

50 MPH: EPISODE 49

“THE OFFICIAL 50 MPH SPEED COMMENTARY TRACK”

Transcript (01:59:36)



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

Hello again and welcome to June of 2024. That’s right, we’re close. The 30th anniversary of *Speed* is literally right around the corner and I’m already starting to get a little emotional. Guys, it’s almost over. *50 MPH* is entering the final lap. But before we come to our big finale next week, I thought something in the realm of a recap and review might be in order. There are a few different ways I could go about that, I guess. I could bring in a bunch of choice soundbites from over the last year and sort of re-showcase the wonderful chorus of 120 voices we’ve heard from on the podcast. I could do that. I could just sit here and wax on a little more about *Speed* and try to put a bow on things that way, but I think there will be plenty of time for that kind of thing next week. No, I thought I’d do something a little more special. If you’re still listening to this podcast after a year of material and literally thousands of minutes dedicated to this particular movie, then I figure you might be up for watching that movie together. And so, this is the official *50 MPH* commentary track for *Speed*. That’s right, it’s two hours of me talking about *Speed* while watching *Speed*. We finally got to the singularity. Now, there are two ways you can do this. Once I shut up here on this intro, you can keep listening on your morning commute or your daily walk and you’ll hear the movie start up as I settle in and begin blabbing on about it. That is, I guess, the most podcast-friendly approach, because you’ll hear the movie underneath everything and it should be a seamless enough experience, particularly if you’re well-versed in the film, as I imagine a number of you are. Or, you can go to our website, 50mphpodcast.com, and you can download the commentary-only track, which is just my voice. That’s if you want to do this the right way, which is firing up the movie on your end – on your VHS, your Laserdisc, your DVD, Blu-ray, 4K, hell, maybe you have a 35mm print of the movie and you’re that awesome. Then just press play on the commentary track once you see the 20th Century Fox logo on the screen. However you choose to listen to this, the goal here is to, again, put a bow on things with a nice recap of *50 MPH*. What better way to do that than to watch *Speed* together as I throw some thoughts around and direct you to various episodes of the podcast along the way for deeper dives into whatever we might be seeing on screen at the moment. Does all of that make sense? I hope it does. So, with that, I’ll talk to you again, one more time, next week on *50 MPH*.

KRIS TAPLEY

All right, the 20th Century Fox logo is up and this is Kris Tapley. I'm the host of 50 MPH, a podcast dedicated to the making and legacy of *Speed*. And this is the official 50 MPH commentary track for *Speed*. So, we're going to watch the movie together. And here we are in the elevator shaft. Of course, you can go back to episode – what was it? – 26 and 29 and learn all about this model. You're looking at a model here of an elevator shaft. They laid it down on its back and they dropped a camera in with a snorkel lens and they're tracking along these multi-hour passes to shoot this sequence. And it's a beautiful model. Let's pause for the title splash here.

A little Allan Holdsworth guitar screech there. There's Mark Mancina score coming in. So, yeah, this is a model, and I've always just been fascinated by the fact that this was cost effective at the time. I mean, today, they would do this sequence on a computer very easily, very quickly. But it was cost effective back in an era when a gigabyte cost whatever it cost, or if you even – you probably didn't have the computer space to render something like this. But to hire all that personnel to make this model, to get in there and rig it with all of these little practical lighting fixtures, to age it and weather it and all of that artisan craft, and then to get a camera out there and shoot it for eight hours at a time, because you're trying to avoid camera shake and things like this, these very long exposures – all of that was cost effective. And within, you know, a couple of years, that cost effectiveness would just be completely reversed. It would cost way more to hire all that personnel. You would just do it on a computer. So, technology continues apace, and it's sad to me. I mean you've got all these guys and gals that have this skill set and it's dying art.

Anyway, this score here, Mark Mancina's overture, if you will, you never get this kind of thing anymore, just this opportunity for the entire film to sort of play out in musical movements. Just to set the stage here, you know, with the credits in the elevator and all of this, I just think that's cool.

A round of applause, please, for our guy, Jan de Bont. Just what an incredible debut movie, and that's what this is. This is a directorial debut.

First cut to the actual set and our first victim.

Mark Gordon, the producer, says they shaved some frames off of that after a first couple of test screenings. I guess the moment was a little too brutal to start. Here's our elevator passengers. You can hear from a couple of them back in episode 26. There's Patrick Fischler on the left, a well-recognizable character actor. *Mulholland Drive*. He's in *Twister*, too. They shot this early part at the Gas Company Tower downtown.

I had to pause for that line from Keanu's drummer. And then the elevator itself, they built an actual elevator shaft and the elevator set on a soundstage at 20th Century Fox. So, mixed media here. I love it.

This is what I think about when I think about the sound in this movie. Of course, *Speed* won two Oscars for its sound work and there is just something about this growling beast of an elevator shaft that, you know – the sound mixer, certainly, but particularly sound editor Steven Hunter Flick. It's just amazing work.

Joss Whedon, ladies and gentlemen. You can tell when it's a Joss Whedon line. Here we are downtown again. You can go there and see this. Do a nice *Speed* tour. Bullitt entrance is absolutely ridiculous but I love it, and I love this shot just wrapping around, getting the energy going, Keanu chomping the gum, and according to Jeff Daniels, asking him right before the take, "What's our rhythm?" Then hammering out a rhythm on the dashboard to kind of have a – I don't know, just an energy going into the scene.

Miles Bennett Dyson, actor Joe Morton, fresh off of *Terminator 2* – or not fresh, because this a couple years later, but I love this guy. Instant credibility for your movie when he shows up.

