

50 MPH: EPISODE 34

“SELLING SPEED”

Transcript (00:36:49)



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

Take a deep breath because we are finally through the thick of it as it pertains to *Speed*. The hard part, you know, making the movie, is done. The movie is finished. We’re ready for release. And so, this final phase of *50 MPH* will be a bit looser, a bit less of a hell-ride as the last several months covering the production and post-production phases have been. Now it’s time to market the movie to the masses and make good on the promise of test screenings, which have the suits at Fox feeling pretty good about the potential hit they have on their hands. All of this, six months or so after going into production on what they all saw as a B-level genre exercise. Of course, this isn’t a linear progression. The Fox marketing department has been involved for quite a while now as the footage has come in through dailies and gone through the editing process. With that in mind, let me bring back a voice from the development phase, Tom Jacobson, Fox’s former president of production.

TOM JACOBSON

So, Tony Sella, who was the head of creative at the time, and then went on years later to become the head of – I think the head of marketing at Fox. Wildly talented, creative guy, came into my office, and we had a good relationship. I really liked the marketing guys, because you’ve got to start talking to them early. Like, they’ve got to understand what you’re making so that they’re marketing the same thing that you’re making. He came into my office, and he said to me – I remember this very distinctly – “You have no idea what you have with *Speed*.” I said, “What are you talking about?” And we were, like, three weeks into post-production. And it had gone well. We liked it. But it was a movie we were making. He said, “This movie’s amazing. This movie’s a monster.” So, he knew right away from seeing the footage. He says, “I have so much material to work with on a trailer. This is going to be fantastic.” Now, I went, like, “Well, that’s fantastic.” But, like, “OK, we’ll see.” Not pessimistic or anything. But just, like, “Who knows? I don’t know. That’s really nice to hear.” It’s much better than the opposite, right?

KRIS TAPLEY

Tom also tells me that this was a big no-no, by the way. Marketing is not supposed to say anything to creative about the state of a film or give their opinion, since it’s early

days and a director's cut hasn't been assembled. But that's how excited Tony Sella was. And indeed, Sella is largely seen as a savant in this realm. I'm told he actually coined the film's tagline, "Get Ready for Rush Hour," and he was a massive part of Fox's success not only in this era, but right on through the '90s and into the next decade. I wish I could say I had an interview with him for the purposes of an episode focused on the marketing of *Speed*, but I just could never track him down. He and countless others were scattered to the winds following the Disney acquisition of Fox in 2019. In any case, let's stick with Tom here for a bit.

TOM JACOBSON

So, then we go out and preview. We do our first preview. And it goes really well. Like, people are really excited. And it scores well, whatever it scores. And then we get notes from it. And the most important thing about the preview process is, like, sitting in the audience and what's playing, what's not playing and using it creatively. Then, of course, you get the cards and you find out if they don't like something. Scores are less important than actually reacting to how it's playing. So, we go back and they keep working. Two weeks later – they do some tightening, they do this, they do that, based on that screening – we go out and have a second screening, and it just blows the doors off. People go crazy. People start applauding at the end. We get chills, right? Because it's one of those moments, like, "What do we have here?" And then we do a focus group. You ever been to one of these screenings where there's a guy up in front and he's saying, "Who liked it? Who didn't like it? What moments did you like?" And they couldn't stop – they just couldn't – he asked, like, one question, they couldn't stop talking. "This movie's amazing!" Like, he was trying to guide them, to, like – and they kept talking about *Die Hard*, because they kept saying, like, "This is the best – this is better than *Die Hard*. This is like *Die Hard*, but even better!" And so, all the studio executives are, like, "Whoa!" Tom Sherak, who was the head of distribution and marketing, or distribution, right there in the screening – and like I said, we were scheduled to be in August, which is, you know, you're going to have hit movies in August, but it's not where you put your big movies. And this was already April. I don't know when it was. It was late. Somewhere, there's dates on this. He had a calendar there. He had, like, the release calendar of the whole industry, right? Because you have that. He said, "We're moving this movie up. We're moving it into the teeth of summer. This is a big hit movie. We're going to sell this like it's *Die Hard*, right now." And he looked at all of us in production and I remember him saying, "OK, you guys are done. Now it's us. We're riding this baby home." So, they knew. They knew from that screening. It was one of the most exciting screenings I've ever been at.

