for another movie. And it didn't work out so well there because it wasn't built so well as it was built here. John Frazier made it work perfect. Because the other time – it might have been, actually, *Lethal Weapon* – but the wind was totally – made so much noise that we could not hear the dialogue. And he was

able to make it so you couldn't hear anything. And also, the light is kind of behind the cameras, because the cameras filled the whole windshield. There were three cameras hanging, all moving, and so it had to be light that surrounds all the cameras but goes around. It is this indirect light, but not so that the cameras would make any shadow on them. So, it had to be made so that the light goes all around it, from top – the whole square – so it could go around the cameras. So, it was an absolutely brilliant idea. And don't forget, I mean, driving a bus, where do you put a generator, you know? So, one bus or two buses had towing generators behind them.

KRIS TAPLEY

While we're talking about cameras, I should mention that, well, Jan was well-known for happily putting a camera in harm's way to get the shot. Here's second unit director Alexander Witt and again special effects coordinator John Frazier.

ALEXANDER WITT

I think it was one of the pictures where we smashed the most cameras that I have done in my career. We smashed seven cameras because of the ways I used to put cameras or Jan wanted to put the cameras. So that was one experience that I haven't done again, smashing seven cameras.

JOHN FRAZIER

Panavision came out and gave Jan a plaque. "Most Cameras Taken Out on a Shot."

KRIS TAPLEY

Speaking of Panavision, the lens technician on the shoot was a guy named Dan Sasaki. Today Dan is the senior vice president of optical engineering at Panavision, and he's a household name in the cinematography community. I can't say it better than American Cinematographer magazine, so, to wit, Dan is, quote, "a go-to resource for cinematographers looking to add a personal signature to their images through the customization of their lenses, and he has helped to pioneer a groundbreaking system of lens alterations that give cinematographers vast control over the precise image they seek." So, this is the wizard behind the glass, basically. Now, I could get deep into the weeds here talking about anamorphic lenses and how the early-90s were sort of the tail end of their heyday. I'm trying to avoid that, but it's hard not to be a sort of gear-head geek with this movie. Anamorphic was an aesthetic that became a Jan de Bont signature during his days as a cinematographer, but at the time, spherical lenses were becoming en vogue and there was a sense that anamorphic was on the way out. Today, filmmakers often clamor for that anamorphic look again. So, with all that in mind, let me have you meet Dan Sasaki, who, again, was just a young lens tech 30 years ago assigned to Speed.

DAN SASAKI

It was very unusual and I remember I was fairly young at Panavision, so to me it was kind of fun because I didn't really fully understand the value of all these lenses. I thought, "Oh, this is going to be a cool show. They're wrecking stuff." And then as we look back, we're saying, "Wow, we actually went through, you know, many sets of

lenses that were not really replaceable.” But the funny thing was around the time Speed came out, that was about when Super 35 really started making a hard charge. And there were these doomsday predictors saying that anamorphic was going to be dead, there was going to be no need to shoot anamorphic anymore because Super 35 gets you closer focus, spherical lenses, without distortion, without realizing that part of the luster of anamorphic isn’t necessarily the technical attributes, it’s the aesthetic that it creates. There was maybe a premature thought that the anamorphic would be a demise, so the C-series weren’t in as high demand as they are nowadays or the last, you know, decade that anamorphic has kind of rekindled itself. So, we weren’t as concerned thinking that, “Well, the Cs are getting damaged, but in a few years, we’re not going to really need anamorphic lenses anymore. We’re just going to really concentrate on spherical.” We circle back the clock forward and we’re saying, “Wow, that was a really risky roll of the dice.” Fortunately, we were able to pull it off and preserve our inventory, without knowing they were going to put them in harm’s way as much as they did and exposing them without more robust crash housings, because there were a couple of lenses that we couldn’t fix. They either hit the ground or I don’t know if the OKO struck them, but there were a couple of times where the lenses rolled, and in that case, every element was destroyed. The castings or the lens housings were completely unrepairable, and those we just scrapped out. For a single show, I think we’re talking in excess of six lenses had to get scrapped, which was unheard of. Especially, even considering shows, such as – another show that was fairly close on that hit list would have been – not as extreme – but it would have been *Days of Thunder*, where we were dragging the lenses very close to the ground and got very similar sand-blasting marks. So, it was kind of a really interesting exercise that we put these valuable assets into such a crazy situation, not really realizing, you know, the potential that they had in the future.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, again, we’re putting this valuable equipment out there, at speeds, blasting them with rocks and bits of pavement on a freshly constructed freeway. And who was down there in the shit getting physically assaulted by this debris and commotion? It was guys like first assistant camera Vern Nobles Jr., racking focus as that bus flies like a bat out of hell. Panavision is up in Woodland Hills, about 25 miles north of the 105, and that can easily turn into a two-hour trip there and back to keep repairing these things. Here’s a fun story from Vern about how they got around that. This sound bit is a little busy because I was literally watching the movie in Vern’s screening room with him and Andrzej at the time, so this is three guys hanging out, stories flying around. But I love this one.

VERN NOBLES JR.

I was prepping second unit and they were running out of lenses. So, they told me – and, you know, really bad traffic to get there – they said, “Can you go get in your airplane and fly them? You can land on the freeway.” And I’m like, “Let me talk to the highway patrol.” They said, “You own the freeway. You can do whatever you want. You’ve just got to deal with LAX,” and I went, “OK.” It literally is the border to LAX.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, you did that?

VERN NOBLES JR.

I got my airplane and I flew the lenses out there.

KRIS TAPLEY

That's amazing.

