

50 MPH: EPISODE 22

“MIND THE GAP (THE JUMP)”

Transcript (00:51:39)



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

We are officially 22 episodes deep into this whirlwind project, which means we’re fast-approaching the midpoint of *50 MPH*. You know, a midpoint in a screenplay tends to mark a major plot point in the story, and boy do we have one of those today. Think back and remember the trailer for *Speed*, if you can. Remember the TV spots. Hell, remember the poster. Remember what they were selling you. It’s not a magic trick, but chances are you just pictured a city bus flying over a gap in a freeway. That image alone sold hundreds of thousands of tickets in the summer of 1994. The bus jump sequence is a harrowing stunt that happens a little beyond the midpoint in *Speed* — the build starts 62 minutes into the film, in fact. But it certainly feels like the pivot point in a story that does not give you a minute to breathe. After all, a single frame before Norwood gets that radio call about the oncoming chasm, Jack Traven is comforting Annie in the wake of Helen’s death. You’ll recall Fox production president Tom Jacobson had a pretty good memory of how this idea ended up on the table. It was in a meeting where director Jan de Bont was making the case for himself to direct the film. Let’s hear that one more time.

TOM JACOBSON

So, Jan comes into the meeting incredibly prepared. And in the meeting, “Here’s the vibe of the movie. Here’s what it feels like. Here’s what it looks like. You’ve got one problem with the script.” And we went, “Oh yeah?” I mean, he’s a cameraman. He said, “You know, the movie goes like this and it goes like this, and you’re missing, like, an end-of-the-second-act crescendo. You’re missing, like, some fantastic moment where just everything – the odds are against everybody.” Jorge and I are going, “Yeah?” And he pitched, in the room, the unfinished freeway bus jump. It wasn’t in the script. That came from that director’s meeting. And we went, “Oh my God.”

KRIS TAPLEY

Here is uncredited screenwriter Joss Whedon on the importance of the scene in the broader scope of the movie.

JOSS WHEDON

I think someone was talking about that they were going to cut the jump, and his argument for the jump was, this makes them a family. This is the moment when they're all going to die together, and they don't, and the dynamic on the bus is completely different after that.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, this is our focus today. One of the great action movie set pieces of the '90s, if not, dare I say, all time. After surviving a barrage of rush-hour collisions, spine-tingling hairpin turns, a tragic on-board explosion and a damn baby carriage full of cans, Jack Traven and the passengers of Bus 2525 are confronted the reality that the 105 freeway isn't finished. We covered this in the locations episode, but they did such a great job of using the truth of the evolving Los Angeles landscape in this movie. They even call out the bravo tango runway at LAX by name when we get to that bit, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. This is just an awesome sequence and we're going deep into it today. So, let's just get a bunch of voices flying around here to start. Here's Bill Young, coordinator of the precision driver cars.

BILL YOUNG

Everybody showed up for the jump, and the reason being is, everybody knew there would never be another jump. That was the end of that. I never saw another jump, because everything is CG now.

KRIS TAPLEY

Production designer Jackson De Govia.

JACKSON DE GOVIA

I watched the bus jump from the side, as close as I could get to see it, because I had no idea, like everybody else, of what was going to happen.

KRIS TAPLEY

Set decorator K.C. Fox.

K.C. FOX

I was there, which was kind of odd because I'm usually not around set all that much, you know? Trying to stay one step ahead of the shooting company. It was very exciting, you know? Nothing like a great stunt. But those days were fraught. Laying out the cones to go into the jump zone, you know, as we're going toward the jump zone thing, like, a very tense time on set.

KRIS TAPLEY

Actor Richard Lineback.

RICHARD LINEBACK

I had no idea. I'd shot a lot of TV at that point. I had watched a lot of things blow up with gasoline and naphtha and everything else making huge balls of fire, as TV back then was. Watching cars go up on their side. And stunts were a huge part of – there was no

CGI back then. So, stunts, were everything, and, you know, still are. But if the stunt man or the stunt driver didn't do it, it didn't get done. So, I was used to a lot of stuff like that, but watching them prepare – and it's not like you can take a lot of runs with a I-don't-know-how-many-ton bus. But no matter how much you prepare, there's no telling how it's actually going to work out. And so, we were all there with I don't know how many cameras rolling at the same time.

KRIS TAPLEY

Unit production manager Ian Bryce here talking about the man who drove the bus for this sequence, legendary stunt man Jophery Brown.

IAN BRYCE

He was in a suspension harness, I think they called it, driving the bus from the middle, right? So, like, the 10th row or 12th row back, whatever it was, so that you couldn't see him. And then we had dummies of, you know, Sandy and Keanu up in the front and, you know, it was an old bus and it took a mile run-up to get to the speed that we needed to hit that ramp, and he didn't have a lot of space on either side. I mean, those are nerve-racking stunts. Very risky, very complicated. And, listen, you take as much of the risk out as you can with all the professionals that are there, but nonetheless, you know, while you're getting ready to shoot a scene like that, I think everybody's nerves are jingling a little bit, you know?

KRIS TAPLEY

Second assistant director Maggie Murphy.

