

## 50 MPH: EPISODE 50

### “ONE MORE FOR THE ROAD”

Transcript (01:05:36)



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**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**

Here it is. We’ve hit 50. And you know what that means. No, it doesn’t mean we’ve armed a bomb, but we have most definitely, I think, left a mark. On June 10, 1994, 20th Century Fox unleashed Jan de Bont’s *Speed* on the world. And today, June 10, 2024, marks the 30th anniversary of that event. So, before we go any further here today, I’ve literally got a beer in my hand. I’d like you to join me, right now, in raising a glass or a salute to this movie. I’ve got a Miller Genuine Draft, which I have not had in years, but it’s what Harry Temple is drinking in the movie with the rest of the squad at the bar, so, it felt right. So, here’s to Harry. Rest in peace. And here’s to *Speed*. Let’s go. Cheers.

And unlike Harry, I do not need bib.

Alright, listen, folks. It’s fair to say we peaked last month with my interview with Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock, alright? If you’re expecting me to top that with our finale today, I am truly sorry. I don’t have Billy Idol waiting in the wings for a special send-off concert or anything like that. As I said a few weeks ago when I first laid out how the final episodes would go, today is going to be a relaxed affair. I mean, I’m drinking a beer here. I will be bringing back a few of the voices we’ve heard from over the last year toward the end of this episode, but what I really want to do here today is, in a sense, give you the oral history of *50 MPH*. I’ve spent a year now telling you the story of this movie, *Speed*, so, if you would humor me, I’d like to tell you the story of this podcast.

But first, a few facts and figures about the show. If you’ve listened to every episode of *50 MPH*, you have consumed more than 2,800 minutes, or about 47 hours, of content. That’s two days’ worth of *Speed*, folks. We landed somewhere around 150,000 downloads across our 50 episodes, and look, I don’t really know much about the podcasting space, believe it or not, but that says to me a dedicated base of a few thousand listeners every week, and that’s great to me. I think statistically if you get, like, 50 downloads for a podcast in the first week of its release, you’re already in the top 50 percentile of all podcasts. So, I think we did alright. I also hope that number only continues to grow as more people discover the show, but I’ll touch on that in a moment.

Here's a random fun fact – and I sort of hoped some obsessive listener would key into this along the way – but if you go back and listen to the beginning of each episode, after the weekly intro, my voice always comes in on the 50-second mark. As I've said numerous times, you heard from 120 voices along the way, really 121 if you count my son's reviews of *Speed* and *Speed 2*. Not counting the work from 10 years ago, when I wrote a 20th-anniversary oral history for *Speed*, the first person I interviewed for this project was actor David Kriegel on January 21, 2021 – 1/21/21. How about that? And the last interview was with Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock on April 8, 2024. That gives you a good idea of the overall timeline of this project, but I'll dig into that more in a second as well.

As of this recording, and this isn't a huge surprise, but our most popular, most-downloaded episode of the entire series was indeed my interview with Keanu and Sandra last month. What's notable, however, is that it actually reached that status within a week. The top two episodes before that were my introductory interview with film critic Justin Chang, the first real episode of *50 MPH*, and then from last August, "The Script Doctors Are In", as I called episode 12, my odyssey into the re-writing process on *Speed* with screenwriters Graham Yost, Paul Attanasio and Joss Whedon. Those two episodes had many months to rack up listeners, but again, Keanu and Sandra sort of cannonballed the top spot instantly. And speaking of splashes, we certainly made one with that interview. Look, nothing I've ever put out into the world has received a reaction quite like that. It was global. I mean, guys, I don't know if you saw this, but Lara Spencer at *Good Morning America* even devoted a segment to this podcast and the news that Keanu and Sandra were open to re-teaming on a *Speed 3*. That blew my mind. CNN was writing weekend op-eds about how the world needs that sequel. Countless other outlets picked us up and you'd have to be asleep to miss the fact that fans, by and large, met that news with incredible enthusiasm. And without saying much about the murmurs I hear from time to time, I'll simply say this: I have zero doubt that a *Speed 3* will at some point go into some form of development. How far it gets, we'll just have to see. But the response to that episode made it clear to anyone with a dog in that hunt that the iron is hot and the time to strike is now. I also know every spec writer in this business is dusting off their idea for *Speed 3*, and, look, I'll just say this: That line starts behind me, alright? No, but, seriously, look, if we started that engine here with *50 MPH* – and I think we at least revved it – well, that's just a hell of a thing.

Alright, as I said – and I'm going to attempt to shed the podcast host persona here for a minute – but I want to tell you the story you haven't heard about this project. I also have a number of people I'd like to thank, so, I want to treat this portion here, if you'll bear with me, as something like an acknowledgments section you might read at the end of a book, which is an apt comparison. Let me explain. You see, *50 MPH* is a project born out of failure. What do I mean by that? I have not shared this with you all yet, but this endeavor did not begin life as a podcast called *50 MPH*. It began life as a book called *Get Ready for Rush Hour*. As I've mentioned before, 10 years ago, I spoke to the many actors on the bus in *Speed*, along with Keanu Reeves, Sandra Bullock and Jan de Bont, for a 20th-anniversary oral history of the film. It was actually package of two stories I published at the website *HitFix.com* where I served as editor-at-large from 2011 to

2015. I later would wonder, from time to time, if there might be a book in the making of *Speed*, something that would take into account the perspectives of all of the various crew members, and of course, all of the cast members that I didn't speak to for that original piece. I tucked that idea away and finally revisited it in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. And this brings me to my first thank you: Kyle Buchanan, a writer for *The New York Times* who was one of my old colleagues on the film beat.