DAN SASAKI

That is – see, I didn't realize that's what he was doing. Once the lenses left our shipping dock, I really didn't keep track on how they got there, but now that you say that, it makes sense, because considering the timing from when I got Jack Ellingwood's call to when we received the lenses and the turnaround time, it didn't add up, you know? I realize traffic is probably much worse now than it was in the '90s, but I still think there was no way they would have made it back and forth as quickly as they did. That's such a great story.

KRIS TAPLEY

Jack Ellingwood, by the way, was the second assistant camera on the shoot. Here's another quick war story from Vern.

VERN NOBLES JR.

We had a guy come in with a 4x8 sheet of optical clear glass, and he cut filters for us, because every take going down the freeway, the filter would get pitted and we'd throw it out. You got one take per filter. And if you bought these filters from Tiffen, they're \$250 each, but paying the guy to come with the sheet of glass, they only cost like two bucks. I mean we literally destroyed probably 400 of them. That was the 105 freeway when they were building it and it was still really dirty from all the construction, so, little pebbles and things – I mean we got sandblasted every time we went down there. That was before remote heads, too. We were on the little – the high-speed, low-level camera car that Allan Padelford built, so we were out in front of the car getting pelted.

KRIS TAPLEY

Oh, buddy, we're deep into it now. But remember, before we get to the freeway, there's that whole business with the first bus explosion out in Venice. When that bus blows up, you're actually looking at two buses. Go back and look at the shot. Keanu Reeves walks out of The Firehouse restaurant and waves goodbye to John Capodice, aka Bob. The bus exits the left side of the frame and the camera whirls around to catch back up to it as it explodes in the near distance. What happened there is the first bus actually turned left once it got out of frame, and the bus we see explode was being towed down the street the whole time, rigged and ready to blow. This is something called a Texas Switch, and it's usually used for people, to invisibly transition from a stunt performer to an actor. This has always been a fun example of the Texas Switch for movie geeks and I'm here to tell you the idea came from first assistant director David Sardi.

DAVID SARDI

That's an interesting story. Because, you know, as the AD, we're not really considered part of the creative process in the movie. We're sort of more like the traffic cops. But I remember when we were sitting with Jan in prep, talking about that sequence, an idea popped into my head about it and I said to Jan, "What do you think if we did this?" And the idea that I pitched was what we actually did. So, for me, that was my moment in *Speed* where I know that what you see on the screen is – it directly came from an idea that I pitched. I pitched the Texas Switch. And Jan went, immediately, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's what we're going to do, that's what we're going to do," and, you know, took ownership of it. But, for me, I know, that at the end of the day, that it was my pitch. So, you know, it's just those little moments that I keep in a little memory box of moments that I know. I've had a few over the years, so – but that was one.

KRIS TAPLEY

And here's John Frazier with a particularly harrowing tale from this sequence.

JOHN FRAZIER

So now, we're going to do it all in one and everything is in place. So, as we took off, and we're pulling the blow-up bus with a van, and we're about maybe 75 feet in front of it. As we're going, all of a sudden, there's a lady running down the sidewalk, up from up near Ocean Avenue, and she sees the bus going. She thinks that's her bus. She jumped on that bus. You know, she blew the security and jumped on the blow-up bus. And luckily, it was, like, Rocky – Rocky Gehr, who passed away last year – he was on the button and he saw this lady jump on the bus, and it was like, you know, "Abort! Abort! Abort!" You know? And luckily, we saw her. She'd have been toast. She was 10 feet, 15 feet from being toast. That was pretty wild. And so, we backed it up and then we did it again. And she probably remembers that day pretty good. That was the start of the movie. That was day one of shooting.

KRIS TAPLEY

And while we're here, we haven't heard from set decorator K.C. Fox yet. K.C. worked closely with production designer Jackson De Govia, of course, and art director John Jensen. She's done movies like *Doctor Dolittle*, *Bowfinger*, *The Score* and David Fincher's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. You know that bank of pay phones that Jack Traven approaches to answer Howard Payne's call after the bus explodes? Here's K.C. with a story on that.

K.C. FOX

I brought in the phones, which is not a hard thing. You're used to bringing in phones everywhere. But to bring in phones that can actually accept a call? That took some doing. That was difficult. So that Dennis could actually talk to Keanu. They are talking to each other. It was important to Jan that that happen.

KRIS TAPLEY

Isn't that great? I mean, in case you never thought about it, but yeah, that whole "pop quiz hotshot" stuff is an actual conversation happening over the phone. I don't know, I just think that's fun.

K.C. FOX

One of the sets you'll never see was Keanu Reeves' apartment, although I dressed it three times. They never shot it. It always fell off the schedule. It was really cool. He just had a very cool vibe, as you would expect for Keanu's character. You know, he had his bike and his surfboards and some cool, vintage, Mexican blankets, maybe, and some hella-cool posters. You know, he had a good place. You know, they had a scene. It was, like, maybe a standing-by scene. Maybe he was just going to leave there, wake up and go get his coffee, and we were going to establish his character more, and they just decided they didn't really need it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alright, let's get out there on the freeway. Jack commandeers a Jaguar to pursue the bus, remember? This is where we meet – well, he's just "Jaguar Owner" in the credits, unless you know him by his vanity plate, "Tuneman." But the actor in question is Glenn Plummer, and Glenn is the greatest. He actually goes back with Jan to a brief role in the Madonna film *Who's That Girl* in 1987, which Jan shot, but he's also been in films like *Colors*, *South Central*, *Menace II Society*, *Strange Days* and *Showgirls*, as well as series like *ER*, *Sons of Anarchy* and *Suits*. Let's bring Glenn in to set the scene himself.