KRIS TAPLEY

This all overlaps with some of the things we've been discussing the last few weeks, of course. If you've been following along, you know that they lined up this release date with things still left to be shot, particularly the model work in the subway sequence. And of course, post-production sound work was put on the fast track, as we illustrated a couple weeks back, so all of these elements are coming together in a race against time as they're testing the film for audiences, presumably with place-holder kind of stuff and storyboards to help bridge the gaps in these screenings. So, the film is performing this

well and it's not even finished. Of course, Fox was pumped. Let's go to the film's writer, Graham Yost. We haven't heard from him in ages.

GRAHAM YOST

My wife and I go down to Lakewood to a test screening. She hadn't seen it. First time I'm seeing it with a big audience. We're sitting fairly far back and the way Tom Sherak put it was, he said, "I knew the movie was going to be a hit when people going out to the bathroom left walking backwards," because they wanted to not miss – they wanted to miss as little of the film as possible. So, they're walking out, they hit the door, they run to the bathroom, they go, they whiz and come running back in. He said, "Then I knew it was a hit." I love that sort of, you know, old-movie sense of what's working. We sat around for the focus group and, you know, they're as meaningful and as meaningless as you want them to be, but they seemed to like the movie. But I remember it was in that lobby when Tom Jacobson, they had a quick conference and they said, "Let's release it in June. We'll go up against *City Slickers II*. We'll go up against *Flintstones*."

KRIS TAPLEY

And another voice we haven't heard from in a while, producer Mark Gordon.

MARK GORDON

I give all the credit on this to Tom Sherak, who was the head of distribution at Fox at the time. We did our first preview. It scored through the roof. And Tom goes, "We're going to open this movie on June 10." And I said, "You're out of your mind. You want us to go up against *City Slickers II*?" And he said, "This movie is going to be a huge hit." And I said, "Wow. You really think so?" And he goes, "Absolutely and the test screening was amazing."

KRIS TAPLEY

Something that's interesting in all of this is the crew's perspective. After all, *Speed* was just a job to most of them, and that's typically the case. They wrapped it up and moved on to the next gig with no real connection to anything that happened after cameras stopped rolling. So, news of the quality of what they had made together made its way out slowly. Take first assistant David Sardi, for example.

DAVID SARDI

The next movie that I did after *Speed* was also a Fox movie and our exec came to visit our set – we were in North Carolina, up in the mountains – and all she could do was talk about this movie that Fox was going to release in the summer that is this amazing film. And I was like, "Well, what movie is that?" "*Speed*." And I was like, "Oh, OK, yeah." She was like, "Oh, congrats. You did that? Oh my God." You know what I mean? So, I already knew, before I saw the movie, that everybody was raving about it and the studio suddenly realized that they had a potentially huge blockbuster on their hands.

KRIS TAPLEY

The movie he was working on at that time, by the way, would appear to be Michael Apted's *Nell*, starring Jodie Foster, which shot in North Carolina.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, let's hear from a new voice on the studio side, and it's a big one: Bill Mechanic. In late-1993, Bill was hired as the new president and chief operation officer of 20th Century Fox, when *Speed* was already in production. It was a big coup at the time, wooing him away from Disney where Bill had spearheaded that company's wildly successful home video division in the '80s and early-90s, as well as its international distribution division. Fairly quickly, some sort of corporate restructuring occurred and Bill was named chairman and CEO of Fox Filmed Entertainment in early 1994, a post he would hold until he left the studio six years later. Under Bill, Fox would enjoy years of success with movies like *Independence Day*, *Titanic*, *There's Something About Mary*, *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* and more, a far cry from where the studio was when he walked in the door. Let me have Bill explain.