MAGGIE MURPHY

That was a day to remember. There were a couple of days to remember where there were tricky stunts going on, and me being the nervous Nellie, that was incredibly nerve-racking. I mean, he was in a cage that was built for him. He had a helmet on. We had a helicopter on standby to air-evac him out if anything happened, standing by on the freeway. Like, there were guys ready with the jaws of life and all that stuff, you know, in case the bus jumped and then rolled or whatever, we had a helicopter standing by on the freeway. That's scary shit.

KRIS TAPLEY

Actor Carlos Carrasco.

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. On the day, I remember it took forever. There was delay and delay. "No, we're not ready yet, we're not ready yet." They finally decided it was ready and we all stood around at a safe distance and out of camera range to see what the heck was going to happen. And when that stunt bus did that, it was done, because when it landed, it landed on the engine and just cracked the oil pan and everything like that. And it's, like, "Well, I hope you got it, because that's it."

KRIS TAPLEY

Put a pin in that notion for now. Here's first assistant director David Sardi.

DAVID SARDI

It was kind of stressful, as all of those big events are, and time-consuming, just to get it right. It wasn't our entire day at all. You know, we had allowed probably three or four hours for it. We were further down the freeway shooting other work and they were setting it up and lining it up and making sure the ramp was set, and all of that stuff really did take all day, but as a company, we weren't there all day. And as I recall, it was later in the day. And so, you know, it was one of those things where you know it was coming. For me, it was less scary because it was a totally controlled situation. The jump, for me as the AD, was pretty easy, because nobody else was involved. We weren't staging any elements around it. It was just the jump itself.

KRIS TAPLEY

Unit publicist Bob Hoffman.

BOB HOFFMAN

It was like an army that was out there that day, of camera people. We were so busy for the couple of days leading up to the stunt, in terms of the planning, because we're documenting all those crew meetings, and then the morning of, when they got out onto the freeway and they had a strategy meeting with everybody there, and they had this scale model and they were showing all the camera positions, and there was so much to get done. And we had the EPK crew. I think they had a third camera on the EPK. All fixed positions, in proximity to the six or seven cameras that were – you know, Jan was operating a camera, Andrzej was operating a camera, the camera assistants were all operating cameras. Anybody who was, like, a second camera assistant, who wasn't needed there immediately, he had a Nikon. He had one of Richard's Nikons and a tripod. I mean, you never saw coverage like this. We get out there and then finally, you know, we're all, like, figuring out where we're going to be, and Richard and I kept, you know, mindful of where the production cameras were and the way that they were viewing the scene and covering the scene, and there were all these barriers that were set up. Like, those heavy cement freeway barriers? So, we found spots that were really good for still coverage, and then about an hour before we were going to shoot, I kind of was, like, "OK, I'm going to shoot from here," and, just, with the camera just sitting on top of the cement, you know, block, and then I look around and I think to myself, "Wait a minute. What happens if this stunt goes awry and, you know, something happens? Like, a fucking bus is going to be going 60 miles an hour and it's going to hit this kicker and it's going to land and all of a sudden, what happens if the driver doesn't have control of the bus anymore?" I look back at that and I thought Richard and I were fucking crazy.

KRIS TAPLEY

Bob is talking about still photographer Richard Foreman. Let's hear from him.

RICHARD FOREMAN

I put Bob next to a camera – two cameras on a tripod. I said, “Hold this button down,” because the cameras were connected. Because in the old days, we shot black and white and color. And so, I put matching lenses on both cameras on a flat bracket on top of the tripod. The cameras were connected to a single shutter button. And it was a horizontal shot. And his shot was actually published front page, or cover page, of, I think, a sound magazine. Because I think *Speed* won an Academy Award for sound or something? And so, he got the shot of the bus flying in just a 90-degree perspective of the bus.

KRIS TAPLEY

Assistant stunt coordinator Brian Smrz.

BRIAN SMRZ

I hadn't been around that kind of stuff as much, so, to be honest, I was a little bit, like, didn't know what to expect as much from it. I just hadn't done that kind of big jumps like that at all. So, I was just a little bit more of an observer at that point. And Jophery definitely did not let off the gas. You could see him coming, he was, like, stepping on it all the way through. So, yeah, I thought it was pretty iconic for that time in my career.

KRIS TAPLEY

And Brian's boss, stunt coordinator Gary Hymes.

GARY HYMES

Nobody had ever jumped a bus that far. I had done hundreds of jumps on everything from *Hardcastle and McCormick* and *A-Team* and, oh, God, on and on and on. *Airwolf* and *Hart to Hart*, *Fantasy Island*, whatever, all those old shows, and I had a pretty good idea. But we all felt that the bus was just going to nose in, just given the length. And if you really look at the physics of it, and the geometry of it, to get it that airborne – because you have such a gap between the front wheels and the rear wheels leaving the ramp – the back end would get more of a kick and it would nose in pretty hard.

KRIS TAPLEY

And everybody's boss, director Jan de Bont.