By the way, this entire sequence – I've reviewed multiple drafts of the screenplay. This sequence was sort of the least changed as it evolved into a more kind of fresher take on the action genre. Which is interesting to me, because, you know, if you go back and listen to – gosh, when was it? Episode nine. Author Alex Pappademas is talking about how the movie is sort of a journey for Jack Traven to transform from this sort of cocksure cop and learn how to actually relate to people and be a part of a community. So, it makes sense that the first act, if you will, would go unchanged, because it was written as, you know, part of a more – inspired by the action heyday of the '80s. So, cocksure and that sort of thing. And that's who Jack Traven is at the beginning of the movie, he's still that guy, the guy who would say, "Yeah, the basement," things like that, so.

You've got to love Dennis Hopper, man. I mean, cast, like, two weeks into production. They were shooting the bus stuff out on the freeway and they finally just say, "Fine, Dennis Hopper." And you couldn't have gotten anybody better to play your villain here. And the pairing of these two, Keanu Reeves and Jeff Daniels, I have always thought that that was just so unusual and great. I mean – rough makeup job there. If you look at the thumb. I mean, these two guys are nothing alike, and that works.

I love that shot. I don't know why. It's unusual. The lady looking up.

The evolution of that idea, the entire "pop quiz" kind of banter between Jack and Harry, I really encourage you, if you haven't, to go back and listen to episode 12, probably the most popular episode of the entire podcast, which talks about the development of the screenplay and writers like Joss Whedon and Paul Attanasio coming on board to script-doctor the proceedings and just the evolution of that into this just fixture of pop culture. You know, "pop quiz, hotshot" is embedded, I think, and immortal. It was quite the Odyssey to determine who wrote that line, I have to tell you

This was a new building at the time. Early '90s, downtown was really changing. I wasn't here but, you know, this is what the research tells me, folks.

More great sound design. This is what I think of. I think of these cable twangs and things like that.

We're 13 minutes into this movie, no bus yet. I've said it before but this movie just gives you so much bang for your buck. This is a riveting sequence. And, of course, Mark Gordon has said that this sequence alone is what made him want to buy the script.

Now a few of these actors in the elevator told me that they didn't know what the hell they were going to do to this elevator. They would shake it around when they didn't expect it. They would blow holes in it like that when they didn't expect it. I mean, this is all part of the Jan de Bont experience, you know? Capturing that reality on camera.

Oh man. Just shooting this shit, by the way, to make sure the information is carried across, that you understand what's happening. And the tension here is so good. And this is just the appetizer, you know? And very different from what we're going to get throughout the rest of the movie. I mean, this is a tight, cramped place. It's more about tension than, like, explosive set pieces. This shit was dangerous, man. I mean, first AD David Sardi said that as harrowing as some of the bus material was to shoot, this was the most dangerous set of the entire film. I mean, they built this elevator shaft. They're dropping this elevator on, like, a cable. It's run up to the roof of the soundstage, and a guy is kind of like gauging it.

Ooh. Alright, who clenched up?

This right here is a digital effect rendered within the model of the elevator. That's how they used the model there. I think that's kind of cool, to take a computer-generated effect with the, you know, window washing wench and the falling elevator, and put that within a model environment. Just one of the many examples of this movie being a bit of a hybrid exercise on the effects front.

I love that rack focus in that moment of realization, by the way. Keanu just gets so serious in that moment.

Believe it or not, Jeff Daniels is 10 years older than Keanu Reeves, which – I don't know why I say "believe it or not," it was just a surprise to me. But I liked that relationship between the two of them, too. I mean, there's a certain veteran, wise mentor aspect between the two of them, which is of course heartbreaking in the original draft of the script where Harry ended up being the villain. But I think this was better. And Harry's ultimate fate and how that propels us into the third act and all of that. But we'll get there

You know, supposedly that's Harry saying "shit, shit, shit," according to the captions. I've always had this weird vibe on that line. I'm, like, "Who is saying this?" I don't know if anyone else feels that way but it almost feels like it's Dennis Hopper saying it. But, you

know, he's on camera. Alright, now, this is a blue-screen shot, Keanu riding the elevator, and they used the elevator shaft – or the model, excuse me – for the background plate. That's kind of cool, too, I think.

He was going to blow his fucking head off. Pretty brazen.

There it is.

That's a bit of a giveaway, huh? "Standard flanking deployment." No one picking up on that?

I love these lines. I don't know.

Now, that was apparently a Paul Attanasio line.

That evil, maniacal laugh. So good.

The villain's lair.

They shot this down at the Derby over in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles. I've said this before. I feel like I could totally, like, you know run a tour based on *Speed* locations. That'd be a hell of a tour.

"Don't get dead."

Super '90s song playing in the background here, by the way. I love it

This is that mentor stuff again. I don't know. I just think that their dynamic is cool. It works.

This is the Derby of *Swingers* fame, by the way. Go back and look at *Swingers*. You'll see it there, too.

Now we're in Venice. This is the Firehouse restaurant. It's outfitted as, like, a coffee shop here.

The great John Capodice. Character actor. Also was in *Ace Ventura* in 1994. What was his name in that movie? Aguado. Something like that. That sticks in my head for some reason.