In late 2020, Kyle interviewed me for his book *Blood, Sweat & Chrome: The Wild and True Story of Mad Max: Fury Road*, which, as it says, is an oral history of George Miller's 2015 film. Kyle was getting perspectives from journalists like me who had been on the beat when the film was in the Oscar race. I asked Kyle at the time, "What's your format here? How do you plan to write this?" I knew it all stemmed from an oral-history article he had written at the *Times*, but I figured he was doing something else. And he said no, he was going for that same format, an oral history. Now, I have written my share of oral-history articles about films like *Wag the Dog* and *Reality Bites* in addition to *Speed*, and of course, there were a number of books that had used the format, but not really for specific movies. Author James Andrew Miller had written a number of them on things like *Saturday Night Live*, CAA, ESPN, HBO. That's not to say that behind-the-scenes books about movies are a rarity. They drop all the time. But, again, the oral history, where you have a book full of quotes that tell the story like a chorus, that had not really been a longform format outside of articles that had really been tapped for a single movie. Anyway, all of this to say, when Kyle told me that, I thought, "Well, I could do that!" Because I've been gripped by the paralysis of writing a book plenty in the past. This felt workable. I probably even thought it was easier, but frankly, an oral history might be even more difficult than just writing straight prose for something like that, but that's another discussion. Kyle got me thinking, is the point, and at the beginning of 2021, I decided I would start circling back to all those people I had talked to for my original *Speed* articles and begin pulling the early stages of a book together. So, at the top here – and he might find this unexpected – I'd like to thank Kyle for that inspiration.

As I said a moment ago, the first interview I conducted with an eye toward turning all of this into something bigger was on January 21, 2021, with actor David Kriegel. Again, that should give you some perspective on how much of a years-long journey this has truly been. I guess it really is my pandemic project, finally coming to its conclusion here today. As I began to plug away at those interviews in early 2021 and catch up with the folks I had talked to back in 2014, I started to branch out. I was ready to talk to folks on the crew of *Speed*, the filmmakers and artisans truly responsible for the craft we see and hear in the film. And this brings me to my next thank you: sound mixer Greg P. Russell. I've known Greg for close to 20 years now and he's one of the best mixers in the game, with countless Oscar nominations to his credit for movies like *Black Rain*, *Con Air*, *Armageddon*, *Transformers* and *Skyfall*. Greg put me in touch with guys like Gregg Landaker, Steve Maslow and David Macmillan, the sound mixers of *Speed*, as well as Stephen Hunter Flick, the film's supervising sound editor. He also helped me get in touch with the late film editor, John Wright, who actually worked with Greg on Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto*. So, I need to thank Greg because that outreach really helped me get my feet wet as I started adding new voices to the mix.

Next up, obviously I'd like to thank each and every one of the 121 people who agreed to be interviewed for this project, but there are a few in particular, and I'll start with Bob Hoffman, *Speed's* unit publicist. I've known Bob for, gosh, maybe 15 years at this point. I got to know him through his affiliation with Technicolor where he was the VP of marketing and publicity and helped me in my capacity as a journalist covering aspects of the visual effects industry in my time. I interviewed Bob for this project in March of 2021. Well, it was partly an interview, partly just me running the idea by him to see if there was anything to it as far as he could tell. And Bob was really encouraging. He gave me that "go get 'em" spirit that you really need when you're embarking on something like this. So, thank you, Bob. Not only that, but Bob put in touch with *Speed's* cinematographer, Andrzej Bartkowiak, who I'd also like to thank separately here. You've heard from Andrzej a few times on the podcast, and as I've said before, the way I conducted one of my interviews with Andrzej was by watching the film together at the home of first AC Vern Nobles, another of the voices you've heard. I should thank him as well. That was incredible, not least of all for that kind of experience, which I had not had before, interviewing someone about a movie while watching the movie with them. But something happened during that screening that opened a crucial door.

At this stage, we're into April of 2021 and about four months of work. I had not, simply out of fear, reached out to Jan de Bont yet. I also hadn't reached out to producer Mark Gordon or screenwriter Graham Yost, let alone the film's stars, because I knew if any of those guys were not interested, it was going to sort of close the door on the whole project. I mentioned this to Andrzej during the screening, and he said, right then and there, "Let's call Jan!" So, he paused the movie – and I have all of this recorded – and Andrzej just straight-up cold-called the director of *Speed*. He briefly mentioned what we were up to, then he passed the phone over to me, and right there, on the spot, I pitched Jan de Bont on this book that I was hoping to write and I asked him if he would be up for a follow-up interview to the one we had conducted back in 2014. And indeed, he was up for it. We would ultimately speak a number of times over the next three years. So, obviously, I have to thank Andrzej for kicking that door open for me and getting that first real necessary part of the equation. Because the way this kind of thing works is, if you can say to prospective subjects, "Oh, I've talked to the director. He's on board. I have his support," that goes a long way toward securing more interviews. And out of that, I got Mark Gordon, I got Graham Yost, I got countless more crew members, and it was just the first big domino to fall. So, wherever you are, Andrzej, thank you, man.

And chiefly, in this section, I want to thank Jan de Bont, for being such a candid and open and available presence in these proceedings. And, not least of all, thank you for *Speed*, Jan.

Alright, let's get back to the chronology. That screening with Andrzej was interesting, because again, that's April 2021. I was between doses of the two-part COVID vaccine. Just, again, to give you an idea of the timeline here. That screening was one of the first quasi-normal things I remember doing as the pandemic finally started to thaw out.

Moving on, by now we're getting into the summer of 2021 and I'm rocking and rolling with interviews. I'm getting ahold of folks like composer Mark Mancina, casting director Risa Bramon Garcia, first assistant director David Sardi. Another major get around this time was former Fox executive Jorge Saralegui, and as you know, he was a gold mine of information regarding the development phase of *Speed*. I'd like to thank him as well, because that entire interview really provided me with a roadmap through the first 15 or so episodes of this podcast. But, again, remember, it wasn't a podcast yet.

