

Mile a Minute Murphy

The year was 1899. The world speed record attempt that I'm about to describe was probably one of the most dangerous ones ever attempted. The stopwatches at the end of the one mile event all agreed that the participant had just achieved the goal of over 60 MPH by covering a mile in only 57 seconds. Now this would not sound too spectacular except the 60 miles per hour had just been achieved by a bicyclist drafting behind a train. That cyclist would forever be known no longer as Charles Murphy but as Mile-A-Minute Murphy.

Now the event was fraught with danger. The tracks had boards laid between them and yet there were the two rails on each side that Murphy need to stay within. The track was short and Murphy would have only 3/8 of a mile to slow down after the one mile run was completed – this on his track bike that had no brakes and was stopped only by backpedaling. If Murphy was unable to stop in time, he would run out of track and would be thrown headlong onto the uncovered railroad ties. As the train went over the track the heavy steam engine would compress the rails which would spring back up from under the train launching Murphy into the air. A good part of the time his bicycle was airborne. The ash from the steam engine that would normally fall harmlessly on the roadbed was flying up and burning Murphy's skin and setting his cycling clothing on fire.

As Murphy accelerated behind the giant engine and passenger car full of reporters, he immediately began to fall behind the 15 seconds per ¼ mile pace he needed to maintain and eventually lost speed and began the fall out of the wind draft of the train car. He quickly fell almost 200 feet behind the train. He recounted later the turning point in the ride. Facing failure he prayed, "Oh my God am I to make a failure of this ride? My prayer was answered. An indescribable feeling came over me – It was the hand of God." Suddenly filled with a supernatural power he had never felt before he quickly closed on the train at speeds estimated to be over 75MPH. As the train crossed the end of the measured mile the stopwatches recorded that Murphy had made up the time he lost in the first ½ mile and had achieved his goal of 60MPH on a bicycle.

But the excitement was not over. The engineer turned off the steam to the engine and began to ease on the brakes. Murphy slammed into a safety bumper at the rear of the train at 75+MPH and his bicycle went flying up onto its front wheel. It was then that several of Murphy's friends leaned off the back of the speeding train car and grabbed Murphy and his bicycle and pulled them to safety. Seconds later the board track disappeared as the train moved out onto the unprotected section of track where Murphy would have likely been dashed to his death. His friends on the platform quickly realized that Murphy's cycling gear was on fire and extinguished the smoldering clothing of Mile-A-Minute Murphy. When the attempt was completed, grown men wept and hugged and kissed each other, one man fainted and the official sent to verify the event said he would never allow or take part in any record attempt event of this kind again because of the extreme danger he had just witnessed.

I like to think of salvation as that peaceful platform on the train car. We have been pulled aboard by the strong hands of our loving Savior. He has rescued us from a path that was leading us to destruction. Our burns have been extinguished and the wounds this world has inflicted on us have been healed. We have been pulled from turmoil to peace and from suffering to solace. And the angels in Heaven held a celebration because just one sinner (you and me) had come to faith in Jesus.

PS 91:14 "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

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