Alright, I love this shot coming up. Pay attention here. OK, this is Keanu coming out of the coffee shop. This bus that's going off is turning left right now down the street, out of screen, and as we come around, this is a different bus that's being towed. You can even see the tow cable there – right there – that was ready to blow. That's called a Texas Switch. It's usually done with, like, a stuntman jumping in for a principal actor in the middle of a sequence to kind of hide the change for a stunt or what have you, and doing

it here with buses is kind of cool idea. And this was a hell of an explosion smoked out an advertising firm down there in Venice. They had to evacuate.

It was either Graham Yost or Mark Gordon pointed out in their commentary track that this angle is wrong. You know, the fire looks like it's coming from another direction here. But that's the magic of movies, man. It's the effect of the image.

I've always liked this detail of, like, whatever this is, a palm tree or whatever. I mean, it's probably just so that there's something dark and it's not fully reflective and you can actually see his face, but it just looks cool.

There's your premise, folks. Come on, man. What an elevator pitch. I have said this before, too, but this was the heyday of that kind of thing. I mean, like, *The Rock*, for instance. You've got to break into Alcatraz with a Navy SEAL team and they're bringing along the one guy who ever escaped Alcatraz to help them do it. Elevator pitch. There's a bomb on a bus. Once it goes over 50, the bomb is armed. If it drops below 50, it blows up. I just miss this era of clean-engine action narratives.

Howard Payne just said that the bus was at the corner of Ocean Park – look at this guy with a fanny pack, by the way. Where did he go? He just was off-screen. It just cracks me up, that guy. Anyway, said it was at the corner of Ocean Park in Main, which, that is literally where this is. I love that this movie really sticks to the geography of the narrative, because why not? Like, they actually just shot it either where it says it is in the script or they just adapted it to where they shot it, whatever the case may be. I just think that's cool. There's not a lot of them saying they're in one place and they're actually shooting it somewhere else.

Emmy nominee Alan Ruck, star of *Succession*, and, of course, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Spin City* and *Twister*. This character, obviously, evolved a lot. He was originally a lawyer. Like, this asshole lawyer with parking tickets – or, no, DUIs. That was the deal. DUIs. Big difference. And that's why he's on the bus, is because he had DUIs, and he was kind of transformed into this tourist character.

And here's Beth Grant, another great character actress. I love these shots, by the way, the kind of patchwork freeway landscape of Los Angeles. It gives the score great moments, too, to kind of do its thing.

We'll see him again.

Sonia Jackson, David Kriegel. Daniel Villarreal back there, Carlos Carrasco. One of my favorite things of the entire 50 MPH project was talking to all these folks on the bus, and I had already interviewed them all 10 years ago for a 20th anniversary story. There's Natsuko Ohama behind Sandra Bullock. They're great people, man. I mean, just – most of them just blue-collar actors, you know? People that make their living as working actors, and it's just a different kind of person, a different kind of actor. I mean, these aren't movie-star folks. These are very skilled, and, again, just hardworking people, and

so their perspective is – my point is their perspective is very refreshing. That might have been the longest episode of the podcast, episode 17, where we really lay out all of their stories.

Alright, here comes our man, Glenn Plummer. Before this, he was in a movie called *South Central*, which is a great – well, it's not a great movie, but he gives a great performance in it. And, you know, as he said, he wanted to get away from these kinds of movies, these sort of gangland movies. He was getting typecast, he felt, and he grew his hair out and got cast in this movie and it's a bit of a comedic bit and it changed things for him. He's so good. He would of course return for the third act of *Speed 2: Cruise Control*.

These helicopter shots are so cool

I think someone has said something – maybe Graham Yost has talked about this, but it's certainly something that comes up. People say, "Well, why didn't he just shoot out the tires before it got up to speed?" Because then we wouldn't have a fucking movie, OK? I won't tolerate that kind of stuff. You're talking about a movie where a bus sails over a 50-foot gap in a freeway and that's what's getting you hung up?

This is Hawthorne James, by the way, the driver. Another great character actor. *The Five Heartbeats*, *Seven*. Really cool guy to talk to.

Alright, this is just something random I'm going to mention, but you know this beat coming up where the note flies through the air and lands on the windshield and it says "bomb on bus"? I'm always thrown off briefly when I see that it's spelled correctly, because for some reason, in my head, I combine this moment with the moment in *The Last Boy Scout* where Damon Wayans is drawing a picture of a bomb to let them know there's a bomb. And he's, like, "I'm drawing them a picture." And Bruce Willis is, like, "It looks like an apple with lines coming out of it," or whatever he says. But he writes "BOM" and he's, like, "There, happy?" But he writes "B-O-M." So, I don't know, those two moments in early-90s action movies gel in my head.

I've always thought that was weird. Who says a phone number that way? You might say four-seven-zero, eight thousand. You might say four-seven-zero, eight-zero-zero-zero. Maybe you wouldn't say that, but it's just always thrown me off. Four-seventy, eight thousand. What a phone number. I'm going to look that up real quick. Four-seventy, eight thousand. Let's try three-one-o.

"Yeah, you get on the bus." I just love that delivery.

Three-one-o, four-seventy, eight thousand is new Newcom Networks Inc., whatever that is. Anyway, back to the movie. Ugh, brutal.

You've got to go back – where's that episode? There's an episode where Glenn is talking about the delivery of that "take the phone" line. I want to say it's episode 21.

Yeah, that sounds right. “Hell on Wheels,” the first bus portion that we covered. He didn’t understand what Jan wanted him to do with the line, and Jan was just, like, “No, just tell him to take the phone,” like, you know, play the exasperation of the moment. And finally, he just played it that way and it got the biggest laugh of anything. And then there’s a whole story, too, about this water beat and how they couldn’t figure out how to do the stunt to get the water on him or something and he just said, “Give me a cup of water,” and he threw a cup of water on his head and stuck his head up and that was the shot. Once again, movie magic.