So, meanwhile, I'm doing something I've never done before. I'm writing a book proposal. Which brings me to another thank you, author and journalist Melissa Maerz. Melissa wrote the book *Alright, Alright, Alright: The Oral History of Richard Linklater's Dazed and Confused*. Melissa didn't know me, but she was kind enough to talk to me early on and sort of give me a crash course in writing a book proposal. Again, that book and Kyle's *Mad Max* book were two of the few longform oral histories centered on a single movie at that time. Anyway, I'm writing this proposal. I'm also continuing to do interviews. I cross the 50-interview threshold sometime in late-2021, and as I turned the corner into 2022, I got an agent for my book. This wonderful guy named Rick Richter. Now, Rick had never failed to sell an oral history to a publisher. He had represented other such books centered on television series like *The Office* and *Freaks and Geeks* and *The Big Bang Theory*. He later got one off the ground for the *Fast and Furious* movies. Anyway, Rick agreed to take me on as a client, and though he and I both knew that a book about *Speed* was not an easy sell, he was willing to see it all through with me. I say it's not an easy sell because, look, it's a bit of a niche thing. Now, I would argue no more niche than *Mad Max: Fury Road*, but it's nothing with a modern context hook. It's not like there's a *Speed* remake in the pipeline or it's in the zeitgeist. Or, at least, it wasn't then. I was also going to be tasked with selling this idea to a bunch of book editors in their 30s who have no real context for why someone like me would be passionate about it or why there might be an audience for it. The dirty secret about movie books is they don't do well, and I've come to the realization that the victory is in getting a deal to write it. Anything it might do in sales is gravy. But anyway, Rick really smartened me up on the book proposal process, and with his help, I soon had a 50-page document laying out my plan for the book, what the chapters would be, a sample chapter, thoughts on marketing it, finding the audience for the book – all of this stuff that was largely foreign to me. But at the end of that gauntlet, I felt I had a pretty good handle on it, and that's something I carry with me still, so, I owe Rick a huge debt of gratitude. That whole process really got me organized exactly when I needed to be.

And here's where I come back to the point I made to begin with, that *50 MPH* is a project born out of failure. I guess I spent a good portion of the first half of 2022 getting that proposal in order, all the while still plugging away at my interviews. And by the way, I had 50 or 60 interviews to pull from in crafting that proposal. I don't know how folks do it before having done an ounce of reporting, and that's actually the standard procedure. But anyway, for the next few months, Rick starts going out to publishers with our proposal. And let me tell you, we got a ton of glowing passes. Everyone loved the story I had captured on the page about the making of this movie, but I guess they didn't see a lot of broader potential in it. There would be an irony to that later, but at the time,

obviously, I was bummed. It looked like *Get Ready for Rush Hour* would never see the light of day. I had been looking forward to having this thing on my bookshelf that I could point to and say, "I did that." But it wasn't to be. I'm sorry to Rick that I broke his streak. However, I always had it in the back of my mind that I would turn this whole thing into a podcast if I had to. First and foremost, I wasn't going to let, at that point, two years of work and reporting go into a vault. I had to do something with it. And I just prayed that the audio from my interview recordings would have the fidelity to support something like that. And so, I ended 2022 dejected but with a new sense of purpose with all of this.

Now we move into 2023. I start the year knowing that, now, this material's destiny is in my own hands. I dug into the audio of all the interviews I had conducted up until then and found that, you know what? It wasn't bad. It might work. I, of course, went back to all of my subjects and alerted them to this change in direction, that their interviews would now be heard, not merely read. The concept I had in mind was a year-long, weekly oral-history podcast that would build to the 30th anniversary of *Speed* on June 10, 2024. And this brings me to my next thank you. You know, my thought was, 52 weeks in a year. I'll do 52 episodes. I'll be honest. I hadn't once considered that I had the number 50 staring me in the face there, and honestly, I was planning to simply call the podcast *Get Ready for Rush Hour*, just like my failed book. I knew there was no one better to bounce all of this off of than movie podcast maestro Blake Howard, whose *One Heat Minute* is the stuff of legend and who has gone on to produce a number of fantastic movie podcasts under his One Heat Minute Productions banner. Blake didn't even blink. He spit out the entire idea with trademark gusto. He said, "No, no, no, you should do 50 episodes and you should call it *50 MPH*. The idea will be you'll tell the story of *Speed* at a clip and the episodes will be as short or as long as they need to be." He just threw that all out, right there. Blake, bro, thank you for that burst of inspiration. You deserve your flowers. Get your ass to the States so I can buy you a steak dinner.

So, from there, I dug into the transcripts. I listened back to the interviews and I timestamped the transcripts, so I would be able to find the quotes I wanted to use. I sketched out script ideas for each of the first 15 episodes or so, largely following the chapter framework I had already laid out in my book proposal. Before I knew it, I was putting an oral-history podcast together. I was pulling soundbites from my interviews and writing voice-over and just figuring it out as I went. The point here is that I would say at least 80% of the interviews you have heard on this podcast were recorded with the expectation of using them for a book, not a podcast. So, it's a minor miracle that this was all possible, and look, maybe that gives you a little bit of insight into any dodgy audio issues we may have had along the way. But I look back on all of that now and I'm just shocked. And frankly, I think that's why all of this worked so well, because these were not performative interviews. They were conducted without the initial expectation that they would be aired, so, I think that led to an openness and candor that was unique. It probably makes this whole thing a little difficult to duplicate.