GLENN PLUMMER

I was so fed up because, you know, back then the big thing was, like, gang violence. Gangs and drugs. And every character I was being cast for was gangbanger or, you know, gangbanger's buddy, I don't know. It just was one of those moments and then I decided, "You know what? I don't want to be placed in the gangs anymore." So, I just grew my hair out. And I figured you can't put me in a gang if I've got dreads. There's no dread gang, you know what I mean? That I know of. Anyway, so, long story short, I grew my dreads out and I just got an audition, I got a call. I mean, for a year my agents just basically couldn't find me, dude. And then, they were like, "Hey, you want to play this – you know, this character in this movie?" And I was like, "What is it," you know? And literally I went from doing a lead in a feature film to that part in *Speed*, just to get rid of everything I had been doing before that. I didn't want to be that guy anymore. I didn't want to have nothing to do with anything that had to do with robbing anybody or shooting anybody. It was just a bit of comedy on the freeway. That's all it was. It was just a bit of fluff on a freeway. So, I was like, "Oh, great. I'll do it." Little did I know that – that part, literally – I think it launched my career more than any other movie I ever did, actually, to be honest with you. Fox saw it, they were like, "Wow." They offered me a TV deal after that. You know, it was kind of cool to just come out of there and play this dude. It was the first time they ever dressed me up in some really cool clothes. I had, like, a \$5,000 leather jacket and some really cool, like, shoes and pants and I was dressed, you know? Nobody saw any of that, but they finally put me in some really nice clothes.

KRIS TAPLEY

And I say Glenn goes way back with Jan, but I guess *Who's That Girl* was an in-passing thing after all. They didn't really know each other, and so it's kind of a miracle that one of the funniest bits in the movie was ever actually communicated between the two at all. Let's let Glenn explain.

GLENN PLUMMER

I didn't really get to know this dude. I didn't know him from Adam, to be honest with you, on *Speed 1*. 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. He was like, "Glenn, no, just tell him to take the fucking phone." I was like, "OK, I'll do it like that." And I did. "Take the phone!" And everybody died. Everybody fell over laughing. And it was, like, one of the funniest moments in the whole movie, and it wasn't even meant to be funny. You know, it was, just, play the irony of the frustration and everything and you just tore my fucking door off and now you're asking me for my God damn phone, dude? Fuck out of here.

KRIS TAPLEY

He said "*Speed 1*" because Glenn also turns up in *Speed 2: Cruise Control*, but, well, we'll get to that. Anyway, not to stir the pot on *Speed 1*, but here's a quick note from casting director Risa Bramon Garcia that Glenn disputes with his entire chest.

RISA BRAMON GARCIA

Glenn Plummer did not know how to drive a stick. I think it was a stick. And he said he did and he got there on the day and he didn't know how to drive the car. I got a call going, "He doesn't fucking know how to drive this." I'm like, "He lied. I don't know what to tell you. Someone teach him." And they're like, "Send another actor." So, I tried and then they called me and said, "It's fine. We've got it."

GLENN PLUMMER

No, not at all. I was born driving a stick. Plus, that Jaguar wasn't a stick shift. It was an XJ-S V12 black-on-black convertible-top Jaguar. I don't even think they made those in a manual transmission. Like, you would have had to ordered that special. "Oh, no, I want my XJ-S with a manual transmission." Why would they make that car a manual transmission? That makes no sense. Do you know what I mean? I mean, can you imagine Keanu trying to drive that car and shift those gears and slam on the brakes and do all that shit with a manual transmission? And then – because, you know, with a manual transmission, once you get off the clutch, if he's going to jump across to another vehicle, once he's off the clutch, we're done for! The car is going to downshift, "uuuurrrnnnn." It's not going to – you know what I mean? No, there was no manual transmission. That was just something weird somebody said.

KRIS TAPLEY

Anyway, we're up to one of the bigger stunts of the movie now. After Jack Traven makes sure Tuneman has insurance and rips off the guy's door, he leaps heroically from the Jaguar to the bus. Keanu Reeves did do this jump in one of the shots, but it

was a much shorter distance and slower pace to get that particular angle. When you look at the film and you see that longer leap, that kind of profile shot down the side of the bus, that's stunt man and assistant stunt coordinator Brian Smrz. Here is stunt coordinator Gary Hymes to talk about setting all this up for the Keanu piece.

GARY HYMES

I had made a platform for one of the angles that had rollers, and it was hooked to the bus and it was about an inch off the ground so that if he didn't make it into the opening, he wasn't going to fall onto the freeway. And Jan really wanted that shot of him jumping out going onto the bus. So, I showed Keanu the whole set-up and I said, "Why don't we just do the first one at, like, I don't know, twenty? Let's just get a feel for it. And I think, you know, it's going to be hard to judge speed anyhow." And he goes, "Well, how fast would you normally?" And I said, "Well, it would be great if we go a little faster." And he says, "Well, let's go faster." So, he goes, "I don't know, how's 35 to 40?" And I said, "Look, if you're OK with that, I feel confident that you're not going to fall, so, sure." So, we say action, we get up to speed and I've given the count, and we're at thirty, thirty-five. "OK, here we go. And action!" And Keanu doesn't move. And I say, "Action." And so, we end up – we cut, right? And we pull over and I jump off the camera truck and I go over, and Keanu goes, "You know what? I liked your idea about going twenty the first time." So, we went back, we did it at twenty. It worked great. But it was just – it was such a fun, cute moment. Because Keanu wasn't making any bones. That was one of the only times, though, he ever, like, "Oh, yeah, I got this." Because he just – I mean, in my opinion, you could not have done half those shots that we did with Keanu with almost anybody I've worked with in the last 44 years, with the exception of maybe a handful of actors, if that.

KRIS TAPLEY

And here is Brian Smrz to talk about his part in this.

