

SPEED

# LEAP OF FAITH

Looks like the end of the road for Keanu and Sandra...

**A**fter *Die Hard* raised the stakes skyscraper-high, '90s action cinema became an arms race of increasingly outrageous scenarios playing out in increasingly enclosed spaces. For his 1994 directorial debut, *Die Hard* cinematographer Jan de Bont went one step further. Not only is *Speed* set almost entirely on an LA bus, but that bus is loaded with "enough C4 to put a hole in the world", if the vehicle (and, by proxy, the film) dips below 50mph.

Keanu Reeves plays the harassed SWAT cop trying to "do his job and not get dead"; Sandra Bullock the spunky every-woman who finds herself in the driving seat. But just as they're getting into their groove, a seemingly insurmountable obstacle appears: a section of missing freeway. There's no choice but to jump. "Floor it!" barks Reeves as the bus hits the gap and starts sailing through space. To de Bont's credit, our disbelief remains defiantly airborne even as the bus comes back to earth with a bump.

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## SETTING THE SCENE

► Original star Stephen Baldwin reportedly left the project because it was too *Die Hard-y*. Script doctor Joss Whedon was brought in and, with Reeves' input, helped make the lead character more earnest.

► The idea for this scene came to de Bont while he was driving to the set. He noticed big sections of the freeway were missing and asked screenwriter Graham Yost to incorporate the jump into the script.

► Shooting on the bus proved so cramped that de Bont, an experienced director of photography, often operated the cameras and loaded the clapperboards himself.



"The jump was a challenge of its own because, to my knowledge, nobody had ever jumped a bus the distance and the height that we jumped this one."

Gary Hymes, stunt coordinator



"I asked the writers to integrate it into the screenplay. It became one of the high points of the movie – what you gonna do?"

Jan de Bont, director



"It's tense when you're doing that kind of stunt and it's that big. You can only do it once; you're shooting with 10 cameras. It has to be right."

Mark Gordon, producer



"When it hit the ramp, it went much further than anyone had anticipated. It went through the top of the frame."

Ian Bryce, executive producer



"I have no intention of becoming an action hero, or of repeating this experience..."

Keanu Reeves (Jack Traven)

## THE CGI

An apparently simple shot of the approaching chasm proved the priciest in the movie as it relied on expensive CGI to sell the idea. CG birds were added in to disguise the effect.

## THE TEST RUN

During the first attempt, the stunt driver missed the ramp and totalled the bus. Nobody told the studio, and it isn't mentioned in the DVD *Making Of*, though de Bont fesses up in his commentary.

## THE BUS

A special super-light bus that could reach 70mph was built, one of 12 used throughout filming. The driver's compartment was moved to the middle for safety purposes, and a dummy driver placed at the wheel.

## THE HARNESS

The stunt driver wore a shock-absorbing harness that suspended him in mid-air during the jump so he wouldn't damage his spine upon landing. He did bite his tongue though.

## THE TRICK

The gap in the freeway is completely computer-generated. In reality, the bus jumped over a continuous bit of road that was subsequently matted out in post-production.

## THE SECOND JUMP

Two days after the first, failed attempt, a new bus was readied for the stunt. It flew 109ft, much further than planned, and destroyed most of the cameras meant to be capturing the moment.

## THE INSERTS

In order to get realistic footage of the cast reacting to the bus landing post-jump, the filmmakers drove them over an eight-inch bump. The results were bone-shaking.

## THE FREEWAY

The film was shot on a yet-to-be-opened freeway, so production had to keep moving to avoid disrupting construction. This often meant painting lines and putting up fences to make it look like a working road.