Anyway, I was happy with the meta idea of a 50-episode podcast, but I also liked the fact that I could now take a few breaks along the way, which I scheduled for Thanksgiving and the holidays. Those would come at pretty opportune times, but I'll get

to that. I also figured I would need some padding to fill that out, because, look, I didn't have 50 chapters outlined in that book proposal. I think I had closer to half that. So, I thought maybe I could rope in friends, critics, journalists, authors, former colleagues, to join me for discussions that would punctuate the journey along the way, and that's how we ended up with the many "detour" episodes featuring folks like Bilge Ebiri, Alex Pappademas, Mark Harris, Nick de Semlyen, Todd Gilchrist, Katie Walsh, Jacqueline Coley, Owen Gleiberman, on and on.

So, anyway, in March or so of 2023 is when I really started hammering out these scripts and preparing to edit the first wave of episodes. Around this time, I went back home to North Carolina to see my parents. Just me. Not a family trip or anything. And here is where I'm going to get a bit personal. Those of you who have been with me throughout this journey know that I haven't shied away from that here. It was during that trip that I think I finally faced the fact that my time with my mother was limited. I had not, until that week, really begun to accept that. You see, she had suffered, for years, from the lung disease COPD – chronic obstructive pulmonary disease – as well as diabetes, stemming from a lifetime of smoking cigarettes. That's North Carolina in the 20th Century for you. I mean, her first job was rolling tobacco in a barn before she was a teenager. It was simply her vice, and my father's, and it would ultimately take her. But I'm going to put a pin that for now. I just wanted, for the purposes of this timeline, to give you an idea of my headspace along the way. I came back from North Carolina and in April and May of 2023, I was, for several hours a day, sitting right here at my kitchen table recording and editing and getting that first wave of episodes together. It was about an entire third of the project. I was also doing more and more interviews, now with a mind toward using them in a podcast. My goal was to get those first 15 or 16 episodes – covering the conception, development, packaging, all the way up to production – in the can before my planned launch date of June 12, 2023. By then I had laid out just about every Monday episode on a calendar of sorts and constructed something that would, again, build to this very day.

And now I come to my next two thank yous, two people who have been featured on *50 MPH*: Kate Erbland and Jonathan Foster. I talked to Kate and Jonathan for episodes focused on Sandra Bullock's career and the films of 1994, respectively. First of all, Kate was an angel in this period leading up to our launch, because she was good enough to listen to just about all of those first-wave episodes as I edited them and give me insights or thoughts or just general calm vibes that this thing was indeed coming together, and I can't thank her enough for that. Jonathan was also a part of that inner circle, and honestly, other than my wife, I would say Jonathan was the first listener of every single episode of this podcast before it aired. I think he even beat my wife to a couple episodes. If you've heard his particular episode, then you know how far back we go and how sort of like-minded we are, and I just thank him immensely for letting me bounce these things off of him for a year. I also thank the small handful of folks who agreed ahead of release to listen to a preview batch of five or six episodes before we rolled this thing out. You know who you are. It was at a time when I very much needed to get out of my own head on all of this and gauge how the material was landing.



I assembled a trailer and then I announced *50 MPH* to the world, via Twitter, at 7am pacific time on June 7, 2023. The response to that trailer was massive. It had something like 330,000 views and there was instantly an audience for this thing. Everyone got to hear a collection of the voices that were in store and they presumably saw that this was going to be a thorough piece of work. They were just so excited and I was really encouraged. People wanted to hear this story. I knew *Speed* fandom was real but it was great to sort of summon it in that moment. So, take that, book publishers! But no, I was so thrilled after that trailer dropped and excited to launch the show. And we did just that, again, on June 12 last year. I started with me, just like I'm ending with me, conveying my passion for this movie and this project, and a sort of maxi-trailer, an extended version of the trailer with tons of soundbites flying around. The following week, I ran my interview with now Pulitzer Prize-winning film critic Justin Chang, then of the *Los Angeles Times*, now of *The New Yorker*. I should say I owe Justin a massive thank you as well, because I think his voice and hearing him call *Speed* a masterpiece at the outset of this endeavor really legitimized the effort. And then as of week three, we were off and running with the oral history of *Speed*, starting with, who else, the man who came up with it all: screenwriter Graham Yost. And it has been a hell of a year ever since – in more ways than one.

Back to the personal stuff. Right after that launch, I went back home for my annual family trip to see my parents. I've said this before, but I watched *Speed* with my mom and dad during that trip, and it would be the last time I watched any movie with my mom. On November 13, 2023, around 10:45am eastern time, my mom took her last breath. My aunt called my wife and gave her the news first. I was on my morning walk, which began with me walking my son to school. In fact, when I look the timeline, mom would have passed as Foster and I were walking to school. I got home an hour or so later after my walk, which was a time I would often spend thinking about the day's podcast duties ahead, and my wife, April, was still at the house, not at work, which was unusual. She asked me to sit. I sat. And she told me, "Sweetheart, your mom just passed away." Those were the six words. Obviously, I'll never forget them. My aunt was torn over telling April first and asking if she would mind telling me the news, but I'm glad she did it that way, because having my wife tell me while looking me in the eyes and being there with me in that moment was far better than having to hear it over the phone miles away from home while I was on a walk. So, this happened to me two days before my birthday. I flew back home to North Carolina. I saw my mother one last time, on my birthday, before she was cremated. I made arrangements with my father to hold a service for her on December 26, during a holiday trip I had already planned with my family, assuming it might be our last Christmas together. Meanwhile, you could hear Drew Taylor and Charles Hood of the *Light the Fuse* podcast, along with myself, discussing and debating the greatest action set pieces of all time on *50 MPH*. That was the episode that aired on November 13, and it was, fortuitously, the beginning of some time away from working on the podcast, because, as I said, I had planned a week's hiatus for Thanksgiving. So, that was nice, because my head was anywhere but work at that time. Ditto the two-week hiatus I set for the holidays, because that was when we were back home and dealing with the weight of saying our final goodbye the day after

Christmas. At this point, I'm halfway through this endeavor, and I must admit, I wondered if I would buckle under all of that and not be able to finish it.