BILL MECHANIC

If you look at the last three or four years before it, certainly there's no consistency and the studio was bled down to where Fox was in kind of a hellhole, rat hole or whatever, in terms of, you know, being maybe the worst of the studios with very little production, you know, very little development. When I got there, I changed the release dates and stuff on *Mrs. Doubtfire*. *Mrs. Doubtfire* was in a can and *True Lies* was in production. One of the movies that had been shot and was just being assembled was *Speed*, and although it was made sort of more, I'd say, as not a premier movie – you know, Keanu wasn't a star then. Jan's first movie as a director. Sandy wasn't a star then. So, it was more of a genre kind of picture, just an action picture. It just was done so well and we had no product, so it became a centerpiece of trying to keep everything moving. And everything else was a waste of time. I shouldn't say that. Everything else was more fungible, how's that? So, the first year was replacing staff and stuff, which affects something like *Speed*. You know, a complete new marketing staff. You know, I turned all that over, and all the international staff. I mean, how bad Fox was, that if I wanted to screen a movie, I had to rent the theater on the lot back from Sony, which had leased it. Everything about Fox had gone to waste. You know, Murdoch – as you can see what happened nearly 30 years later, selling, you know, dumping it – you know, he didn't like movies and didn't like movie companies, which is not a good sign for an owner. So, the company was sort of second-tier at that time. I guess the simplest way to say it is my final interview when I was meeting Rupert and I walked into the main administration building, and the front door of the administration building, whatever it was called, said "Fox Fi Corp," and the "Im" had fallen off and nobody had replaced it. So, it was sort of just a fading, you know, former giant with, again, selling off – when I was at Disney, I bought some of the foreign rights on *Die Hard 3*, you know? So, you're selling off your franchises, even. And so, everything about Fox was, to me, when I got there, sort of second-rate, and it was about, you know, rebuilding everything and building an infrastructure and making it what it ultimately did become. You know, we went from the seventh-ranked studio to the first-ranked studio.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, Bill is not part of the development equation here. He's working with the product available to him when he's hired at the studio. And along with Sherak, he's a big part of the decision to go out with *Speed* to kick off the summer movie season in June of 1994.

BILL MECHANIC

Which, I think World Cup or something like that was there. So, people – there were no real major releases against us, you know? Which allowed us to pump it up as a as a big movie. In June, the big releases, especially action-y, male-oriented types of entertainment, usually stay away from sporting events, and, you know, I thought that was an opportunity for the movie to have less competition. You know, generally, it's like anything. Nobody releases an action-y picture on Super Bowl Sunday or something like that, which, you know, would be more pronounced. But again, to me, it was one of those things of, it gave us an opening to let the picture be sampled. If I remember right, we also previewed it, you know, which Fox wasn't doing at the time because they felt that was giving away tickets, but I always felt on a movie like this, no, you're seeding an audience. So, the more people you get to talk about it, because you have an audience – to me, what was clearly an audience picture. You should let people do the talking, not the advertising. I'd say, just by, you know, Jan and Keanu and Sandy, where they were in their careers, you know, it's taking a shot more than it's sure-fired. You know, *True Lies* is what would be considered surefire with Jim at the peak of career at that time and Arnold and all that. So, that's a different – that's when you know the goods are there and you put the film down, you set a release date and everybody moves away from you. Nobody's going to move away from a *Speed* until it's too late.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, part of the challenge with this film, as we've noted in various ways throughout this podcast, is the fact that Keanu Reeves was not seen as an action star yet. Which is hard to conceive today, four movies into a franchise like *John Wick*, but that was the case. He was Ted. Well, Bill's answer to that was simple: fake it until you make it.

BILL MECHANIC

When we went to market, I think one of the other things we did was treat him like he was like an Arnold or any one of those guys. The ads are all about, he's a star, even though he wasn't really a star at the time. Treat the movie like it's a big movie. You have to overcome the fact that the exhibitors were looking at it like, you know, "Sure." You know, like, "What?" It's not *True Lies* until you see the movie, you know? Or a big picture. But, you know, when you pick a non-competitive release date, you're taking it out of people's hands. You're letting it be the public makes the decision. It was an action film that was a date-night movie, you know, that women liked as much as men. It wasn't a gunfight movie. So, you know, it wasn't overly violent. The female component was high, you know? It might be a movie that, the date night, the girl, the wife, the girlfriend, whoever, might want to see, but very easy to get the guy to go. Or the guy wants to go, and easy to get the girl to go. So, however you want to look at it, it wasn't a gendered action movie, which is more unusual.