BRIAN SMRZ

We were probably going 40 miles an hour and it was interesting because the way we had it set up, it was pretty rudimentary. It was pretty simple. It was basically, I'm jumping to the bus, and I had some webbing inside the bus, like, where the stairs were, so I had something to grab onto. But I remember specifically, it was Jophery Brown was driving the Jaguar and if he would get, like, a foot closer, I'd go, "Oh, that's easy. You can go a little further." And then he'd go, like, a foot away, I'm like, "No, no. I can't do that." You know, it was a very definitive line that I felt like I could make. There was also a camera on the back of the bus that filmed it, and so, it wasn't like I was just going to miss and roll on the pavement. I'd miss and roll on the pavement and get hit by a camera, more than likely. So, it was definitely not a wanton miss kind of scenario.

KRIS TAPLEY

After Jack's valiant leap, poor Tuneman can't hold the wheel and he careens into a bunch of water-filled barrels at an exit on the freeway.

GIL COMBS

That was done for real. That was Jophery sitting in the – basically sitting in the passenger seat cross-driving, because he was doubling the guy. That's where he was. And just you know, smashed into the water barrels. I'm sure it knocked – you know, jarred his teeth pretty good. But, you know, Jophery was as tough as they come. That's why they pay us the mediocre bucks is doing stuff like that!

GLENN PLUMMER

Believe it or not, they were having a hard time trying to figure out how they were going to do the stunt. And I was like, "You guys are crazy, man. Give me a cup of water." They were like, "What?" I was like, "Give me a cup of water!" So, you know, we did the whole thing and then I drove my car into the things, not hard, you know what I mean? And then they were, like, "Action!" I poured the water over my head and jumped up like [out of breath]. That's all I needed. Literally, I poured water over my head and sat up from being down in the seat, took a couple of deep breaths, and that was it. Blew the water away, you know? So simple and we did it and it was good. The guy who drove the car into the barrels, you know, he was a well-known stunt driver. You know, he was one of the best stunt drivers in the business. He was always around. Like, you saw him in everything. In every cowboy movie, he was one of the bad guys falling off a horse. He probably did a billion movies.

KRIS TAPLEY

Glenn is talking about Jophery Brown there, who both Gil and Brian also mentioned, and that guy is indeed a legend. We'll get to him next week, but I wanted to throw another voice in here, a guy named Richard Foreman. Richard was the still photographer on the film. These folks are often right in the thick of it with the camera assistants and whatnot, grabbing publicity shots. Anyway, Richard had this story to tell about the Jaguar sequence.

RICHARD FOREMAN

I remember the jump from the Jaguar to the bus that Keanu did. OK, he did it himself, and so, I thought, "This is important." So, they mounted an iMo back kind of underneath the bus, midway between the back door and the front door. And I had them open up the back door. I laid down with my back on the bottom step so I could lean out, and I wore a harness on my chest so that I could lean out and turn to the right forward part of the bus, where Keanu was going to do the jump, and I'm just hanging out in space. And so, I wait for the Jaguar to come past me, and then I lean out. The grips are holding the rope, and I'm getting ready. I knew the proper exposure, because it was all sunlit. And then Keanu took – the precise moment that he did the jump was in the shade of an overpass. And so, it just ruined my photo. Because it was basically in silhouette. On film, it all happened so fast. It goes from sunlight, just a flash of shade, and then sunlight again. Because, of course, the bus is traveling at 50 miles an hour. But while I'm leaning, for some reason, the iMo decides to shake loose and then falls off and starts to bounce towards me. And I said "pull" and the grips pulled me up into a sitting position and the iMo flashed, you know, where my head was. And then I said "down" and they let me down, and just in time, and I took the shot. But all for naught because it was in the shade.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alright, after that, Ray gets spooked, thinks Jack is there to arrest him. He pulls a gun, Ortiz tackles him, Sam accidentally gets shot. Now, we're on the freeway for a minute before we get onto the city streets, so, let's settle in and get a little deeper into the day-to-day. Here's first AD David Sardi.

DAVID SARDI

I was always on the bus. And I'm six foot eight, right? So, I was scrunching. I never rode in the Popemobile but I was always somewhere physically on the bus, generally in the front door well, you know, and I'd have the transmitter, you know, the microphone that went to the AM transmitter so we could call the action for all the extras on both sides of the freeway.

KRIS TAPLEY

Remember, that's the AM radio system they had set up, courtesy of transportation coordinator Randy Peters' idea to coordinate all of those cars on the freeway. Here's second assistant director Maggie Murphy.

MAGGIE MURPHY

We had a great system. We had, you know, PAs in cars in the off-ramps and, you know, in LA you actually hire the police, whereas in New York, the police get given to you and the police decide when you're going to open the road up or allow you to close it. Whereas in LA, it's like, they're part of your team, and we had a great head of our police, and we had a great system where we'd be, like, "OK, sweeper car go through," to make sure that, even though everyone said it was locked up, did anybody sneak in in the meantime? So, we'd do a final sweep, and it was in my rental car, which was this red car, and we'd send my car through with a production assistant to say, "Yep, it's all clear."

KRIS TAPLEY

Now I want you to meet the film's production sound mixer, David Macmillan. He was one of the few crew members on the bus because he had to sit there and mix the live audio. David has won three Oscars, for *The Right Stuff*, *Apollo 13* and, indeed, *Speed*. *Speed* actually won two Oscars, which went to five individuals, and I'm realizing now that David is the first of those Oscar-winners we're meeting on this podcast. Anyway, like many of the folks involved in the making of *Speed*, David's expectations for it were pretty low. Here's him talking about that and his duties on the film.