Now the page turned into 2024. There were no more breaks. I had six months of weekly episodes promised to you guys and I got to work. And then, to stay personal for a moment, I want to say this, which I've not shared: On February 13 of this year, three months to the day that I lost my mother, my father was diagnosed with lung cancer. You can imagine. Don't smoke, folks. But I am, however, happy to say this: As of just a few weeks ago, after several weeks of radiation and chemotherapy, it appears we caught this early. His doctors are pleased with his progress. The mass in his lung has taken a beating and he has recently begun a year's worth of monthly immunotherapy treatments to keep his system strong and able to fight for itself. I guess we live in the future, as a friend of mine says. The doctors have been talking in terms of "this could come back again in five years" as opposed to "you have two years to live." So, look, I think both Dad and I were due for a win. And he continued working through all of this, by the way. He's worked in retail his entire life. He manages an auto parts store in Benson, North Carolina. He's 70 years old and I will believe he's retired when I see it. But, after seeing everything my mother went through these last few years, when he went for his biopsy on February 7, that day, he quit smoking for good and, so far, has not looked back. I'm very proud of him for that. So, all of that has been going on the last four months as I've been bringing this podcast in for a close. And I still had the highest of highs lying ahead.

So, sticking with the timeline, obviously I want to thank Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock, and I want to thank anyone who helped line up this or that interview along the way, but I really should extend a chunk of gratitude to Keanu and Sandra's hardworking partner and publicist of many years, Cheryl Maisel. I first reached out to Cheryl over a year ago in the hopes of interviewing Keanu and Sandra and working with those interviews throughout the process, but they simply weren't available at that time. Cheryl suggested circling back closer to the actual 30th anniversary, and so I did exactly that at the beginning of the year. And, honestly, I had no expectation that this would actually come together. Would they care? Would they have time? Especially for me, for this? It feels like Keanu, particularly, is making about six different movies at the moment. But I stayed on top of her. I was the squeaky wheel. And then she hit me with my dream scenario: "Can you talk to both of them together?" Are fucking kidding me? Absolutely. She pulled it off for me and, again, we really made a splash with that interview. So, Cheryl, thank you for bearing with me. And, hey, I hope I gave you guys some leverage for when 20th Century comes to the table.

Alright, just a handful of scattered thank yous here. I was fortunate enough to be invited on a few other podcasts to promote the launch of *50 MPH*, as well as some in recent weeks to promote the finale. So, thank you to Jordan Raup, Cory Everett, Conor O'Donnell and *The Film Stage's Cinephile Summer Game Night* podcast. And I appreciate my friends Paul Hammond and Jonathan Foster for joining me on *Team 50 MPH* there. Thanks, as well, to Philip Gawthorne, Liam Billingham and the *Die Hard on a Blank* podcast. I was happy to come onto their show as we were pivoting into the production phase of this podcast back in October last year, and of course, they've been

a guest here as well. As have the aforementioned Drew Taylor and Charles Hood of the *Light the Fuse* podcast. Drew and Charles were kind enough to put together a separate piece of promotional material over in their feed the week of their appearance on this show. Thanks to Blake Howard again, who recently had me onto his *Decade Project* podcast focused on the films of 10 years ago to talk about Keanu and *John Wick*. That's available at his Patreon right now. Blake, by the way, did a nice air drop on Katie Walsh's episode about the best LA movies. Thanks, also, to Adam Turner, Ben Steinson, Craig Morris, Gareth Slade and the *Diabolical* podcast. We had fun talking about John Geiger and *Speed 2: Cruise Control* recently. And, finally, thank you to Clay Keller, Ryan Marker and the *Screen Drafts* podcast, as well as my partner-in-crime on that program, Ash Crossan. We had a blast drafting winners of the MTV Movie Award for Best Kiss. You heard me right. Gratitude as well to Shotdeck, which is a wonderful resource launched by cinematographer Lawrence Sher and was very helpful when I just couldn't find the right image for this or that at our website or social media channels. Thanks to Headliner, which is the service I used for the various audiograms you may have seen at our social channels along the way. And finally, thanks to an old mentor of mine, Tim Gray, the man who literally wrote the book on *Variety*. A big part of my research involved digging into *Variety's* comprehensive archival collection and Tim, when he was still with the company, was a big help with that.

I know at this point it sounds like the longest Oscar acceptance speech of all time, but I come to the end of my acknowledgments by thanking my family. My wife, April, has seen me put countless hours into this project for three and a half years at this point. I have very purposefully, maybe stupidly, refrained from monetizing this for a few reasons. First of all, I didn't want a bunch of ads clogging the flow of the story I was telling. I'm very fortunate to have the bandwidth that I have for something like this, so, I didn't want to put out the tip jar or make it a Patreon thing, even though I've been encouraged to do so. Frankly, I didn't want to get popped for using Mark Mancina's score in the opening of each episode. I wanted to just say, "Look, this thing is free. I'm not making money. It's a labor of love." And it is. But try convincing your spouse that the time you're putting into something has no tangible payoff. Thankfully, she required no convincing. She has been a wonderful sounding board for ideas and rough cuts and just all the things that you want out of someone who has agreed to accompany you in life. I'm grateful for that and I hope she knows that.

My son, Foster, has had to watch Daddy sit at this table, hunch over his laptop, be sucked into this obsession for a solid year, from his perspective, and if I'm looking forward to anything on other side of this, it's the fact that I can refocus the attention I've given to this over onto him. You've, of course, heard from Foster yourself a couple of times on the podcast, so, you know his spirit a little bit. It is an unbreakable spirit, and I just love him so much, and I really have to thank him for his patience with me. I hope one day he listens to this and gets a better idea of all the hard work Daddy put into it.