JAN DE BONT

We had the bus made as light as possible. After finishing all the shots of the people in the bus going in protection mode, they were replaced with doubles and we had a stunt driver, of course. And so, then we had to build a ramp, a really long ramp that would basically make the bus go sailing. Because if a ramp is straight the bus will just fall down. So, to be able to make it go fly, you have to build it in a way so it goes upward, and those buses are – they don't have powerful engines. So, we have to put a bigger engine in, but then, still, it's a bus, you know? So, to get from 50 to 60 or whatever, you have to really use a long, long track. So, they had to build a really long track, a section of road that goes up, up, up, up, but the very last point where you do it, there's a little bit of a tiny ramp that lifts the front wheels up so as it goes up, it floats.

KRIS TAPLEY

For some perspective with Jophery Brown back at the start of the jump, I want to bring in a new voice here. And I'm really just showing off how comprehensive I'm trying to be with my interviews. This is Seth Edelstein, and today, Seth is the Emmy-nominated producer and unit production manager of series like *Murder in the First*, *Better Call Saul*, *Hacks* and *For All Mankind*. He also had a lengthy first and second assistant director career before that. On *Speed*, Seth was as far down the totem pole as it gets. He was the DGA Trainee on the film. Here's what he recalls of this day.

SETH EDELSTEIN

The thing that struck me was, I was at the start mark for the bus and I was the only production person there with that stunt man, and I remember standing in the doorway of the bus while he was sitting in the driver's seat looking at him getting ready, knowing that there was a ramp all the way down the road that he was about to send the bus over, and he took a picture of his family out of his pocket and put it on the little band that was up on the sun visor. And I remember him kissing his hand and putting his fingers to the picture and looking at it for a moment before he said he was completely ready, and that was a moment that told me he was scared, too.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alright, back to Gary Hymes and everyone back at the ramp.

GARY HYMES

Jan is setting cameras, and, you know, as a second unit director and having shot my fair amount of action, I'm going, "Jan, you know, I'm not so sure." I'm like, "Some of the camera positions, I don't think it's ideally suited to where I anticipate the bus to land." And he's, like, "Don't you talk to me about camera positions! Why aren't we ready?" He just goes off on me big time, right? So, I just turned to him, I said, "Just say action, we're ready," and I walked away. So, we started the bus, you know, like, miles away, practically, and did everything we could to get maximum speed out of it. So anyhow, it hit the ramp and it set the front end considerably higher than any of us would ever have imagined that it would go, and so, it really came in rear wheels first, which made for a sensational shot and I think it's been talked about time and time again. I've done numerous interviews and they even did a *Mythbusters* episode on it, right? So, we all know that it was over the top. I'm the first one to say, in our wildest dreams, none of us saw it coming in with the nose – we wanted the nose high, but not at that severe of an angle.

KRIS TAPLEY

Before we get too deep into the weeds on that, I figure I could have a couple different people explain the logistics and physics that went into planning this. But special effects coordinator John Frazier is probably the most detailed about it so let's hear from him.

JOHN FRAZIER

That's the only shot that Jan really – he wanted it to auger in more. And I was going for the realism, and he didn't want to have that. What you do on these jumps like that is you

have your initial ramp, right? And it was set at I don't know how many degrees. But at the front of the ramp, on the top of it, about the last eight feet, you put – we called it a kicker ramp. And whatever is coming off of that thing, it's like Newton's first law. If it's in motion, it stays in motion. It doesn't change. So, if you're arcing up, it's going to stay in that arc all the way down. So, if you want it to fly level, you've got to trick the bus. So, what you do is you put a kicker ramp on, and it's another short ramp, and then you set it up on an angle away from the ramp. It's on the ramp, but it's at the tail end of the ramp that the bus is going to take off. OK, you take that plate and you just raise it up, in this case about a foot, OK? Now, what you do is – and it was easier because it was a bus, because it was so long – when the bus goes up, the front wheels hit the kicker ramp. Now, that causes the bus to go up at a different trajectory, because now it's off the ramp, it's on the kicker ramp, and it goes up. So, now you're into Newton's law, right? What you do, then, as soon as those front wheels leave the kicker ramp, you drop the ramp on top of the other ramp. So, the back wheels now are on the ramp, but on the same plane it was on. The front wheels are up in the air. That causes it to glide. To get a good example, when we did *The Rookie* with Clint Eastwood, when that car comes out of that building, it's perfectly level. And that's because of the kicker ramp. If you don't do that, it does exactly what Newton said it's going to do. It's going to come off that ramp and it's just going to stay in that arc and it's going to auger in. Now, I probably put a little bit too much lift on the kicker ramp, but at the end of the day, it just looks like a bus flying through the air, right? You don't want it to be like *The Dukes of Hazzard*. You know when that car goes in the air, and it's coming down, that car is done and the people in it are done. And then they shake the car and the two boys are fine, right? You see that every Wednesday night on TV, OK? Well, we don't want that. You're going to know that the bus stopped right there if it does that. But Jan, after the shot, he says, "Aw, man." He said, "I wanted it to auger in." That was the only real shot that he kind of, like – he just wanted something a little different.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, hopefully all of that made sense but to distill it, you've got a long ramp, then you've got a smaller ramp at the end of it. As the bus goes up the ramp, it then goes up the second ramp. You then drop the second ramp so that the back wheels don't hit it and go up in the same trajectory that the front wheels are now moving in. That should make the bus soar and then crash sort of head on into the pavement. Jan wanted that because he wanted it to look like the bus was sort of nosediving and nearly missing the other side. What we ended up with was sort of the opposite of that, where the bus lands like a 747 airplane with the back wheels touching down first. And the near-miss of it all is in seeing those back wheels just barely finding purchase on the other side of the gap. Again, Jan didn't want that.