We haven’t even talked about Keanu and Sandra, have we? I mean this is the movie that made her a star, period. It’s the movie that made Keanu Reeves an action star, which he is very much to this day. I mean, just a seminal movie with that in mind. I mean, as I’ve said, I think that Sandra Bullock is the movie’s indelible legacy I mean, if there’s anything that is a defining legacy of this movie, it is the movie, due respect to *Demolition Man*, that gave us Sandra Bullock, you know, in all of her glory and all of her shades. You know, everything we love about her is present in this performance. And then Keanu here, yeah, he had done *Point Break*, and I’ve talked about my reticence to call that an action movie. It’s probably an action movie. But *Speed* is an undeniable action movie, and Keanu just wasn’t sure if he was the guy for it. And I think, you know, he proved he is. I mean, he’s so charismatic. The camera loves him. All of that stuff. And he clearly, you know, got the bug regarding stunts and fight scenes and whatnot, and the stuff we see in these John Wick movies is just incredible. So, you can thank *Speed* for that as far as I’m concerned. I mean, you get from *Speed* to *The Matrix* and you’ve got a full-blown action superstar.

My kid loves that line.

And this whole thing, by the way, with the bus driver getting shot, was a bit of a domino effect, as I’ve talked about. I mean, it started out with the bus driver having a heart attack, and Hawthorne didn’t like that, understandably. You know, all these people that are being heroes in some fashion and the Black man has a heart attack, and it just didn’t sit right with him. And that led to a need to incapacitate the driver, so, you have somebody that’ll have a gun, and that ends up being Daniel Villarreal, and that’s how he ended up in the movie. He had, I think, auditioned for David Kriegel’s role, which also evolved. All of these roles evolved. And Carlos hates the fact that his character, Ortiz, tackles Daniel Villarreal and causes that whole chain of events. So, Carlos says, you know, “Yeah, sure, blame it on the Latinos,” a gang banger and this, you know, lumbering idiot who tackles him. So, you know, it’s just interesting how these things trickle down.

I don’t know why I’m laughing at that. Something about the talking with your mouth full. Good acting.

“Passenger relay.” Is that a real thing or did they just figure that sounded like a cool term?

One of the few unnecessary F-bombs in this movie. A few fewer and they could have got a PG-13 rating, I think.

I think they had some cameras lined up for that shot, by the way, and the car landed on them. So, they didn't have those angles to use.

If you pay attention there, if you look real close, it looks like Annie has put on some weight. That's because that's Gil Combs, stunt driver, with Annie's clothes on – I'm talking about the longer shots – driving the bus. You can also see a camera mounted onto the side of the bus in one of those shots.

Believe it or not, one time I tracked down what this football game was, and it's some, like, college game from, like, '86 or something, which just tells you, like, that's what they had access to get the rights to throw on those TV screens. But, yeah, I tracked that down. I'm pretty obsessed.

That's Margaret Medina, by the way. She's a lot of fun. She was actually – originally, she auditioned to be Carlos' wife, because there was a draft of the script where you got to know a little more of the bus passengers' lives, and they liked her enough, they brought her back to play this role once that wife role was kind of written out.

This is the NOTAR helicopter meaning “no tail rotor.” And they fly pretty low in a number of these shots. Joe Morton tells me that's something that can't do anymore.

Now this stuff was shot down in Long Beach, by the way. This is an example of, you know, going somewhere else to get your shots. I think they want you to think it's maybe, like, Mid-Wilshire or something like that, maybe heading back toward downtown.

Classic moment coming up.

Just that shot there, by the way, is something you don't really get. I mean, they would use a drone or something, but having two helicopters in the air and, you know, I'm told even at the time that was a little unusual.

There's a great story Graham Yost tells me about this baby carriage, how he saw it, like, in the production office or whatever, and it was this sort of European, ornate pram and he's, like, “No, it should just be, like, a regular baby carriage.” But that's the genius of Jan de Bont. You know, directors like to have visual elements like that and it just stands out more plus it's, like, something that maybe that woman would have found, because someone threw out – not to think too hard about the fucking baby carriage scene of *Speed*, but there we are.

“We're boned.” I always liked that.

This stuff, you know, “everybody get on this side of the bus,” “stay on or get off,” that whole deal, I've said this before but I just – the thesis of the movie, or the theme of the

movie, is in “pop quiz, hotshot.” Think on your feet. And that’s what’s happening here. Making the split-second decisions. “What do you do?”

Why do they use that sound effect twice? Of here saying “here we go.” Like, you’d think somebody would say yeah, “Eh, maybe not.”

That guy standing in the middle there, that’s Milton Quon. Milton was a Disney animator. He was in his 70s when this movie came out and he only passed away a couple years back, made it into his hundreds and, you know, did extra work and background work and stuff. And this is a guy that worked on, like, *Fantasia* and stuff. It’s sort of an honor to talk to that guy.

Andre Bartkowiak is the DP of this movie and he had just shot in this area the year prior for *Falling Down*. If you remember the big scene where Michael Douglas shoots a bazooka at a construction site, same area right here. And here we are on the 105 freeway, which was under construction while they were shooting this and completely empty for their use, which is something you would not get today, a stretch of eight miles of freeway or whatever in the middle of Los Angeles. They were working on it all the way up until it opened in October of ‘93.

Jack Traven has no drip.