KRIS TAPLEY

OK, let's go a bit deeper. I've talked in previous episodes about the *HBO First Look* episode for *Speed* and how that was a pretty seminal moment for me in terms of having an interest in the filmmaking process. The whole series was great. It made use of behind-the-scenes and EPK marketing materials for movies and developed little narratives to carry the viewer through a 30-minute making-of program, and *Speed* was easily one of the best ones they did because of the sheer amount of material they had to work with. It featured Dennis Hopper as himself and a quasi-hybrid of the Howard Payne character hosting the proceedings, connecting the footage with bits of material that he filmed with a separate crew. Who was responsible for that? We've heard from this guy briefly before, but I want to bring back Fox's former senior vice president of promotional programming, Tom Grane. He was one of the first people to have an in-house job like that at a studio, overseeing EPK production – or electronic press kit. He had crews that would go out and film B-roll of stunt sequences, get on-set interviews with the cast and crew, things like that. Here's Tom.

TOM GRANE

The very first movie I did at Fox went into production about a week or two after I was hired. It was *The War of the Roses*, and Danny DeVito wanted me to shoot the stuff on 16mm, and I was like, "That seems like overkill. It's very old school." So, we shot it on 16mm, and then up until – I think *Cast Away* was the last one – whenever there was a movie that I thought was a big behind-the-scenes-y kind of, like, movie, we would shoot it on film, which, you know, quadruples the cost, quadruples the time. But we did that on *Speed* because you saw that this thing was just going to be a big action movie and there was just going to be so many set pieces that way, that we wanted it to look bigger and, you know, gigantic in terms of its production, and psychologically at that time I felt doing it on film set it apart from everything else. Obviously in the '60s and '70s, you know, I remember seeing things like on *Willy Wonka*, a making-of thing they would air on ABC after a Sunday night movie, and also, like, *Annie*, and they would do those things on 16mm but they didn't do them on every film. They only did them on select movies back then. By the time I got into the business, every film had an EPK crew behind it, you know, whether they were spending three or four days on it or whether they were covering 20 days or whether they were covering every day, but it was definitely standard by the time I got involved. For *Speed*, we didn't shoot every day, but I want to say we probably ended up shooting around 30 days of behind-the-scenes coverage on that, which probably was – it was almost, like, every other day.

KRIS TAPLEY

Like Tony Sella, who was watching the footage coming in and getting ideas for cutting trailers and promotional materials on his end, Tom was excited about what he was seeing out in the field during production, and he would speak up about it with the suits.

TOM GRANE

That's the unique thing about my perspective of that job, was being out on set while things are in production, and then I would go back into our marketing meetings and I can sit there and say, "You guys got to pay attention to this. Because they're actually doing something kind of cool." I remember the same thing happened on *There's*

Something About Mary. No one freaking talked about that movie and I'd go down to the Florida locations and I'd come back and go, "They are making the funniest God damn movie in forever." You know? And then finally, it's like, once they get the screening of a first cut, they come back and it's like, "Holy crap, you were right." All of a sudden, the attention pivots, and that's what happened with *Speed*.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, regarding these "HBO First Looks", as a proper series called that, *HBO First Look*, these began airing in 1992 with episodes centered on Irwin Winkler's *Night and the City* with Robert De Niro and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, from director Francis Ford Coppola. Along the way, movies like *Blankman*, *Drop Zone*, *Outbreak*, *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, *Twister*, *The Cable Guy*, *Men in Black*, on and on and on through the '90s, got this treatment. I guess it's still going today though I never watch HBO on linear TV anymore. Anyway, long before it began airing as an actual series, Tom was busy establishing the blueprint with one-offs.