DAVID MACMILLAN

The good thing was it was in LA and I, you know, always like to take films in LA, because I have three kids and – well, they're all grown up now, but at the time, they were in schools and I liked being home with them, at least on the weekends, anyway. So, I said, "OK, I'll do it," and I thought, "Oh, God, what a piece of shit." The best laugh was, for me, was I had put a radio mic on Keanu as the bus went up onto the freeway, and I heard Keanu say, "Dear God, don't make this another shitty film." I cracked up.

Really, what my job is to get clear dialogue, you know? And to record live effects as best I can. And to not bug the actors.

KRIS TAPLEY

I've always been sort of curious by this aspect because David has to get clean production audio, but that must be difficult when you're on a moving bus and there's so much noise from the engines, the wind, all of that. Here's Jan de Bont.

JAN DE BONT

We were able to use a lot of the dialogue. I mean, we all do ADR every once in a while, because the sound level presence is so loud that you cannot hear, but quite often, he was able to isolate the actor very much from the background. And everybody, all the actors, had a different recording track on the soundtrack system, so it wasn't all mixed, so he could mix it later, which was also so unique. So, people could talk and yell and they were all recorded at the right level. It was so good.

DAVID MACMILLAN

What I did, I put a microphone in the collar of his T-shirt and slid it around to the middle. You know, at the top of the T-shirt there's a fold-over, it's the neck part. You could slide a microphone right down in the middle. And what was great about that was when he was ready to go at night time, he would just give me the transmitter, he'd turn his T-shirt over to costumes, and they would take it up, clean his T-shirt, and put it back for me. It was great! On Sandy, I would put it on her right side, because she's talking towards Keanu. So, we were able to get all of their dialogue pretty clean. And then, Joe Morton, when he's on the back of that truck, you know, the semi, well there's a cowling, so he was out of the wind, and again, they're yelling. Keanu, the doors on the bus envelope out, so he's got a wind block. So, all that scene where they're trying to get the bus driver off of the bus onto the semi, they're yelling at each other. Joe's mic is, again, right out in the open, right under his chin. It just looks like part of his uniform. I think most of that stuff is production sound.

KRIS TAPLEY

David has two cameos in the film, by the way. One purposeful, the other purely accidental. You'll see his name and face in the lineup of police officer photographs when Harry Temple and the team are trying to find who the bomber is. The other happens on the bus. David says there's a shot where you can see the top of his head and headphones pop up in the back when the bus hits a bump. I think I knew this but I can't seem to find the moment where that happens so for the eagle-eyed out there, see if you can track it down for us.

DAVID MACMILLAN

My boom operator, Steve, who, eventually, he went on to – he was, like, the mixer on NCIS until he retired last year – but he said that was his favorite job in the world because he didn't have to do anything! He was – for six weeks, he was off the bus, hanging out. Usually I let my guys mix, but it was such a cramped space and it was kind of difficult to do, so, I wanted to have my ears on the microphones.

KRIS TAPLEY

Continuing on, then there was that bit where traffic starts to back up on the freeway and, you know, “stay on or get off.” Annie jerks the bus onto an off-ramp and here we have another big stunt as it slams into car after car on its way to the city streets. This was a whole thing. Here’s Gil Combs to start us off.

GIL COMBS

Donna Evans, great driver, one of the top female drivers in the world. She tried to do the shot the first time, and because of the arch and the speed that they wanted it to carry the bus up and hitting these cars, it wasn’t a matter of skill. It had nothing to do with skill at that point. It had to do with upper body strength, because now you’re trying to hold the momentum of the bus into these cars while you’re going around this curve. And it just – she made it about halfway and then she couldn’t hold it anymore. It went off the off-ramp and down into the grass and all that.

DONNA EVANS

I did what I was thought I was asked to do, and Jan went all off because he wanted me to hit these things on the side and hit the edges of the cars. Well, I hit the edges of the cars, but I swear the things were too far out, because for me to hit the edge of the car and the flags or whatever that were on the other side, it didn’t work.

KRIS TAPLEY

Art director John Jensen.

JOHN JENSEN

Jan wanted a chain-link fence on the left side of the bus and all of the cars on the right side of the bus, so she would have to stay right in this lane, right in between all of that. And she got into it too hot and she hit the fence on the left-hand side and went straight and up and over the knoll, and I remember seeing the camera guys on the knoll that were filming on the left side of the bus and bailing out because the bus was coming straight for them.

GIL COMBS

So, then I wound up doing it. I remember Jan, all he said to me was, he said, “Whatever you do, don’t stop in the shot. Get all the way out of the shot.” And I knew where the cameras ended. He says, “I don’t care what happens. Don’t stop.” So, I’m usually pretty good when people say that. And so, I come up there and I’m sideswiping cars. And the hardest thing to do was not necessarily to hold it in the arc, but as you scrape these cars as you’re going up, it has a tendency – it’s trying to pull the bus in to the car. So, like, the next car, you get a little bit more of the one you got before. You see what I’m saying? And it’s hard to stay on the edge where you can get by them. And I was fighting that more than I was fighting momentum of the curve trying to steer me away from – it was actually sucking me in. And I literally got to the last car in the line. And I think it was a guy named Hubie Kerns, a stunt guy that I’ve known a long time. I believe it was Hubie that was in that car. And I just kept getting in deeper and deeper and I kept trying