BOB HOFFMAN

I remember after the stunt, the bus landed, and we're looking through the Nikon, you know, with a motor drive, just shooting away. And then the bus lands, it gets into control, it comes to a stop and all the stunt guys and the medics and everybody, they run over to the bus and the guy who is the stunt man is walking off the bus and his mouth is just covered in blood. He bit his tongue.

KRIS TAPLEY

Stunt driver Gil Combs.

GIL COMBS

Yeah, he damn-near bit it off, based on what I saw after he got out. I still don't know how he did that. I think somehow or another, I don't know if he spit his mouthpiece out, because I know he had a mouthpiece. Here's why I know. I put him in the bus. I put him in. I strapped him in. I gave him his mouthpiece before I got out. Because they rolled camera, I handed him his mouthpiece – that's the last thing I gave him – and I ran out of the bus. He closed the door and then they hollered "action" and down the road he went towards the ramp. So, I know he had his mouthpiece. I handed it to him! I really never got a good explanation from him after the fact. But yeah, I'm telling you, man, it was one of the grossest things I ever seen after he got out. And he's just saying, "I've got to go. I almost bit my tongue off." And he sticks his tongue out. I about threw up. I was, like, "Oh, shit. Oh, man. Don't show me that again."

KRIS TAPLEY

After that visual, here's actor Joe Morton to lighten the mood a bit. Pardon my laughter but he totally caught me off-guard here.

JOE MORTON

And you heard what he said when he called his wife? He's bitten down on his tongue and he says that he has to call his wife because she gets nervous whenever he does these kinds of things, and he has to call her to let her know he's OK. So, he gets on the phone and he says to her, he says, "Thweetheart, I'm fine, but I can't lick your puthy tonight because I bit my tongue."

KRIS TAPLEY

And with that, let's talk about this legend because I need to finally get around to Jophery Brown. We've been sort of talking around him for a couple of episodes now. He doubled Hawthorne James when they were testing his transfer spot. He doubled Glenn Plummer in the Jaguar sequence, driving the car when Brian Smrz did the more harrowing of the jumps over to the bus, and then he also plowed into the water barrels at the end of that sequence. And here he is again, driving the bus up this ramp, soaring through the air, and then crashing it back down to the ground. You'd love to talk to a guy like that, but Jophery died in 2014 after an amazing life and career. Jophery was actually a professional baseball player in the 1960s. He was drafted by three major league teams, first by the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1965, then by the Boston Red Sox in 1966. He ultimately signed with the Chicago Cubs and spent several years in the minor leagues, making just one major league appearance. He had only pursued baseball because of his father's love of the sport, so with a torn rotator cuff and an itch to do something else, he was soon enough lured to Hollywood by his brother Calvin, another legendary stunt man. Journalist Matt Monagan wrote a pretty great profile of Jophery at mlb.com back in April and I'd suggest you seek that out for more, but Jophery, like his brother, was a pioneering professional in this industry for men and women of color. He performed

stunts in films like *Live and Let Die*, *Smokey and the Bandit*, *Commando*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Predator*, *Die Hard*, *Hard Target*, *The Relic* and *Oblivion*. Just to, you know, name a few. And by the way, he also coordinated stunts on films like *Scarface*, *Action Jackson*, *House Party 3* and, one of his favorite movies, according to his widow, *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars & Motor Kings*. Oh, and here's a fun fact: You remember the opening scene of *Jurassic Park* where the loading dock guy on the top of the raptor pen gets killed? That's Jophery Brown. What's even cooler is they just straight-up used his name for the character. Go back and listen to Muldoon barking orders.

[JURASSIC PARK CLIP]

BOB PECK (as "Muldoon")

We're locked. Loading team, step away. Gatekeeper. Jophery, raise the gate!

KRIS TAPLEY

Again, the guy was a legend. I just want to really give him his due here because I can't talk to him. But we can hear from him. This next clip is from the behind-the-scenes material that was filmed that day by Bob Hoffman's EPK crew. It was prominently featured in the HBO First Look making-of mini-doc that I've discussed here before. Remember, Jophery had just bitten the shit out of his tongue here, and they're playing score over this interview, but hopefully you can make it out as he describes his experience.

[HBO FIRST LOOK CLIP]

JOPHERY BROWN

Let's see, the tires blew. The doors came off. It blew the oil pan. Oil went everywhere. A lot of dummies flew around inside the bus, you know? It's a high you can't explain, you know? It's just a natural feeling that everything goes completely silent when you're in the air. All you hear is like a, "Wooooooosshhhh." You know? And it's kind of really weird. Everything goes into slow motion, almost.