TOM GRANE

The first one was for *Lethal Weapon 2*, where the hair and makeup people for Mel [Gibson] were pretending like he was making home movies. And Mel was such a ham at the time. So, it wasn't an *HBO First Look*, it just kind of happened and they put it on and it did really well and I think it really helped boost the movie. And, you know, that was a time when Mel was considered just fun. And then we did the second one, which we did a mockumentary for *Edward Scissorhands* where we took, like, a PBS approach to telling the life story of Tim Burton and we cast actors to recreate his life and show why as a young child, where these imaginations would come from. Like, living in a nightmare with his family and stuff like that. So, after that, then HBO was, like, "These things do really, really well," and then they came to those of us – so, Fox had a deal, an output deal, with HBO. So, they came to us and said, "You know, if you guys are interested in doing more of these, we're interested in airing them." And research came back around this time. So, *Scissorhands* was '90. *Speed* was '94. So, research in that period came back where it actually showed that it moved the needle marketing-wise, the *HBO First Looks*. That people would see these things. And I even remember at one point, Bill Clinton, in an interview, saying how he saw one of our *HBO First Looks* on a movie and it made him want to screen it at the White House. So, they had a pretty big impact during the time. And the unique thing about *Speed* is, the *Edward Scissorhands* one, we spent a lot of money on because it was all a kind of – there wasn't a lot of behind-the-scenes footage. It wasn't a making-of; it was this faux documentary. With *Speed*, what we did was – and this was, again, for movies that I thought were big, had a big chance, and I wanted to elevate them rather than just do a straightforward, kind of, like, long featurette kind of *First Look*. I would do something that would put even more production value in it, which is why we went after Dennis Hopper as a host and came up with that kind of sub-story in the thing about, you know, he's walking the audience through the making of the movie, but then, you know, he also kind of is a little bit of the character and blows up the Hollywood sign at the end.

[CLIP: "HBO FIRST LOOK: THE MAKING OF SPEED"]

DENNIS HOPPER

Oh, hi, yeah. It's me, Dennis Hopper. Hollywood, whew. I'd kill for a bus right now. I've got to get out of here. Place will make you crazy. This film I just finished, *Speed*? Something about making that movie just put me over the edge. Me. Explosions, chases, stunts. I mean, after all. A bus is just a bus, right?

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, just to back up a bit, you have to collect all this behind-the-scenes material in the first place. Tom mentioned they had about 30 days of coverage from the set. That was pretty outsized, according to the film's unit publicist, Bob Hoffman.

BOB HOFFMAN

I know that one of the areas in which they allowed a certain level of flexibility in terms of marketing spend was with the EPK, and it was based on the fact that Andrea Jaffe was so impressed by everything that she was getting. They knew that the amount of days that we were asking for were reasonable, given the physicality of the production.

KRIS TAPLEY

He's referring to the late Andrea Jaffe, Fox's former president of marketing.

BOB HOFFMAN

My recollection was, is that it got expanded to something like 20 or 25 days. I mean, it got expanded dramatically, is my recollection of it. And it would only happen if you had a production that had some unusual feature going for it. I think the unusual feature here was the belief in the marketing department that they were on to their next *Die Hard* and that they needed to really cover themselves to make sure that they had all the materials that they needed to be able to market the film the way they wanted to, which I think was, you know, the anomaly for the way that most EPKs were done. Because most EPKs were capped that they would want to spend \$30,000, \$35,000 on the making of an EPK.

KRIS TAPLEY

Producer Mark Gordon.

MARK GORDON

Back in those days, the machine worked. And it didn't matter whether you were \$150 million movie or a \$28 million movie, they had the machine. Now, it's too expensive to do all this stuff, and the world has changed.

KRIS TAPLEY

You can see the *Speed HBO First Look* on YouTube, by the way. I'll link to it at our website. It's a lot of fun. Dennis Hopper is such a pro and totally sells it. Chalk it up to another aspect of the '90s I miss. Oh, and one more aside from Tom about all this...

TOM GRANE

And you've actually got to remember, too – and I don't know if anyone has talked about this – there was a very similar movie at MGM that came out around the same time about a bomber, called *Blown Away*. There was definitely concern, kind of like the Volcano/Dante's Peak thing. It was the same sort of situation where it was like, "Who's going to come out first? How are you going to position these things?" And I remember having friends at MGM, particularly once the *First Look* aired, and they were just like, "We give up. You guys have the goods. We don't."

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, other aspects of the marketing obviously include the poster and trailer. Tony Sella, as he told Tom Jacobson, had tons to work with to craft an exciting trailer. I know I remember it well, and it did its job in driving interest ahead of release. Let's luxuriate in a little of that. I know this is just audio but see if it brings back some memories.