My father, Daryl, has, as I said, been through the wringer these last few years. He's only human and so, it hasn't all been grace, but I think he's handled things as well as anyone could hope to. He has listened to the podcast here and there, but I will say, as far as a

love of movies goes, I got a lot of that from my dad. *Once Upon a Time in the West*, *North by Northwest*, *The Untouchables*, *Stripes*, *The Right Stuff* – these were seminal movie moments I owe to my father. Two of his favorite movies of all time are *The Hunt for Red October* and *Twister*. I'm sure that would make Jan smile. I have a number of memories of going to see movies with my dad at the theater, just me and him. Stuff like *The Rock* and, of course, *Speed*. We weren't much of a theater-going family in the '80s. *Batman* changed that, of course. The most recent one we saw together was *Top Gun: Maverick*, actually. So, we're overdue for another one, I think. But I just want to thank my dad for taking me to the movies. Obviously, all of that led, in some way, to this project.

And finally, my mother, Jean. I've told you about her before, but when I was spending some time in North Carolina last year writing her obituary and making arrangements for her service, I discovered something I hadn't really wrapped my head around before. Anything about me that is artistic or curious or creative, I get all of that from her. Having been a journalist is particularly interesting because, and I had forgotten this until I was going through things back at the house in the fall, but she was the editor of her college yearbook. I actually worked on my ninth-grade yearbook. Side note. She was very dedicated to documenting her life, my life, our family life. Having a grandson was a big event, with that in mind. The things you'll find in that house, notes she wrote, reminders, labels. I even see some of this in my son. Pages she's pulled from magazines because there was an interesting story or profile of someone that stuck out to her. She was just such a documentarian. And she and I shared the quality of being both staggeringly organized and tragically scattered. Later in her life she was a teacher and she touched a number of lives. But she had so many phases and eras. And she had such a fertile mind. Such a fertile mind. Anyway, the point is, I am an artist and a storyteller, just like my mother before me. They haven't invented enough words to thank someone for making you who you are. So, with that said, I do want to dedicate this project, every hour I've put into it and whatever impact it may have had, to my mom, Leslie Jean Meece Tapley.

Again, thank you for bearing with me through all of that. I just really wanted to paint the fullest picture of this entire endeavor, and I felt pretty strongly that that story be a part of this record. So, you got to know your host today. Now, before we completely wrap this thing up, I wanted to bring back our chorus. No, not all 121 voices from *50 MPH*, but a few of them. We're riding off into the sunset here and I think that the people who made this movie deserve a chunk of real estate on this special day. So, let's start with the prince of *50 MPH* – yeah, I called him that – former Fox exec Jorge Saralegui.

### **JORGE SARALEGUI**

The things that I learned from the story I just told you, that I learned about moviemaking but I learned them because of what *Speed* became, were, one, how much luck has to do with success and failure, just in life. I didn't know it then, but in retrospect, any time I tell any part of this story to anybody, I'm always telling it kind of the way I'm telling it to you, in this, "Can you believe how many potential wrong turns we took and ended up where we ended up, and how lucky you are?" Because it's actually a funnier story that

way and a funner story to tell, but it's true. It's not like it's all luck, but how much luck is a big factor, you know, in everything, in terms of, like, not getting too full of yourself, you know? And letting things go to your head. Because we were – I, but we, Fox, everybody involved was very lucky.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Here is costume designer Ellen Mirojnick, or I should say, newly-Oscar-nominated costume designer Ellen Mirojnick.

### **ELLEN MIROJNICK**

I always remember it as being a great experience and one that actually shifted the persona of action films, so, I think that it's that kind of spirit and rebelliousness that we need more of today, frankly. Listen, you know, the movie business has certainly changed dramatically since that time, and there's so many movies from the '90s in so many different genres that still employed storytelling, and what we find now is, of course, there's different types of storytelling, but certainly not with, I don't think, the same basics of telling a story so that there is a story and so that it becomes memorable and it's a great means of communication, as opposed to just a visual art.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

A string of actors here, starting with Emmy-winning actor Joe Morton.

### **JOE MORTON**

It is very simple but it just works from beginning to end. Everything sort of gets stitched together in just the right way so that you believe who these people are, you believe what they do and you're willing to take a ride. It seemed as much fun to watch as it was to shoot. It seemed to fulfill what it was doing. I mean, very different, in that sense, than *Terminator 2*. *Terminator 2*, James said that it was a, you know, an anti-authoritarian film. It was about, you know, trying to talk about the eve of destruction, if you will, and I thought, "Eh, well, we'll see if that really happens." And I was very surprised that he was actually able to pull that off in a very clear way. Whereas with *Speed*, I think *Speed* was what it was, and it was an audience thriller. They loved it, you know? There was nothing layered about the movie other than what it was, but it all worked very, very well.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Joe's partner in crime-fighting in the film, actor Richard Lineback.

### **RICHARD LINEBACK**

There's not many movies that will hold your attention, still, like *Speed*. And I watch it – I don't know how many times I've watched it, not just to see me or to impress a date, or my now wife, but I do it because it's just a really, really well-made, unpretentious action thriller. And just like anything that's really professional, they make it look effortless. You're not sitting there critiquing, "How did they do this? How'd they do that?" You are caught up, because Jan de Bont, as a director, always stays ahead of the audience. It's just like comedy. You can't let the audience catch up with you and anticipate what's going to come next. To me, it seems like you always have to be ahead of the audience,

and yet, make it look effortless, so that people aren't pulled out of the movie, until maybe, like, the second or third viewing of it. And then you go, "Wow, I wonder how they did that?" But definitely, the first time I saw that film, I was not even aware of, you know, the memories of the thing. I was pulled along with the action and it was unbroken and there were no awkward pauses or anything in that movie. It was just masterfully done.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Emmy-nominated actor Alan Ruck.