to pull it out, pull it out, pull it out, and finally, when I got to the last car, I got so much of his car that it actually spun it out in front of me. And now I'm pushing – I'm T-boning him. I'm pushing him sideways, going, you know, whatever I can get out of this bus at this point. And of course, there was – I was coming up on a light pole that was coming. And, I mean, if I hit that light pole with him, it would have spun him off. But I mean, they're not in five points, they're not wearing helmets. They've got seatbelts on, but that's all. I'm thinking if I hit something pushing him like this, I mean, I could hurt him really bad or worse. Well, I made a decision. And I can see him. I mean, his car's tipped up on two wheels. I've got two wheels off the ground, on the grill of my bus. And the two on the driver's side, where he's sitting, are on the ground skidding. If he caught one of his rims, he would roll the car. And I just – I just lifted. I said, "OK, I'm not killing somebody for a shot." Well, anyway, Jan de Bont jumped off the camera car and ran up to the bus screaming at me and runs right up into my face. He's basically spitting on me because he's screaming so loud. And I'm looking over at Hymes, and he ain't saying a word. Not a word. Not defending me, not, you know – believe me, Gary knew that I made the right choice. Anybody who was there, especially Hubie Kerns, knows I made the right choice. I mean, come on. It's just a shot. It's just a movie. And you've seen the sequence cut together anyway. I think it looked like a million bucks. So, I let this guy finish chewing on me. I don't say a word except, you know, giving him a look that if you could kill somebody with a look, that's what I'm giving him. And I'm really not as mad at him as I am at Hymes for not stepping in and defending me and pulling him off me. So, anyway, I think it was very close to the last shot of the day. It may have been the last shot of the day. I grabbed my stunt bag, wherever I had that stashed, went straight to base camp, signed out, got in my car and I told the second AD, I said, "You tell Gary Hymes I just quit." And I drove home from Long Beach, which all the way to Santa Clarita, which is a good, you know, hour and a half with traffic. So, anyway, my phone's ringing when I get home. I know who it is. I'm not answering it. Anyway, long story short, the next morning Hymes wakes me up at, you know, phone ringing again at about, I don't know, five or something, because it's about the time I'd get up anyway. And he says, "You're coming into work today, right?" I said, "No, Gary, I told your AD, like, I quit. I'm not – I'm not doing that again. You sat there and let that little asshole do what he did and say what he said and you never even stepped in. And you know that I did the right thing." "Well, yeah, uh, OK, I, uh-" I said, "Look, Gary, just, no." He goes, "Gil, I'm sorry. I swear to God, I'll never let that happen again." And he apologized and all that. And I said, "OK, well, alright. Well, I'll get there when I get there." You know, I'm already running late, because I've got to drive all the way down to Long Beach again. I said, "But I'll, you know – I'll start getting ready. I'll head down there." So, anyway, I got there a little bit later than the call was, but not that late. And we went on from there.

DONNA EVANS

I have to tell you, Gil Combs – it's funny because we worked a long time on a bunch of different things and he has a lot of really funny sayings. And he said, "Yeah, in this business, you've got to have a really short memory." We call it "hero to zero," one day you're a hero and the next day you're a zero.

KRIS TAPLEY

I'll try to get into Jan's temperament at a later date. He was known to be a fiery guy on set and that's a whole other thing. But this sequence, if you look closely at it, you'll notice that Annie is quite a bit larger all of a sudden. That's Gil in there with a wig and her wardrobe on. And just to throw this in there, that whole sequence actually starts with the bus slamming into a black car on a tow truck and sending it flying through the air. That's where they lost a few cameras, because that black car actually landed on them. Moving on, here's John Frazier.

JOHN FRAZIER

And then we did that thing when that bus hits that baby carriage. That was pretty cool. Well, what we did was we did it kind of twice, and we did a Texas Switch. We hit it but we knew that he was just going to just run over it. And then the second time, we hooked it up to an air cannon and stuck it right in front of the bus, and when it got to the point, we really kind of just launched it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Speaking of the baby carriage, I've been holding onto this bit from screenwriter Graham Yost. Here he is talking about a period of time when the script was still in development at Fox, before Jan came on as director.

GRAHAM YOST

I heard that it was Peter Chernin who said, "Can't it almost hit a baby carriage or something like that?" And he has said, since, that it wasn't him. But it was someone at a meeting. That note came to me through Jorge, and I remember sitting with Jorge and going, "We can't do that." You know, that's almost like Siskel and Ebert and the fruit stand, right? It was the '80s action cliches. I said, "The only way to do it is if it actually hits the baby carriage. But if it hits a baby carriage and we kill a baby, then we've lost the audience and it's done." And that's when I just went away with it and thought of the cans, and having seen someone in Washington Square Park pushing around a shopping cart, filling it with cans. So, I thought, "What if a baby carriage?" And, you know, that's the brilliance of Jan. I remember being in the production office and seeing these old English prams, and it's, like, "No, it should be just, like, an Aprica. It should be a regular fucking American baby carriage. It shouldn't be a pram on big wheels and stuff." But the good thing about that was it made it very distinctive. It's very visual. Directors love that shit. We do as audiences. But it also – the logic working backwards is, "Oh, this is the kind of thing that someone might have thrown out."

KRIS TAPLEY

Actress Julia Vera, one of the passengers on the bus.

JULIA VERA

Some of these things were so realistic to us because we had not been told what was coming up next. So, on one of those streets in Long Beach there is, like, two grownups with a bunch of kids, and here we come. We can't stop, right? So these kids are all of a sudden going to cross, and we're freaking out, and then, of course, they pulled them back. And around us were stunt cars making it look like regular traffic, and so, one of

the ladies on the bus says, “Oh my God, I would never allow anything like this to be done to my children,” because we found out that they were actors.