KRIS TAPLEY

Back to stunt coordinator Gary Hymes.

GARY HYMES

So, anyhow, Mark Gordon comes running over. Peter Chernin. Basically, everybody said, "Oh, Gary, that was sensational! That's great!" And I just remember this guy comes up, and he's pushing, like – and it's Jan, and he gets in my face and just goes off on me. Just, you know, "You ruined my shot!" And anyhow, so, I just kind of said, "You know, Jan," I said, "I told you where it was going to land. Yes, it went higher than any of us thought it would, but in all of our discussions, we protected it, camera-wise." And Andrzej, we would talk about it and he's like, "Yeah, I'm going to throw a wider one back here and I'll use two panning angles, and we'll" – so, we knew we had it covered, right? And so, I had just – pretty much at that point I had had it. So, I said, "Look, Jan" – I said, essentially, "It's not working out for me, either, and I think we should just part ways." So,

I start walking back to my motorhome and Mark Gordon comes up and he's, like, "Oh, Gary, you can't leave. You know, he's just having a moment." And I was like, "Well, I don't work like that." And, so, cut to the chase, about 20 minutes later, Jan knocks on the door of my motorhome and we sat down and talked and basically from that moment on, we had a great relationship. Literally, the very next day, we're setting the shot and Jan's, like, "Gary, come here, tell me. Where would you put the cameras for this?" It changed so 180. And I think that, I don't know, maybe the fact that I stood up to him, I earned some respect. I don't know.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, we're about to go deeper. This next section is going to detail the most stubborn wrinkle that I've been trying to iron out along the way, and I just haven't been able to fully understand it. So, I might as well be as unabridged in presenting all sides as I can. Here is Jan de Bont.

JAN DE BONT

Officially, we only had one chance to do it. But, of course, the one time we had planned to shoot it, everything was set, all the cameras were set, the stunt double, the driver, he went so fast that the bus went over the cameras, crashed the cameras. Not planned, but, in reality, it would never have worked for the sequence. The idea was to really get him in the air, start landing, and then have him land in front of the camera, so it goes out of frame, landing. And that didn't really work because he went so fast that all the cameras missed it, and that was a disaster. Of course, we not only destroyed multiple cameras completely, and the bus, completely. So, it was, "Oh my God. They only gave us one opportunity." So, what we did with Ian Bryce – an amazing line producer and fantastic, supportive person – is tell the studio we didn't film it, we did some testing this day and that we're probably going to do it the next weekend or so. So, they never saw the dailies. They were never sent to the studio. And they believed us, which was great, because otherwise, we would never have gotten a chance and we never would have gotten it right. And then the next time they did it, you know, another weekend – because they had to build a new bus, all the same stuff again. And this time the bus driver was less afraid and he did a perfect jump.

KRIS TAPLEY

Let me state that again very clearly. According to Jan, the studio gave him one chance to shoot this stunt. He didn't get what he wanted because the bus landed on a number of cameras. So, he told the studio they didn't shoot it, that they actually just ran some tests, and then they did it again on another date unbeknownst to the suits at Fox. Jan has told this story before, and it's become a small part of the aura around this movie, that they did something this massive without studio approval or knowledge. And you can see this displeasure with the shot in the reams of behind-the-scenes material the publicity unit shot that day. Jan was visibly upset. But it was more about the trajectory of the bus, which went sort of straight up and didn't go up and down and auger in quite like he wanted it to.

JAN DE BONT

I know that to make things believable, there are a lot of things the audience will accept, but there are certain things you do not accept. And if the bus makes, for them, an unbelievable move that they think is not real, they will not accept it and it will be less effectful. So, to be able to make them believe it exactly like it's supposed to happen, and execute it in that same way, that is really important, to get it all right, and anything that distracts is really, really bad. And I know that just from having worked on so many other movies, when people, just, "Oh, it's good enough. It's good enough." And it's actually not good enough, and then, "Oh, shit, we should have done it one more time." So, those dailies we then sent to the studio, and then they were extremely happy, of course. They couldn't believe we did it in one take. Yeah, no, we did it, actually, in a little sneaky way, but directors and line producers do that all the time, because, you know, they don't know what's going on the set. And ultimately, they would have never forgiven me if they wouldn't have the jump, you know? In those days, digital effects were not even close to being able to copy that, so, it had to be real.

KRIS TAPLEY

Naturally, I've asked everybody about this. Not one person has fully confirmed this second jump. And I wanted to be clear, because there was a second jump filmed, but not this full stunt with the huge run-up and everything. It was a much smaller jump meant to capture the landing of the bus from behind. Everyone does remember that. No one remembers doing the whole massive stunt again. Here's unit production manager Ian Bryce.

IAN BRYCE

No, there were several pieces of it. So, there was the big jump, which was the one-mile run-up and it hit a ramp that was, you know, however many feet long and ended at, like, six, seven feet, you know, off the launch. That was once. That was a one-time deal. It's far too dangerous to do it twice. And by the way, you know, the bus had to be prepared and the suspension and all of that. So, that's a one-shot deal. Secondly, we did, like, a separate landing piece, and that's very specific. Those are tighter lenses and, you know, you just get a little bit of the bounce. But yeah, the big jump was one time.