Some of these pictures of the guys in the lineup here by the way on the computer are guys on the crew. Michael Coo was the movie’s key grip, and David Macmillan, who we’ve heard from on the podcast, was the production sound mixer. So, they got a few fun cameos there to show the family.

Speaking of David Macmillan, he talks back in episode 21, I think, about the challenges of getting clean audio on the bus here. This bit made it a little bit easier because the doorway there sort of shielded the wind away from the microphones, which at least in Joe Morton’s case is visible, the microphone, in the shot. It just looks like part of his uniform. That’s kind of cool.

This moment coming up here is Hawthorne doing the transfer over to the flatbed. Which he did himself stuntman Jophery Brown did it a couple of times first, but ultimately, Hawthorne did it and he says that when he asked for his bump for doing a stunt, that’s what made everybody else decide they needed bumps for their stunts. Can’t really track down who was really the ringleader on all of that.

We are all Helen, OK? We want to get off that bus. Now, in the end, final analysis, people find her annoying or whatever. Beth Grant certainly does. Because her whole thing is she was more of a hero in the earlier drafts. She gave CPR to the driver and whatnot when he had the heart attack. So, you know, obviously that changed. And the way Jan de Bont put it to her was, “We need a coward.” She’s a bit of a surrogate, I think, for an audience member. You know, you want to get off that bus. You see an opportunity. But Beth just hates her. She’s such a whiner, in her eyes.

Simone Gad there, by the way, with the glasses. Simone passed away a couple of years ago. Honestly, it was three weeks after I spoke to her last for the podcast, and – a really sweet lady.

I've got a great photo of Beth Grant with her dummy that they rolled over there. Tons of stories from this whole section, by the way. Again, go back and listen to episode 21. Virtually everything from Jack getting on the bus – or even before that, really – through up to the jump, which is coming up You can find all of that information in Episode 21.

I love this part of the score. I think it's called "Helen Dies" or something. Yes, "Helen Dies."

One of the greatest tweets in the history of Twitter is someone putting this scene up where everyone's at each other's throats about just sort of random things, and they said something like, "This this scene from *Speed* is Twitter in a nutshell." So, I always think about that tweet now when I see this.

That's a great shot, by the way. I don't know why. I just – to have Simone back there covering her ears and Natsuko in the foreground, just that sense of the community breaking apart there. That's what happens when you get a DP to direct a movie. You get good shots.

That's a great scene. It's pretty real

And by the way, you barely get a second to breathe after Helen dies before we come up on the jump. This movie does not let off the gas. No pun intended.

I love Joe's just exasperation here.

The guy playing Norwood, by the way, is Richard Lineback, another great character actor. He had a big year this year with *Speed* and *Natural Born Killers*. He's at the beginning of that film. And he would go on to play Helen Hunt's dad, ill-fated dad, at the beginning of *Twister*, getting sucked up through that door.

Now, according to former Fox production president Tom Jacobsen, Jan de Bont pitched this sequence in the room when he came in to interview for the job of directing the movie. He felt they needed this kind of crescendo in the middle of the movie. And as Joss Whedon put it, there was even a moment when they were considering not doing this but, you know, the thing is, when they survive this, the entire dynamic is different on the bus after that. They're a family after that, and you know, not to get too deep on dramaturgy here or anything, but that is a very valid point, because it progresses the story.

That is the most expensive shot in the entire film right there, and if you want to learn all about why that is, I would encourage you to go back and listen to episode 29 about the

visual effects element of the movie. It was just not an easy thing to do in 1994, OK? To track all of that on a moving helicopter, zooming camera, tilting, panning and to have digital matte paintings and such that you're working with there and it's just – I don't want to bog down in it. You should go check it out.

There's Loretta Jean Crudup getting her line. "I miss my babies." I love that woman. Just a lot of fun talking to her.

Here we go. Money shots all around. That sold tickets right there. Just an awesome, awesome moment in the movie. And they completely fucked up. I mean, I've done an entire episode dedicated to the jump, episode 22. Go back and listen to it. Jan de Bont just is adamant that he did it a second time without the studio knowing. You know, shooting the actual bus jump, which they did, you know, separately and then used computer effects to sell the idea that there's a gap there and all of that. He is adamant that they shot it twice. I'll be honest, I'm not sure after doing such a deep dive into it. My instinct is no they definitely couldn't have done it twice. No one remembers doing it twice. But, you know, whatever. Lots to say about that entire sequence, so, go check out that episode.

And here we are again, by the way. Quick split-second decisions. "Get off this. Let's go into the airport. I can go around the runways." Quick thinking. And now we're into the LAX portion of the movie, which I also covered at length, episode 24. Lots of stunts coming along here, too, so.

By the way, it was literally called Bravo Tango. They just called it what it was. And this is my favorite shot in the entire movie right here, by the way. These pylons, the plane taking off, the plane landing and the bus coming onto the scene. Just the levels within that shot are just so cool.

Getting this plane is no easy feat, by the way. I mean, it's not like they go out there and they have carte blanche and the airport is, like, "Yeah, use our planes do this, do that." No, you've got a transportation coordinator involved, who I talked to a number of times, Randy Peters. I encourage you to listen to all of those production episodes. It's basically episode 20 through, gosh, 27 or something. Randy is a character. He had to round up all of these buses that they rigged and outfitted for different stunts, courtesy, by the way – I haven't said this name yet and I should – John Frazier, the special effects coordinator. That guy's just a legend. Getting a bus to go up on two wheels, rigging that whole situation with the jump. All the stuff they do that's mechanical effects throughout this movie, that's John Frazier's genius.