GIL COMBS

I made conversations with the actors, because they were doing their acting and moving around the bus while I was back there. I told them, I said, “Guys, I think I can pretty much find holes and stuff as you guys move around, depending on the situation.” I said, “But if I say” – you know, we had a word. I can’t remember if it was, like, just “move” or whatever. I said, “Just dive to the side immediately, because obviously I can’t see.” So, I think we only had that happen a couple of times from that inside position, where they actually blocked my vision and we were doing something a little bit sketchy. I remember the first time I hollered it out, and, I mean, the actors literally dove to the seats. Parting of the sea, man. They weren’t taking any chances. Because if I couldn’t see, they knew we were all in trouble. I didn’t have to say it twice. Put it that way.

DAVID SARDI

I said, you know, more than a few fucking prayers. I mean, it was hairy. We were fully in Gil’s hands, right? All of our lives were in his hands, and he was just so calm and so confident and did a phenomenal job. And, you know, also, those blind drives, you’re moving hydraulics and all of that stuff, and special effects, and, you know, you’re always, like, “Are we going to blow a cable and lose brakes?” Always, that stuff is in your mind.

KRIS TAPLEY

The next big stunt was the hard right turn back onto the freeway where the bus almost tips over while it’s screaming around the bend on two wheels. Let’s go back to stunt coordinator Gary Hymes for perspective on that.

GARY HYMES

There again, we had done some tests, but on the day, Jan would always spice it up. “Well, let’s have it, like, while it’s up on two wheels, hit two police cars!” It’s like, “Well, wait, we didn’t talk about this,” you know? We would – John and I would get together, Frazier and I, and either reinforce it so it wouldn’t come off the slider – that whole scene in itself was – I don’t want say it was problematic, but it definitely had its share of little quirks, getting it up on two wheels and making it look like it sustained that going around the two wheels. And to Jan and Andrzej’s credit, the way it was shot, I think it was – given the technology, I think they did a good job with it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Here’s Bill Young with a little more on that sequence. Remember, Bill ran the precision drivers outfit that surrounded the bus with pattern driving to simulate traffic.

BILL YOUNG

We had to do that a lot of times, and don’t forget, I think we had 15 police cars following. So, everything had to be coordinated. In fact, I had a bunch of my guys in there in the police cars. And I went to the real police and I said, “Look, I need more cars. Give me

five of your guys and we'll put them in these picture cars," and that's how the real cops helped us out. Because they were in the cop cars, as well, behind.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, there were actually a couple of stunts that they had to abandon during this whole chunk of the movie. Here's Gary Hymes again, and then first AD David Sardi talking about one sequence in particular that was known as the "Baker Sequence," named after the character who was involved in this discarded stunt.

GARY HYMES

We don't want to water it down. Let's do three things great rather than seven things that are just mediocre. You know, the script, at one time we had about three, like, really big gags that aren't in the movie. They came to me and we had a meeting about this. I remember it was Graham and Mark Gordon and Jan and Andrzej and Jack, and we're talking about, you know, we have to cut it down. We only have this many days. And I always love that approach. I'm always the first one to say I'd much rather do one thing terrific than, you know, have four things that the audience is like, "Oh, well..." You know, you start to get their hopes up and you let them down, and if you do that more than a couple of times, you've lost them completely.

DAVID SARDI

What it was going to be was prior to Keanu getting on the bus, they were going to try to land a guy on the roof of the bus from a cable. You know, we had scouted out one of the overpasses going over the 105. The idea was he was going to come down, literally touch down on the roof of the bus and start to work on the hatch, and then, you know, in cinematic reveal, suddenly look up and, shit, there's the bridge coming, and, you know, give the thumbs up sign, and the helicopter starts to crank him up and he just clears the bridge, and we were going to cut to a moment of relief, and then, you know, bang, there's this glass truck driving through that he was just going to plow through. And, I mean, we were going to have to do it in pieces, but all in, it probably would have been a full day of shooting. But yeah, we had it all ready to go, and then, you know, we had to lift. But everyone was very sad that that had to go, although, for me, as the AD, there was an element of relief in it as well, because it was going to be a really hairy stunt. Whoever Gary was going to choose to ride that thing, it was not going to be fun.

KRIS TAPLEY

Before we wind down this week, as we're back on the freeway leading up to the film's most iconic moment, I should touch on one final sequence where Jack and the bus passengers all rally to get bus driver Sam, who has been shot, off the bus. Here's actor Hawthorne James with some memories of that.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

When we started shooting me getting off of the bus onto the flatbed, it was the stunt man who did it. And he did it, like, oh, I don't know how many times. It wasn't a lot. It was, like, three or four times they had shot it. And I remember the first AD came to me and said, "OK, are you ready to go?" And I didn't know what he was talking about at

first. He said, "Yeah, you're up. You're going to be next to make the transfer." Well, at that point, you know, everybody was talking about, "Oh, man" – all the people on the bus were talking about, "Oh, man, you're not going to do that are you?" I said, "Heck, naw, y'all must be crazy if you think I'm doing that. You're out of your mind." So, when they came to me and said it, "You're up next," well, what am I going to do? My macho sprung up. And I said, "Oh, yeah, I'm ready." I thought to myself, I said, "You must be out of your damn mind," but I couldn't back down because of that macho thing. I could've said no, but, no, my mind said, "No, you've got to do this. You've got to show them that you can do stuff like this." I did it, like, eight times that day, but I remember the first time I stuck my head out to do it, the wind hit me in my face and it just took my breath away. But nobody on the bus knew I was going to make that transfer. So, all of a sudden, I made the transfer and I disappeared. So, the reactions you see of the people on the bus from certain shots are actually real reactions, because they thought I had fallen. But Jim Mapp, who apparently had problems with his heart, after I did it that first time, he never got back on that bus. Every time I made that transfer, he did not get back on the bus because he couldn't watch me do it anymore. So, I came back, and I remember that you get a bump for doing stunts. So, I went to the first AD and I said, "What's my bump for doing the stunt?" And he went away. He said, "I'll be back." And he came back, he said, "Well, they'll give you \$50." And I thought to myself, "Fifty dollars?" I said – I just said, "OK, fine." But \$50 for doing a death stunt as an actor is, like, "Wow." And that's how I think everybody else got a bump, because of the fact that I asked. Because when they make the transfer from the bus to that other vehicle, everybody got that bump, and they wouldn't have gotten that bump had I not asked about my bump.