KRIS TAPLEY

Production designer Jackson De Govia.

JACKSON DE GOVIA

They only did it once and the bus went further than they thought it would. So, it destroyed one camera, and it destroyed that film and you never see that. Now, if there is something that happened and they didn't jump or it didn't make it or something, it's news to me, because I was standing there when it happened. As far as I know, there was only one jump.

KRIS TAPLEY

Producer Mark Gordon.

MARK GORDON

We never shot it again, and the reason I know we didn't shoot it again was because, in the film, it goes like this. And that's because the kicker ramp, the flap didn't go down. I don't know what he's talking about.

KRIS TAPLEY

He's referring to the bus going straight up in the air as opposed to straight out. Mark also told me, by the way, that Jan was distressed about the light fading and that he even declared at one point that he would not shoot the sequence that day.

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. We're shooting." Jan wasn't happy with the light because by the time we got ready to shoot it, the light was flat and there were shadows on the freeway. So, he was really pissed off. So, I said, "We've got to shoot it. If it doesn't work, that's another conversation." And this might have been what he remembers, but we never shot it again.

KRIS TAPLEY

John Frazier? You got anything on this?

JOHN FRAZIER

I've heard that before, that, "Oh, yeah, the stunt guy screwed up or something and we had to do it again." But no, it was a one-taker. If we did it twice, I would have dropped the kicker ramp and Jan would have got what he wanted. Because I remember when Jophery got out of the bus, he said, "I'm glad we're only doing that once." I think he did take out a camera, but we weren't going to do it again. I'm sure there was a lot of lying to the studio about stuff, because, just like with that, you've got one shot at it. You know, that's a big deal. I don't know what that movie cost, but let's say, a round figure, per day it's about \$500,000 a day. On the really big features, it could be a million dollars a day by now, I don't know. But \$500,000 was a good number. So, you know, when you've got to do something again, you just blew \$500,000. You know, it's hard to hide that. But you have to think about that when you're setting stuff up and testing it. It's like, "If this doesn't go right, we could cost them a half a million dollars." So, we've always sort of prided ourselves on making sure that they got it. If it was supposed to be in one, they got it in one. Because we put the cage in the bus. But I just don't – we only put one cage in one bus.

GARY HYMES

There were other shots in the movie, where we launched cars and did other stuff, where absolutely cars landed on – so, I think there may be some confusion there.

KRIS TAPLEY

I mean, look, these are folks who would know, right? The UPM, the production designer, the producer, the special effects coordinator, the stunt coordinator. Maybe Jan is misremembering? Maybe he's juicing the story up a bit to build the mythology?

IAN BRYCE

Well, I don't want to countermand my old friend, but, yeah, that doesn't seem – that doesn't seem right. I mean, listen, there was a separate occasion where we did a stunt and it didn't work and I did say to the studio that we needed to have another crack at it, because it just didn't work and the bus landed – it wasn't a bus, it was a car. You remember when Sandy's doing the "stay on or get off, stay on or get off?" Doing all of that? And then the bus pushes a car, a broken-down car that was kind of stuck behind a trailer, like a car carrier. And that car got pushed and went up over the top of the car carrier and came off of the other side. Well, where it landed was not quite – and there was nobody in it, obviously. It was just a mechanical stunt. But that car landed on the cameras and did some damage to the cameras, and so, in that, we certainly did not get exactly the angles that Jan was referring to, and that did get done again. But that was a less significant stunt. But yeah, the other one was a one-shot deal. And he's right. He didn't exactly get it the way that he wanted to. He was, you know – he was a little upset. You know, there were a couple of aspects. How high the bus went and then camera operators, you know, which were all – that was all live-action back then, right? There's no remote heads or drones or anything that you could stick out there in the danger zone. These were all human beings on the receiving end of that bus when it was coming in on the landing. And I think – my memory is that there was somebody – we always put a safety person or two safety people on those cameras in certain situations like that, and I think they might have pulled the camera operator a little early, and so, obviously, that shot got a bit wonky. Because, listen, when you see a bus coming at you, you know, that's just been going 50 miles an hour, you know, you have split-seconds to make your choices about whether you've got to safety the crew.

GARY HYMES

To be exact, Jan's correct in the sense that, yeah, I mean, we had talked about the jump, and this is always kind of where we'd go with it. I said, "But if I can give you more, would you take it?" And he said, "Yeah." He goes, "Of course." But, he goes, "Just know that as long as I get sixty feet..." So, when I saw where he was putting the cameras, I think that's what kind of started the heat of the moment. And I said, "Jan, you know, based on, you know, everything we've projected, these cameras are going to miss the shot." And that's where he goes, "Don't tell me where to put my fucking cameras! Why aren't we ready?" You know, I so get it, from Jan's perspective. He's directing his first film. It's a big deal. He just wants everything to be perfect, as we all do. Action is what I do. It's what effects guys do. This is our job, right? So, I think the picture we have in our heads of what the outcome is going to be, was considerably different, I think, than what Jan ultimately saw it as being. You can pre-viz, storyboard, you can do whatever you want. But, you know, at the end of the day, we all have a preconceived notion in our heads that we visualize from, and I think that visualization Jan had was always different. And I feel bad because my job is to give the director, always, what he wants. That's who I work for. So, hindsight being what it is, of course, it made the shot. Because had the bus had landed flat or nosed in or whatever, it just wouldn't have had that pop. But it was so sensational that, you know – it wasn't intentional. I did want it to land wheels high. But, like I said, none of us had a clue that it would pop that much and stay there.