[CLIP: *SPEED* TRAILER]

JEFF DANIELS (as "Harry Temple")

Alright, pop quiz. Airport, gunman with one hostage. He's using her for cover. He's almost to a plane. You're a hundred feet away. What do you think?

KEANU REEVES (as "Jack Traven")

Shoot the hostage.

JEFF DANIELS (as "Harry Temple")

What?

KEANU REEVES (as "Jack Traven")

Go for the good wound and he can't get to the plane with her. Clear shot.

JEFF DANIELS (as "Harry Temple")

You're deeply nuts, you know that?

JOE MORTON (as "Capt. McMahon")

Alright, gentlemen. What we have here are 13 passengers in an express elevator. Bomb's already taken out cables. The bomber wants \$3 million or he blows the emergency brakes.

JORDAN LUND (as "Bagwell")

Anything else that'll keep this elevator from falling?

KEANU REEVES (as "Jack Traven")

Yeah, the basement.

TRAILER NARRATOR

He can strike anywhere at any time.

KEANU REEVES (AS “JACK TRAVEN”)

Will the mystery guest please sign in.

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Why are they messing with me? Do they think I’m doing this for fun?

TRAILER NARRATOR

For LA cop Jack Traven...

KEANU REEVES (AS “JACK TRAVEN”)

Tell me again, Harry. Why did I take this job?

JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)

Oh, come on. Thirty more years of this you get a tiny pension and a cheap gold watch.

KEANU REEVES (AS “JACK TRAVEN”)

Cool.

TRAILER NARRATOR

...the game began...

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Very exciting, Jack. Some close calls, huh?

TRAILER NARRATOR

...when someone put the city of Los Angeles to the ultimate test.

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Pop quiz, hotshot! There’s a bomb on a bus. Once the bus goes 50 miles an hour, the bomb is armed. If it drops below 50, it blows up. What do you do? What do you do?

KRIS TAPLEY

Man. You can see how they really did a great job of building tension there. It’s an awesome trailer. And then, of course, there were tons of TV spots, some even featuring that Pat Benatar cover of “Rescue Me” that we talked about in the soundtrack episode. As that June 10 release date approached, all of this stuff built to a fever pitch. Then, of course, there was the poster. It’s somehow equally nothing special and a work of art. And to Bill Mechanic’s point, it treats Keanu Reeves like a full-blown action star. His head is featured prominently and massively, with one of still photographer Richard Foreman’s shots of the bus jump surrounded by a Photoshop amalgamation of flames. Richard actually detailed that image a little bit for us at the end of our episode dedicated to the jump sequence, episode 22. But I wanted to bring his voice back in here as well because, after all, a lot of the material he was getting on set would be used for the marketing of the film. Here’s Richard recounting a small example of one such photo and I think this gives you a nice peek inside the machine.

RICHARD FOREMAN

I saw Andrzej kind of out near the freeway, holding up his light meter trying to, you know, get a read on the exposure, what it was going to be in the sunlight versus underneath the shade of a very large overpass. And I pulled up the camera thinking, "Oh, this is a great shot for Andrzej." And all I had was a 28-millimeter lens. And I thought, "Well, he's just tiny in the frame," so I just framed it so that the shot was Andrzej as a tiny little person underneath this huge overpass with a gigantic column on the right-hand side, and then the overpass arching kind of at the top of the frame. And I shot it vertical with Andrzej down in the bottom left-hand corner. Well, I was going to pull that frame for him, that slide, and just kind of give it to him as a momento, but I never did. Because in the old days, of course, it was, you know, transparencies. And because I left that transparency in the stack of all the images, advertising pulled that frame wanting to use the column and the art for the poster. And so, if you look at the poster, it's got that arch over the top of the freeway and the big column coming down on the right-hand side. It had had to have been the original theatrical poster because they gave me \$5,000 for that archway, that freeway overpass. They gave me an advertising buyout. So, anyway, it was a lesson learned, professionally, to give them everything. Don't pull anything, because you never know when it's going to, you know, cost you. You know, you give a gift to somebody, that was a \$5,000 gift, but it didn't happen because I didn't find the slide or I just didn't go to the lab that day and it got submitted to Fox.