KRIS TAPLEY

We're going to stick with Hawthorne for just a little longer here because I love this anecdote about a line he came up with that almost made it into the film.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

They let me improv several things, lines in the script, and one of the ones that I remember that they actually kept was, "Don't spit on my bus, Annie." And then when she's getting on the bus, I said something about the butt. I forget the exact line, but something about the butt.

[SPEED CLIP]

SANDRA BULLCOK (as "Annie")

Excuse me, coming through! Sam!

HAWTHORNE JAMES (as "Sam")

This ain't a bus stop!

SANDRA BULLCOK (as "Annie")

Oh, man!

HAWTHORNE JAMES (as “Sam”)

Get rid of your butt, Annie.

SANDRA BULLCOK (as “Annie”)

OK, it's gone, it's gone.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

They let me keep stuff like that. But there's one line that I wish I had said and I didn't say, and I thought of it that day, and I didn't say it and I wish I had. When I was getting ready to get off the bus, she said something to me as I'm getting ready to get off, and I forget how I responded, but I wish I had said, “Take care of my bus, Annie.” Every time I see that movie, I wish I had said what I wanted to say, and I didn't say it. “Take care of my bus, Annie.”

KRIS TAPLEY

And finally, this is where Helen, Beth Grant's character, meets her tragic demise as she tries to get off the bus against madman Howard Payne's orders. Here's Beth, and she's talking about her newborn daughter to start.

BETH GRANT

She was 9-months-old and she visited me on the set, and I had two stunt doubles on set that day. I guess it was when we were doing the stunt. And then I had four or five dummies that looked exactly like me, because I had done the full-body cast and head cast, and dressed exactly like me. And poor little Mary walks on the set and she's looking and she goes, “Mama? Mama? Mama?” And she starts to cry. And I go, “Mary, Mary, it's me! Here I am!” But can you imagine? I mean, I probably scarred her for life! But I don't think a stunt double ever – they didn't do a single shot with them, because, I mean, it was so safe. They had me strapped in there. But, you know, Keanu did his leap off of the Jag and then Hawthorne had done his, getting carried over to the flatbed. And so, I said, “Well, I want to do mine.” You know, ego. Actor's ego. And they said it was safe. And, I mean, I was strapped in. I would have had to take a flying, leaping jump to fall off that bus, you know? But of course, they did use mannequins to roll over. I did not do that!

KRIS TAPLEY

So, lots of stunts. Probably the most in one sort of section of the movie that we'll deal with. I don't think I expected this episode to go this long but I guess we did have a lot of business to take care of at the top. Either way, you should have a pretty clear idea after these 80 some odd minutes of the controlled chaos of this movie.

JAN DE BONT

They could see in the dailies that it was a lot better than they had ever expected. You know, because they kept asking me, “How are you going to do that? How are you going to do it?” And the reality is, I do not always want to know in advance how I'm going to do it, because then I lose authenticity, too. I feel I want to, as a director, respond in the same way as the audience responds. As a director, I want to be – if I would be in the

audience right now, I would love to see that from here, I would want to be there, I would want to be there. So, it is a very personal viewer-participant relationship for me, and you cannot say that in advance. And that – I think that frustrated them, you know? And also, they really were afraid of all the handheld stuff. They never believed how you could make a movie on a bus interesting, you know?

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, I think you proved them wrong, Jan. OK, folks, we've still got a lot of movie to cover, so get some water, get that good stretch and be ready to go again next week. To wrap things up today, however, and speaking of buses, I thought I'd close with Jan talking about his support of the Ghetto Film School, an award-winning non-profit here in Los Angeles that has, for the past 20 years, educated, developed and celebrated the next generation of filmmakers.

JAN DE BONT

At the Ghetto Film School, they make those short movies with kids that are, you know, coming from East LA, and it's a fantastic group for kids that would normally never get to a film school, and really, they teach film, seriously. And then they get a project to make at the end of the year, or two years, and one of them was a project on a bus. So, I said, "Oh, I can get you a bus!"

[OUTRO MUSIC]

KRIS TAPLEY

Next week on *50 MPH*...

KRIS TAPLEY

Get set for a deep dive into the centerpiece moment of *Speed*.

BILL YOUNG

Everybody showed up for the jump, and the reason being is, everybody knew there would never be another jump, because everything is CG now.

BOB HOFFMAN

It was like an army that was out there that day.

CARLOS CARRASCO

I do remember it was a very, very exciting day. Everybody was on edge because they just didn't know how it was going to go.

KRIS TAPLEY

But things go awry when the team sends a 35-foot bus sailing through the air.

MARK GORDON

I said, "Well, if you don't shoot it today, you may not ever fucking shoot it. We're shooting it, Jan, so fucking get going."

JOHN FRAZIER

That was the only real shot that, he just wanted something a little different.

KRIS TAPLEY

And in the end, I'm left with yet another mystery to unravel. Did they or did they not shoot this thing twice?

JAN DE BONT

So, we got one chance. The problem was the one chance we got, we totally screwed it up. And then I made up a story that we did a fantastic test run. I said, "Tomorrow we're going to do the real thing."

KRIS TAPLEY

All of that and more next week right here 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. If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We'll see you next time.