KRIS TAPLEY

I know this starting to sound a little repetitive but I'm just trying to paint a complete picture of everyone's memory here. And so, I had to go back to Jan and make sure he wasn't misremembering or, like Ian and Gary suggest here, conflating two memories of two different stunts. Well, Jan told me the whole story again, and it's pretty vivid.

JAN DE BONT

It was another bus that was going to be destroyed, and we had reached kind of a limit, already, of buses that were destroyed at that time. Because once you crash the bus, I mean, in the movie it still rolls, but in reality, it will be destroyed. And it had to be totally rigged for that jump. So, we got one chance. And the problem was, of course, and I told you that, is the one chance we got, we totally screwed it up, because the stunt driver freaked out, slowed down, didn't make the jump, didn't reach far enough, and therefore, landed on all the cameras and we didn't get the shots. Real simple. And then, so, that was a question, "How do we tell the studio?" And then I made up a story that we did a fantastic test run and I think it's all going to work. We had some issues with logistics, how to really get the right speed. I made up a whole story that they fell for, and – but I said tomorrow we were going to do the real thing. Which, we really were not ready for at all, of course, but that was the only chance we had. So, we had to quickly make another bus ready to do the same job, made everything, the chassis, lighter, so that the speed could stay high up and that it really would land on its wheels. And also, initially, we wanted to take a different stunt driver down, because the other guy got suddenly scared and almost bit his tongue off, and he still wanted to do it. So, I said, "I don't want to risk it again. We'll never get another opportunity to shoot this scene." And they said, "No, I think he learned his lesson." And actually, he did learn his lesson. He really did get the bus to speed and actually almost went faster than what was needed. So, and then I could say the next morning, "Yeah, we did it first take. The first take was perfect." So, I basically got a free day, because I could not schedule it officially, you know? Because on our schedule it was only, like, one day, like, I think on a Friday afternoon or so. And so, we did it, we failed, and then I did it again by filming, first, another scene, so it looked like the day was really full. And so, the studio believed that it was all OK and great, and when they saw it, they loved it, not knowing that we totally screwed up the first time.

KRIS TAPLEY

You'll note that this time he said Jophery slowed down. And yet earlier he said he went too fast. It's a shame I can't talk to Jophery about all of this. Then again, he also strikes me as a guy who wouldn't have been "scared," as Jan said, given the stuff he did throughout his career. But the bottom line is there is a chorus of people who insist they didn't shoot this thing twice. I mentioned all of this to Jan and he doubled down.

JAN DE BONT

John Frazier was the one who took the bus apart and put those extra springs in there, for God's sake! Maybe what happens is maybe he started to believe that the first take the day before was, like, a test take or so, because that's what I kept telling everyone, and maybe that's what they're thinking.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, what, is this Jan and Jophery out there all by themselves? No producer? No stunt coordinator? No special effects guys? It starts to feel like that's the only way this could have been true, and Jan does say the crew was much smaller on the day of the alleged second jump.

JAN DE BONT

We wanted a really small crew. We had only, like, three or four cameras and stunt people. That was it. Nobody else was needed, you know? Because the extras were not needed. It was basically just the jump, and therefore, maybe that's why people are thinking that it was just one time. There were not that many people there. So, maybe that's why, in their mind, they only saw that one. And they didn't know it was totally wrong, that they – well, they saw the cameras were screwed up, but also, that therefore, they didn't know that all the shots were useless. No, no, no, I remember it as a day of yesterday.

KRIS TAPLEY

And yes, I made sure that he didn't mean the smaller second jump to get the landing.

JAN DE BONT

No, it was the full stunt again. Because this time, the driver, the stunt driver, he did it better than we expected and he reached the higher speeds at the very end. I can't believe no one remembers. Because everybody, when it happened the first time, was really pissed off.

KRIS TAPLEY

I only ever heard from two people who made me think that maybe, MAYBE, this was done twice. First, here's still photographer Richard Foreman.

RICHARD FOREMAN

And of course, the kicker kicked it up way too much and they had to redo it, I guess, for the film, or do something. You probably know more about it than I, because in the film, it didn't look like that.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, Richard, I wish I could be authoritative about this one. Here's first AD David Sardi, who just blurted this out at the end of a discussion about Jan being unhappy with the angles.

DAVID SARDI

Now that you're talking about it, we might have actually done it a second time without the kicker. I think that's correct.

GARY HYMES

It would have still needed a kicker. We made the kicker too long and too high. And then, it's also how I modified the front suspension. Had there been more give, it would have absorbed the ramp a little more. I made it very rigid, one, to protect Jophery and two, so basically it wouldn't bottom out so bad that it would break the front end off hitting that kicker.