That always cracks me up because, clearly, that's not what Dennis Hopper said there. He sounded – it looked like he said, "I want you back you son of a bitch," or something like that, but obviously they made it "real fast" and it's just a weird thing in this movie.

That image on the side of the bus of the wave breaking, Jan actually shot that as a photographer for some advertising campaign. So, fun fact. And by the way, whenever

Keanu stepped off of the bus and onto the SUV there, I've said this before, but I watched the movie one time with Andre Bartkowiak, the DP, and with Vern Nobles, the first AC – I love this shot, by the way, with that lens flare – and Vern pointed at the screen in that moment and said, "You can't do that anymore." Which is just, you know, your movie star stepping off of a moving bus onto a moving vehicle without being strapped down or anything like that. Just, insurance wouldn't cover that kind of thing.

Once again, we're not letting off the gas. Here we go. Another crazy stunt. You hear a lot about how Keanu did this stunt himself and went under the bus, and he did, but I'm going to show you a couple of these shots are definitely stunt performers. Anytime it's a long shot and you just really can't see Keanu – like, this is obviously him.

"Don't get dead."

Alright, so this next shot, I think. Yeah, that's Brian Smrz, stuntman. That's Keanu obviously. Now, there's a shot coming up where you see Jack's feet going underneath the bus, and it's operated by whoever's feet that is, right there. That is second unit director Alexander Witt, because none of the camera operators would do it, and who can blame them? So, he had to get down there and shoulder up that camera and get that shot.

And this is all Keanu there underneath a bus that's, like, got considerably more headroom. They've kind of elevated a bus so he can get underneath it. But you know, "why not just do some kind of a treadmill thing with rear screen projection or something behind you to show the background?" Well, because it shows up in the performance, you know? That reality of being in that situation, the adrenaline that's actually pumping through your body, this is the Jan de Bont way, if you will, and it's sort of all gone. I mean, you just don't get this kind of thing anymore. You've got so many safer ways to do things, first of all but, you know, it's all of a piece. I mean, it affects things. The look in someone's eye when they're looking at something truly harrowing in front of them versus imagining it, and even in this world of LED environments, you know, in the volume, if you will, you're looking at footage. You're not looking at reality and that shows up in a performance.

Now, that right there? Definitely not Keanu Reeves. That's going to be Brian Smrz. And another stunt performer, Billy Morts, is involved in some of this. And another stunt driver I should mention is Donna Evans, who stood in for – I shouldn't say stood in – you know, performed stunts for Sandra Bullock in a number of shots.

That's gnarly right there.

That reaction is so good.

Here's where Carlos got to spend a day or two hanging upside down, dragging Keanu out from underneath the bus. Again, they're a family now. When I talked to Guillermo

del Toro, he compared this movie to Stagecoach, with its many types and characters working toward the goals of the traveling group, and I kind of love that.

I think Carlos says he ad-libbed that one.

I sort of just got sucked into the movie here, but here we go. OK, this is a pretty cool location, this house. There was a locations episode I did, by the way, speaking of which. Episode 18, where I spoke to Donna Washington of – Film LA is where she works now, but she was with the city at the time and did all the location paperwork and whatnot for *Speed*. Kind of a fun conversation. And they blew this guy's house up, basically. I mean, they put it back together. Funny story about that in the airport episode from John Frazier. And I've got K.C. Fox, the set decorator, talking about, you know, outfitting this house with all these very, I don't know, just interesting decorations and whatnot in here. There's a reason that they're all kind of random. She had to throw it all together quickly.

Alright, so, this look on Jeff Daniels face right there is classic stuff. There's always a prompt on Twitter lately, for some reason: "What's the best 'I'm about to die and know it' performance," or face or whatever, in movies, and that shot is always the correct answer. And Jeff had a great story about that moment. I can't remember if that's the airport episode or just in Jeff's episode – Jeff's episode was 13 – where he talks about Roy Scheider in *Jaws* and a little bit he did in that movie that kind of keyed him into how to play that moment, if you will. A big, heartbreaking moment here at the end of the second act propelling us into the rest of the narrative. It raises the stakes exactly when the stakes need to go up. You know, again, originally, Harry was the bad guy and you didn't have this kind of a moment, but this is better

And that is indeed Pershing Square.

I have not seen someone lose their shit like that. I mean, I'm sure I have, but there's just something super keyed-up about Keanu's performance there. I love it

"We're gonna die."

Good moment. I love them holding hands there.

And this little bit of revelation is thanks to Joss Whedon, that this is how he determines that Howard Payne has a camera on the bus.

Did they have a good football team? I don't know. I'm a Trojan, so.

Carlos looking around for a camera cracks me up for some reason.

The daily struggles of this guy with his blown-up thumb. A can might have been easier. I don't know.

Just to name a couple of these other folks we saw there, Loyda Ramos, Carmen Williams, Sherri Villanueva in the back there, Marylou Lim. Marylou is actually a costume designer, or costumer, in the business, which is kind of cool.

Whatever is going on here, it doesn't make sense to me. Like, how did you find this – how does this signal – I don't know. And I love the testiness, by the way, between Mac and this poor cameraman.

“Get off my back man.”

Also back there, no longer with us, is Paula Montez and Jim Mapp. I never got to talk to them. They had already passed away 10 years ago when I did that last story.

Now, see, Mac's going to get even madder at the guy here and he doesn't react as much. The things I notice.