**ALAN RUCK**

Decades ago, old Darryl Zannuck from 20th Century Fox said, "The movie business is not a slide-rule business." It's nothing you can compute, you know? I mean, for all the statistics and the demographics and all the things that the studios and the networks and everybody relies on, the truth is, you never know. I mean, because you can have the right script and the right director and the right star and people will just stay away in droves, and there's no way to figure it out. And then there's other things that, like you said, nobody expected that much of this thing, and it just caught on fire.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

The delightfully grumpy Carlos Carrasco.

**CARLOS CARRASCO**

Like I said before, when I called it an artifact, you know, I did mean that, and not in a pejorative way. It's a cultural thing that is very entertaining. It's a fun piece. It's of its time, you know, in terms of the state of the art of moviemaking and everything and it holds up.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And, truly a burst of light, Ms. Beth Grant.

**BETH GRANT**

It is a hugely iconic movie. I mean it just is. It's one of those handful that never goes away and gets new fans with every new generation. People who haven't seen it, they – you know, it's like *Donnie Darko*. I always say the older kids introduce it to the younger kids and then they grow up and they introduce it to the younger kids, and so, there's always this new generation of *Speed* fans. And, you know, as I always say, "The movie, not the drug!"

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Moving on to the crew, here is unit production manager and executive producer Ian Bryce.

**IAN BRYCE**

Listen, for that time and for that movie, it was an extraordinary amount of energy on screen for that kind of price and launched a number of people's careers. I like those

movies. I like watching them. I like making them. I just enjoy that process, and when you look at movies like *Speed* and *Twister* and *Transformers* and, you know, *World War Z* and, you know, like, some of the movies I've been fortunate to work on, keeping it grounded and keeping it real is, like – that's a big deal for me, right? Like, I like that approach.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Stunt driver and performer Donna Evans.

**DONNA EVANS**

A lot of stuff that I've been in, like, way prior, when I was younger, I'll tell my kids, "Oh, yeah, this was a great movie. Watch this movie." And you watch it and you go, "Oh, that's kind of corny," or, "That's kind of – it just looks old." It doesn't look like it's anything special, when it was, like, a big deal back then. And, boy, I have to say, you know, Jan de Bont did a fantastic job.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Visual effects director of photography Dave Drzewiecki.

**DAVE DRZEWIECKI**

I have had the pleasure of working with Jan de Bont and working with Christopher Nolan, and I know that Jan, you know, his list of feature directing credits isn't like Christopher Nolan's, but you can't take anything away from Jan de Bont, and I think, actually, history needs to point out, really, what Jan de Bont brought to the film industry. And he was a great cinematographer and his personality just drove everything around him. I would call Jan de Bont an auteur.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

We've got to hear from these guys. Producer Mark Gordon.

**MARK GORDON**

With me, I don't think about how successful something's going to be. I think about, "How do I get this made in the best way possible?" And then you leave it up to fate or whatever to know or wonder or to hope if it's going to be successful. It's just nice to be a part of something that people still think about.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And screenwriter Graham Yost.

**GRAHAM YOST**

Everything happened in a certain order and at a certain time, and there are so many things that could have gone other ways and didn't, and because of that, it actually got made and became the movie it was. You can't see this house, but my wife and I call it the house that *Speed* built. We live up in Monterey because we can afford to because of *Speed*. So, always grateful. And as I've said now 20 times, it changed my life.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

And finally, computer graphics artist David Douglas. I sort of get chills every time I hear this quote.

## **DAVID DOUGLAS**

There are geniuses and masters, OK? Mozart's a master. You listen to his music, and composers have told me this: "It's exactly where it's supposed to be at that moment, but in a way I didn't expect." So, it follows the rules, and it does so brilliantly, OK? But then you have genius, and genius is like Beethoven, who listens to Mozart and says, "I can't do that, but I can do this and I can make it sound like nothing else." I think, in a way, *Speed* represents a mastery of the action genre, and what I mean is, it's not doing anything new, per se. It's not reinventing the genre the way that *Die Hard* did or *Commando*, which I can't stand as a movie, but it was definitely the first of that reality. But what it does is it plays the mid-90s aesthetic of what an action film could be and pushes it as far as it can go without becoming John Woo. And it's still grounded. I mean, even with that dumb shot, I'm sorry, of the car flying over the camera and the whole fucking thing, I can just still buy into the world of *Speed*, even though the logic of it is, at best, dubious. That's how you know you have a great film, when you don't care that they're not doing 55 miles an hour around the corner of that whatever, right? You just don't give a shit, because it's such a good film. And so, I don't think it revolutionized. I think it was the ultimate distillation of what an action film could be at that time.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

To that, I can only say, "Hear! Hear!" Because that is it in a nutshell, and why *Speed* ought to be remembered, ought to be canonized, more than it has been. That has been the stated goal of *50 MPH*, and after this last year, I hope we've accomplished that. I mean, I can honestly say I've left it all out there. On that note, I did want to sort of selfishly offer up this clip from my interview with visual effects artist Todd Vaziri, who did not work on *Speed*, but who is a great admirer of the film and friend of the podcast.