DAVID SARDI

Whether we hid it from the studio or something like that? Yeah, no, I don't think we did that. First of all, I don't think Ian Bryce would have allowed it. The liability is just too great.

KRIS TAPLEY

Might as well get a studio voice to speak to that part, by the way. Here's former Fox exec Jorge Saralegui.

JORGE SARALEGUI

They could only do it once because it was hard to do and expensive and a big deal and you're stopping production and we would have known. They could not keep that secret. It's impossible. OK, look at the shot of the bus going up and you see that angle he's talking about. If you look at the bus, it looks weirdly vertical.

KRIS TAPLEY

And right there you have heard two different takeaways from the same footage, from Richard and from Jorge. Sigh, folks, I'm here to tell you, I've looked closely at the behind-the-scenes footage of the day everyone was there and the footage you see in the film. I've gone back and forth comparing frames like it's the Zapruder film, and sometimes I think it looks like the same shot, meaning this was only filmed once, because why would Jan put the, quote, "bad" take in there? Other times it looks like, in the behind-the-scenes footage, the bus might indeed be at a steeper angle than what we see in the movie. But it's obviously weird that so many people don't recall this. John Frazier says he's heard this before, that they did it twice. From who? He also, when we spoke, didn't remember if the bus was totally unusable after the jump or not and I think, clearly, that bus was done. So, if he's got fuzzy memories of actually being there watching it go down, maybe he could have missed a second day? Maybe he was in his shop fixing up a bus for a second run without knowing it? That would be odd. Surely Gary would be involved. It's a stunt. It's THE stunt. No memory of it. Ian, the UPM, who organizes the shoot and schedules everything? He would somehow be in the dark? Which is notable, by the way, because you heard Jan at the beginning say he did all of this with Ian's help. And the one guy Jan says definitively was there is Jophery Brown, who's no longer with us. So, we've got Jan, a still photographer who says what's in the movie doesn't look like what he shot on the day and a first assistant director, which you would absolutely need to pull this off a second time. There's just enough doubt to drive a man insane. We should get out of this, because it's quicksand, but I guess take all of that and make up your own mind. I'm honestly not sure. Anyway, moving on, I want you to envision or pull up a picture of the official movie poster for *Speed*. That is what Richard Foreman is referencing when he speaks here.

RICHARD FOREMAN

I was further down the way where no one wanted me to be, kind of in harm's way, as they say. And I got the elevated shot of the bus, you know, kind of diagonally, which is what you see right here. And what I was told by advertising is that that bus and those flames, because there were so many explosions, that's mostly the flames from the explosion of the bus. Actually, they set off an explosion to reflect in the windows as the bus passengers are looking out the window of the rescue bus, and there's this big explosion, and I photographed – I had two cameras, one aimed at the explosion, and one – which was just a wall of fire. And that's mostly where they took this wall of fire the bus is coming through. And they said that this photo with the bus and the wall of fire was an amalgam of, like, six different photos that they put together in Photoshop. My philosophy about what I do, is to capture, you know, the iconic images that are put forth. And you never know when you're going to – well, sometimes you do. You know when it's going to come and you're going, "This is going to be a great shot." Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes you just get that iconic headshot or expression and that's what's used, and that's what lives on, on people's walls, on websites, on, you know, magazines.

KRIS TAPLEY

And that's what I want to ultimately land on today, despite the confusion and disarray of this otherwise straight-forward topic of discussion. The bus jump from *Speed* is a classic movie moment. I say hang it in the great hall with Gene Kelly and the lamppost, Cary Grant and the crop-duster, Harrison Ford and the idol, King Kong and the Empire State Building. And no, I'm not exaggerating. These images are part of the fabric of our core movie memory. They are, collectively, the American cinema experience. They're immortal and they're indelible and Bus 2525 taking flight over an empty urban expanse lives on right alongside all of them. It was one hell of a set piece. Speaking of which...

[OUTRO MUSIC]

KRIS TAPLEY

Next week on *50 MPH*...

KRIS TAPLEY

I hope you're ready for another list!

DREW TAYLOR

There's definitely, like, people on wires. There's hundreds of squibs going off. There's blood packs. There's things exploding. It's a wonderful kind of, like, symphony of violence in a way that only John Woo could conduct.

CHARLES HOOD

There's not a lot of action movies that really happened before this movie. I feel like this movie kind of birthed what is now the action genre.

KRIS TAPLEY

Drew Taylor and Charles Hood, hosts of *Light the Fuse*, the official *Mission: Impossible* podcast, join me to count down the greatest action set pieces of all time.

KRIS TAPLEY

The meticulous nature of Michael Mann to pull that off — he shot it right up the street here in downtown LA. Just an awesome sequence and the best shootout I've ever seen.

DREW TAYLOR

I wanted to make sure animation was represented, so I chose The Battle for Metroville in *The Incredibles*.

CHARLES HOOD

I felt like James Cameron needed to be represented on this, and to me, in my mind, I kept going back to *Terminator 2* and how iconic that sequence is.

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.