KRIS TAPLEY

And then, the final piece of the promotional puzzle ahead of release: the premiere. The glitz, the glamour, the red-carpet photos that go all over the world, the interviews from the stars as they file into the first public exhibition of their efforts – this used to be quite the spectacle. You'd see clips on *Entertainment Tonight* or what have you and you would feel that rush of excitement for an upcoming movie release all the more. The *Speed* premiere was held at the famed Mann's Chinese Theatre on June 7, 1994, and the guest list included Bruce Campbell, David Spade, Dwight Yokam, Edward Furlong, Gary Sinise, Gene Simmons, Jennifer Tilly, Rebecca De Mornay, Eric Stoltz and, of course, the film's key players. Another attendee was filmmaker Quentin Tarantino, which brings me to this anecdote from Graham Yost.

GRAHAM YOST

We sit down and my parents have flown from Vancouver. My brother, too. I'm there with my wife. A whole group of friends. They let me have, like, 20 tickets. We're all in a row and I say to Connie, I said, "You know who's sitting behind us?" And she said, "Who?" And I said, "It's Quentin Tarantino. He directed that film *Reservoir Dogs*." Which is cool because that's the one film, and he's already known by how he looks, you know? So well-promoted and that he's this directing star. She said, "You should say hi." I said, "No." So, his hand comes forward onto my dad's shoulder and he says, "Excuse me." And my dad turns and it's Quentin and he says, "Are you Elwy Yost?" And he says, "Yes." And he says, "I've seen all of your shows. *The Moviemakers*. All the interviews you've done. It's unbelievable stuff." And he keeps going, and my dad says, "Well, this is my son, Graham. He wrote this movie." And then he said, "I saw it at a sneak preview

on Wednesday night. I did everything I could so I could see it again.” The sweetest guy. That was a nice vote of confidence. But what that said to me was, OK – and this was something I also heard at Fox, was people love to feel they discovered something.

KRIS TAPLEY

While we’re at the premiere, let’s bring back former Fox exec Jorge Saralegui. Here he is, finally able to enjoy the fruits of his labor and of his support. Remember, this is a guy who read Graham’s script by happenstance because he was looking for a comedy writer to work on a script about a pig in witness protection. He stuck by *Speed*, stood up for it in meetings, toiled through development with Mark and Graham, played a huge role in putting the various pieces together in front of the camera and behind it, and now, he can bask in the glow of success.

JORGE SARALEGUI

On the night of the premiere, it’s going to be Fox’s first hit under this regime, right? And it’s my first movie. And it’s just a great party and at some point, I’m walking out with Peter Chernin, and he put his arm around me and said, “Enjoy tonight because it’ll never get better than this.” And I took him seriously, but he was right. It was such an underdog story, all the way, and to have it work out like this and have it be the beginning of something, the beginning of Fox being a ‘90s action place, right? And, you know, and the beginning of my career, you know? And really the beginning of his career as a studio exec, right? It was an unbelievable feeling of, like, you know, hard work and overcoming and it all works out and everybody in the movie is an underdog and, you know, and so forth.

GRAHAM YOST

People love to get behind the underdog, and *Speed* was the underdog. It became that something that people, you know, could rally behind because you feel like you’re getting into something at the beginning. And listen, we all remember, you know, Anthony Lane’s review.

KRIS TAPLEY

You know what, Graham? Hold that thought.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

KRIS TAPLEY

Next week on *50 MPH*...

KRIS TAPLEY

Speed finally hits theaters and it’s a runaway popular, and critical, success.

JAN DE BONT

Almost immediately, the audience embraced the movie. It was so fantastic. You cannot even imagine that the audience responds in the same way as you always would hope they would do.

TOM JACOBSON

And not only was there tremendous excitement about it, or, you know, the numbers were bigger than we had thought, but the feedback was, you know, the sort of exit polls and all of those things were just really high, so, it's like, "Yeah! We did good!"

MARK GORDON

We made this movie that was kind of *The Little Engine That Could*, and I do think that it was a series of happy accidents.

KRIS TAPLEY

And after a wildly successful run at the box office to the tune of \$350 million, the film breaks the mold one more time with its home video release.

BILL MECHANIC

I believe people collect things that are good, and movies that are fun like *Speed* are rewatchable.

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.