This whole layer, by the way, you know, they finally show you where he is in the world when he looks out the window and says “the drop-off is Pershing Square” is kind of cool because, up until then, you know, maybe you think he's in his garage, so, when they're going to his house, you think they might bust him. So, it's kind of a cool switcheroo.

Alright, epic stunt coming up here. I mean, all of these folks making this transfer over from the bus to the people mover or whatever that thing is. It's a pretty hairy thing for these folks to be doing. They made sure they got a bump in pay for it. This is the kind of thing you just don't see, for obvious reasons. I mean, why put your performers in danger here? Like this right here? That's real fear from Simone. I mean, she was, like, freaked out. And, you know, this last one here, Stephens, Alan Ruck – obviously Alan Ruck is not going to be hanging off of the side of the bus. I'm not sure what the stunt performer was here, if it was Billy or if it was Brian. I never interviewed Billy. I interviewed Brian, and I don't – I never asked him if that was him or not. So, I'm not sure who we've actually got hanging off the bus here. It could be either one. But it's not Alan Ruck, I'll tell you that.

I always liked Traven, like, falling into that seat. That thing of going out of control.

Alright, another big stunt coming up. This is going to be, you know, obviously not Keanu and Sandra flying out from underneath the bus. It's actually Brian Smrz and Donna Evans. Tons of detail on all these stunts, by the way, in all these episodes I'm talking about, so, go back and check it out.

The score's about to explode in a way it has not at all yet. There is Donna and Brian flying around. That part of the score is used in the Braveheart trailer. It's literally the only piece of music in the entire score that sounds like that. You know, big and triumphant.

Great story from Randy Peters about getting this plane. And there's, of course, Pacific Courier Freight, which is production designer Jackson De Govia's little inside joke,

because that's the name of the freight company that's on the sides of the trucks in *Die Hard* and it's also in *Die Hard with a Vengeance*. So, a shared universe, folks.

What an explosion, by the way. Look at that. One of the biggest explosions ever caught on film at that time. I mean, between that and the napalm strike in *Apocalypse Now*. There's a huge one in *Lethal Weapon 3*.

There's Ian Bryce, the unit production manager and executive producer of the film.

By the way, how real is that? "Are you okay?" "No." Heard that

When he says "oh yeah" there, by the way – random thing – it's just so dialed up, the dB level. I don't know why. I've always noticed that. Look at that fire. And I guess there's some, like, alchemy, chemistry, whatever, to getting that black smoke. Something about using old gasoline or something. John Frazier talks about it.

Now, he called him Lieutenant McMahon, but in the credits, it says Capt. McMahon. Oops.

And by the way, we've got a half-hour left here. This movie is a three-course meal.

And off we go back downtown to Pershing Square.

I like what the score is doing here, too. This percussive thing going on. I don't know. There's something very late-80s about it that I dig.

I wonder if that barbershop is still there, or if it even was a barber shop, if they just dressed it. I'm going to go check it out. If it's there, I'm going to get my haircut there.

You know, let me just nitpick a little bit. Why the hell is Annie there? She should not be there. But, you know, you wouldn't have a third act, folks.

He seems pretty happy to be about to blow this bus up, doesn't he?

Can't follow instructions? "No sudden movements." You're the reason Richard Schiff is about to get shot!

This shot here, that's a Bartkowiak classic right there. There's another one just like it in *Falling Down*.

But, yeah, why is she there? My God.

I like the guy there sweeping up hair, apparently, with the cops doing their thing around him.

Richard knows this is his moment here. Get's that moment for that line reading

We'll make this part of the *Speed* locations tour, too. You've got to drop down through a hole in the middle of Pershing Square to get to the subway portion.

I just want to take a minute to pat myself on the back for how I have Keanu and Dennis's "what do you dos" sort of dance with each other in our weekly intro. I think that's kind of awesome, if I do say so myself.

I'm an Eagle Scout, by the way. Fun fact. And that is indeed the Boy Scout motto. "Be prepared."

I like how things fall off into shadow here. I mean, I don't know how it looks on different iterations and the – I'm not looking at the 4K right now, but, you know, what I'm looking at here, half of Hopper's face is in shadow.

Let me say this. I've said it before. I love that he calls him a punk. I mean, if it's 30 years before this and it's *Easy Rider*, Dennis Hopper is the punk, right? Richard Schiff of *The West Wing* fame right there. But, you know, here we are sort of passing of the punk baton to Mr. Cyberpunk, Keanu Reeves. I just think that's cool. I don't know.

Pershing Square Station still looks like that. I'm telling you, man, I could make some money on this tour.

Alright, so, we've had an elevator, we've had a bus and now we're on the subway. And the subway was brand new at the time. It's sort of unusual for LA folks, a subway. But it made for a pretty fun playground, I think, for this sequence.

Rest in peace, Richard Schiff. Didn't even get a line. He would show up in *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* a couple of years after this. He was all over the place in the '90s.

The way he's waving that around is so diabolical. What a sinister line.

Alright, we're on top of the subway car now and this is rear screen projection. You know, you're looking at footage that they've gone into the subway and shot and projected onto a screen behind Keanu Reeves crawling on a real stationary subway car. So, again, the mixed media, this sort of combination of effects applications and, you know, old-school techniques, really. I mean, rear screen projection has been used in so many fascinating ways. *Terminator 2* has some of the most, frankly, brilliant applications. This one is interesting to me because it's such a massive screen they had to shoot this on – or project this on – for that sort of immersive quality. And it looks great. I mean, you know, it works. And of course, that tech has come full circle and evolved into the LED volume stuff today.