## **TODD VAZIRI**

Every movie – especially one that's a big hit, that is culturally significant, that after all these years, people watch and still enjoy – there needs to be caretakers of all this information. Because, as we've seen online, even movies that are released, or even haven't been released, are filled with so much misinformation and mythology, and the mythology takes hold and it is so hard, if not impossible, to break that mythology. So, thank you for being the caretaker of *Speed* and how it was made. It is pretty remarkable.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

Thanks for that, Todd. It has been a painstaking journey, at times an emotional one, and, consistently, a rewarding one. I have quite literally never worked harder on anything and I have quite literally never been more proud and satisfied with anything. I'd like to wrap these soundbites up with one I've had in my back pocket for 10 years now. This is from the very first interview I ever conducted with Jan de Bont, back in 2014. I've always liked this little anecdote, and I've never shared any of the material from that



interview because most of it I've covered in all of my updated conversations with him. But this is a nice tip of the cap to how long I've been engaged with telling the behind-the-scenes story of this movie, and I think it ultimately speaks to the reach of the film Jan made. Also, it just feels right to leave things with the man responsible for delivering the subject of this podcast, so, here, from a decade ago, is Jan de Bont.

### **JAN DE BONT**

Six months ago, I was in Indonesia and I was scouting something. It was, like, an island with nothing there and we had to get – it was getting dark and I had to get on a little boat to get to the other side. So, I started a long walk. At the very end, there was a pier, and at the very end, there was a little hut. I mean, nobody lived there, and there was this one guy taking care of the boats, and he was looking at *Speed* in Indonesian. I said, "How cool is that?" That this little guy on this little battery-powered TV, I mean not bigger than 12-by-12 inches or so, was looking at that movie?

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Fun fact, the movie Jan was scouting at that time was a follow-up to 1991's *Point Break*, ironically enough, which ultimately moved forward without him in the form of the 2015 remake. That was 10 years ago and Jan is 80 years old now, but I'll just say, once again, what I've said a number of times here, and to him: I hope we can get one more movie out of you, Jan. OK, folks. As they say, in closing – here's the thing. This movie makes me smile. I thought about that a few weeks ago when I was at a repertory screening of *Speed* here at the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood. I caught myself at one point just grinning from ear to ear. And by the way, while I'm on the subject, in addition to that, there was also an anniversary screening held courtesy of Idiots at the Eagle Theatre over here in Eagle Rock. The celebration has also gone global. The Forbidden Worlds Film Festival in Bristol, England opened this year's festivities with a screening of *Speed* on an IMAX screen, which sounds amazing. I was happy to help the festival's organizer, Ti Singh, pull together a video introduction from Jan de Bont for the audience there. Back here in the States, I know there have also been 30th-anniversary programs held in Indiana and Pennsylvania and Yale University, and I'll add this: None of the ink is dry, so, without saying too much, folks in the LA area, keep an eye out for something special.

Anyway, what was I saying? Oh, yeah. This movie puts a smile on my face. So, the opportunity to dedicate this kind of time and attention to something that makes you happy, I know that's a rarity, and I'm incredibly grateful for that. I also think – and this is a broader conversation – that we're running out of movies that deserve this treatment. I know I'm over the hill, alright? I get it. But I just find that this business, this art form, this popular mode of entertainment, it doesn't make me smile as much anymore. *Speed* is a movie that endures 30 years later and, I've said it before, but I'm not sure how many movies nowadays will have that same luster 30 years from now. I'm honestly not sure how many movies from the last two decades will have that luster. But, maybe the nostalgia of this generation will take hold on schedule at that time and I'll be proven wrong. I can only speak for myself. But I don't want to bog down too much into those thoughts. I will say this project has been a nice full-circle thing for me in a lot of ways.

There's been a bit of a reunion vibe with the opportunity to bring in folks like Anne Thompson and Guy Lodge, who have been a big part of my professional life over the last 20 years. It's been very fulfilling to take whatever I might have learned as a journalist in that time and apply it to something like this. I also think I've established a format for similar movie podcast oral histories, because I think it's clearly one that works quite nicely, if you're willing to bust your ass. Along the way, we made some splashes. We actually got a nice notice from the Webby Awards, by the way, which I haven't mentioned before. We were not a nominee, but we were an honoree in the TV and movie podcasts space there and one of I think nine programs that were mentioned across the nominations and honors in that field in total, so, that was awesome. Thank you to the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences for that recognition.

Finally, though, I want to thank each and every single one of you out there listening to this right now for taking this journey with me. Everyone who has taken a moment to listen, to reach out and be kind along the way, and there have been so many of you – I'm glad I found my people with this thing. You and your love for this movie are the lifeblood of *50 MPH*, because without that, I'm just a guy talking into the void. And with that in mind, I said earlier that I hope the audience for this continues to grow. You see, the thing about this podcast is that, although it had an expiration date, it's not simply going to go away. No, *50 MPH* will always be there, waiting to be discovered by people who have missed it. I get emails all the time from folks who have only recently stumbled across it, and that's great. What I ask of you, if you've enjoyed what I've put together here, is please spread the word. Write us a five-star review. It only takes a second. Tell your friends. Tell anyone you think might be interested in this material that there is a podcast out there that – and I don't think I'm out of line in saying this – is the most thorough, singular exploration of how a movie was developed, produced and released into the world, and how it manages to maintain a legacy decades after the fact. Because I think that's exactly what *50 MPH* is.

Alright, I think I've said it. So, with that – because, after all, we release at midnight pacific time – let me be the first to wish Jan de Bont's Oscar-winning 1994 summer action blockbuster *Speed* a Happy 30th Anniversary. Where's my beer? Here it is. It's warm now, but I'll take a sip. Oh, yeah. And wherever you are in the world, please, fire it up on VHS, Laserdisc, DVD, Blu-ray, 4K, whatever. Relive the memories. Bask in the craft. But, above all, enjoy the ride.

I am Kris Tapley, and this was *50 MPH*.

## **[OUTRO MUSIC]**

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Thanks so much for listening. *50 MPH* was written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I'm @kristapley. That's Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website [50MPHPodcast.com](http://50MPHPodcast.com). If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things, but most importantly, tell a friend. And again, thank you so much. I hope to see you down the road.