I mean, in some ways, this entire sequence, the third act of *Speed*, is the weakest element because, you know, the movie's kind of over once they come out from underneath the bus, but I just love the effort that went into the sequence. There's more

filmmaking techniques on display here than in any other part of the movie. I mean, I'm talking to you about the rear screen projection. We have a whole miniature train derailment sequence coming up. And certainly, what happens in the big finale.

Oh, there he goes. I had that spoiled for me, as I've said, by Tommy Willmont on the baseball diamond during practice. "Hey, man, did you see *Speed*?" "No, not yet." "Oh, it's so awesome. Dennis Hopper gets his head knocked off at the end!" Didn't matter. Spoilers were not a big deal back then. Nowadays it's, like, "Oh, don't tell me what the character was wearing! You'll spoil it!" I'm being catty. By the way, "I'm taller," all-timer line. I don't care what anybody says. I don't love "he lost his head." I've always thought that was a little bit of, you know, gilding the lily, if you will.

Nothing works, but one thing does: the accelerator.

This is rear screen stuff, too, by the way, obviously. Out the windows there.

You know, another great voice on the podcast has been former Fox exec Jorge Saralegui, really crucial in some of the early episodes talking about development and casting and all of that. But he had this, just, fascinating nugget for me in this moment coming up when Keanu says he's going to speed it up. It was sort of a moment they made up on the fly and kind of repurposed footage of him between takes. I'm stalling so I can just get to the moment here but, like, all of that was, like, you know – you didn't see his face when he was saying those lines. This right here is just an interesting, weird take. His face there, Jorge said that was something in between shots, like he's waiting for action to be called or something. And, I don't know, I guess previously, it would have just been, "Oh, this thing's not going to stop and let's hunker down," and they decided to turn it into more of a willful act. "I'm going to speed it up and make it jump the tracks," instead of it just jumps the tracks, and you can use whatever footage you had to cobble together that moment and record Keanu saying the lines and drop them in, because you don't see his face in that one part. Anyway, really behind the curtain here, but that's kind of cool. I love this beat, by the way, when she puts her arms around him.

And by the way, Jan was no stranger to the subways and kind of the ongoing construction down there, because he shot in that one sequence for *Lethal Weapon 3*. He was the DP of that movie as well, the year before, so – or two years before.

These are miniatures. This is a model that you're going to see come crashing through. You know, they shot that, you know, as a model, added these sparks and all of that. They shot this down at, I guess it was at Sony Imageworks, Culver City. There was a soundstage down there. They built all this. Jack Sessums was responsible for building the model train and his team. I should shout out Grant McCune, who was responsible for the elevator shaft miniature. But, yeah, all of that was miniature work. A lost art. And then we blast through the street with a full-blown subway car, which is actually a bus, by the way – another bus – dressed to look like a subway car for a full-scale, epic stunt. So, again, just this mixture of filmmaking techniques in this entire third act, as weak as it may be from a narrative standpoint – shout out to Stanley Kubrick there; Jan's a big fan

– it's just, for a guy like me, who's such a geek about this kind of stuff and the movie magic of it all, it's just a great sequence for that, for sure. So, I'll always have a special place for it with that in mind.

I love the guy coming in with the camcorder there. And this glass that starts falling on them here, I think I've heard, maybe in another commentary track, that that's Jan dropping it from above. Right there, just throwing glass at them. And also, as Keanu said a couple weeks ago when I interviewed him and Sandra, this is the last thing they shot on the entire movie.

You know, on the VHS I remember – you remember when it would, like, pop out of the full frame and into the widescreen for the credits? I always remembered that for this movie. But anyway, as I've said before, cue the Billy Idol. And you're damn right, I talked to Billy Idol and guitarist Steve Stevens, episode 32, about this song and the soundtrack and all of that. I love this song. I mean, this song just says summer to me. It's a nostalgia thing, obviously, on one end. It's, like, you know – reminds me of walking out of the theater after seeing *Speed* and out into the summer daylight, but I'm a big fan. And all these folks, most of them, I've talked to for the podcast. There's Maggie Murphy. She's a great voice, second assistant director. Ralph Sall, the producer of the soundtrack. All these folks – a lot of these folks, anyway – you will hear if you listen to *50 MPH*, and likely, if you're listening to this now, you've been listening, but if you're new to the podcast and maybe this is your gateway into it, to hear some dude do a commentary track, let me encourage you, please seek out *50 MPH*. It's a 50-episode endeavor lasting from June of 2023 to June of 2024. It was a build-up to the 30th anniversary of this movie, which still holds up 30 years later. I mean, I think it's undeniable. I truly couldn't say anything more than what I've said in those 50 episodes. So, I won't try to reiterate it now, but one of my favorite movies. The movie that got me interested in how movies are made. The kind of movie I wish they still made. And, you know, as much as it is a relic, it is not a dated relic, and it just still is fire all these years later. So, that's my take, and this has been Kris Tapley, host of *50 MPH*, talking you through *Speed*. I hope you enjoyed it. It was fun for me. And look, man, it's never a bad time to watch *Speed*. So, anytime you want to watch it together with me, you know where to find me. Pop on this commentary track. By the way, as I'm saying this there goes Boyd Shermis's name, visual effects supervisor. Certainly can't leave this without shouting him out. But, you know, the podcast has 120 some odd interviews, so, plenty of voices flying around. So, go check it out, and again, thanks for sitting here and watch the *Speed* with me. I hope you liked it.

[SONG: "Speed"]

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.