

LONG ISLAND RAILROAD

· INFORMATION BULLETIN ·

*Issued Periodically by the Management
with the hope of promoting a better understanding
among Patrons and Employes of
local and general Railroad questions.*

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My Memorable Bicycle Ride Behind a Long Island Railroad Train in 1899

By CHARLES "MILE-A-MINUTE" MURPHY

Editor's Note.—In 1899 newspapers, magazines and other publications throughout the United States and Europe, devoted substantial space to an account of the remarkable achievement of Charles M. Murphy, at that time a New York City policeman, who, paced by a Long Island Railroad train, pedaled one mile in less than a minute. This record has never since been equalled or surpassed.

While many of our readers have seen descriptions of this most unusual cycling feat, written by various persons, they have never read the story of the ride, told by the man who performed the so-called "impossible," and whose name will live as long as bicycles continue to be manufactured and used.

After spending several years in the West, Mr. Murphy returned a few months ago to take up his permanent residence on Long Island. Naturally, the newspapers heralded his re-appearance in the East, and refreshed the memories of their readers with brief tales of his thrilling ride twenty-seven years ago. Recently he paid a visit to the editorial office of THE BULLETIN. As the result of that call, we print below what Mr. Murphy states is the only account of the record-breaking bicycle ride of 1899, written by himself. Needless to say, THE BULLETIN staff are proud of the distinction and opportunity of publishing the extremely interesting and historical narrative. We can not close this notation without thanking Mr. Murphy for his kindness in preparing the article for our exclusive use.

Briefly, here is the story of how I rode a mile on a bicycle in 57 4-5 seconds:

In 1886, while an amateur cyclist, I was asked to give an opinion of the quality and relative speed of the various prominent riders of the time. My answer was, that there is no limit to the



CHARLES M. MURPHY

speed of a bicycle rider, that the speed depended largely upon the bicycle, gears, tracks and pace-makers.

This opinion was based upon an exhibition at a Philadelphia bicycle show, when I rode a mile on a "home-trainer," with a 64 gear, in one minute and nineteen seconds. The track record, at that time, for one mile was three minutes and nineteen seconds. I demonstrated, that in the absence of the wind pressure, one could ride at least two minutes faster for a mile, than the figure just mentioned.

I declared that I could follow a railroad train, and that there was not a locomotive built which could get away from me. I immediately became the laughing stock of the world. The more people laughed, the more determined I became to accomplish the feat. I figured that the fast-moving locomotive would expel the air to such an extent, that I could follow in the vacuum behind, which meant exactly the same as if I were riding on a "home-trainer" or in dead air.

After thirteen years of trying ordeals, I finally succeeded, in 1899, in interesting Mr. Hal B. Fullerton, of the Long Island Railroad (now its Agricultural Director), to have his road build a board track between the rails, two and one-half miles long. This was done at Maywood.

On the rear platform of a special car, a wind-shield had been constructed, which looked like an enormous vestibule. It had been arranged to give three exhibitions, so there would be no question as to the record. After eight weeks of hard training, I was ready for the test. I used a Tribune bicycle geared to 112, for the first trial. A light locomotive was used to correspond with the light roadbed. It was afterwards found that this locomotive could not reach the mile-a-minute mark. The heaviest and fastest locomotive of the road was then used. This worked disastrously, because when I would pass over the joints of the rail, the rails would sink under the pressure, causing an up and down hill race, entirely different from the first trial. The first trial was held June 21, 1899. The time for the mile was as follows: 16 2-5 seconds for the quarter; 33 3-4 seconds for the half; 49 1-5 seconds for the three-quarter post and one minute and twenty-five seconds for the mile. This constituted a record for the distance.

On June 30, 1899, the final attempt to ride a mile in one minute was made. The specially prepared train, crowded with officials, and members of the press from all parts of the United States arrived at Babylon, at 4 p. m. I was escorted to the depot by an array of trainers. Then all left for Maywood, the starting point.

After a hurried conversation with Sam Booth, the engineer, I donned my racing clothes, took my position with the bicycle, behind the train. I took hold of the special rod that was placed on the back of the car to prevent my front wheel from striking the car. This precaution probably saved my life. Mr. Fullerton then shouted to me, "Are you ready?" I answered, "All right." The signal was passed to Sam Booth, in the engine cab, and I was off for the famous ride.

The blood tinkled through my veins, but I soon settled down to business. I let go of the rod, and as soon as I did, I experienced an entirely different feeling compared with my previous rides. It was

a hold, then a shove sensation. I was riding in a maelstrom of whirling dust, cinders, paper and other small particles of matter. The whipsaw feeling, through a veritable storm of fire, became harder every second. I was determined to win, and with each push of the pedals I was putting every ounce of energy into the ride.

To indicate that the starting point of the measured mile had been reached, Mr. Fullerton waved a white flag. The peculiar feeling I mentioned previously made riding more uncomfortable as I progressed. The officials knew that I was laboring under great difficulties, for I could tell from an occasional glance at them, that their faces reflected a feeling of despair and disappointment. I heard the cheers from the officials and spectators as I rode, and they had a fine effect upon me. I was riding against hope; I expected the worst.

The first quarter mile was reached in 15 1-5 seconds. I then observed that the hearty cheers of the officials had given place to appeals to "Come on; don't give up." They realized that something was wrong because I was losing ground. Fred Burns, the announcer, called to me through the megaphone, "What is the matter?" I raised my head from the handle bars, but quick as a flash I fell back 150 feet. With all the energy and power at my command, I tried to regain the lost ground. It was no use; I was doomed to failure; I could feel myself getting weaker every second.

Murphy's Prayer Answered.

I offered up this prayer to God: "Oh, my God, am I to make a failure of this ride?" My prayer was answered; an indescribable feeling came upon me. It was the hand of God. New vigor and energy came with each push of the pedals; the old bicycle responded like it never had before. Foot by foot I could see and feel myself gaining the lost ground. I could hear the chorus of officials yelling, "Come on, come on, Charlie." You could tell that their earlier feeling of despair and disappointment had given away to a feeling of confidence and success.

The half-mile had been passed in 29 2-5 seconds. On I pedaled through this fire of hot cinders and rubber, but with each sting it made me more determined. Wobbling to and fro, but still gaining, the three-quarter post was passed in 44 seconds. The engine was warming up by this time, and flew into the last quarter at the rate of 70 miles an hour. The roar and din of the train was terrifying. I had completely lost my steadiness, but continuing to labor madly, I kept on gaining, and just as I regained all the lost ground, I saw Mr. Fullerton wave the American flag at the same time the signal was given to Engineer Booth to shut off.

What a pleasing feeling gripped me when that American flag came to view. I knew I had made good my promise to the public. One cheer after another was given by the officials on the rear end of the train. Suddenly an agonized look came upon those trained officials' faces. It was horrifying; they felt the train vibrate as the result of shutting off the steam. On I came, crashing head-on into the rear of the train. My rear wheel rebounded; I pitched head forward. A frantic yell of despair went up from the officials on the rear platform. They expected me to be dashed to pieces and sure death.

The pleasure and glory of this long-cherished idea was not to be taken from me by death. I reached forward, grabbed an upright on the rear of the car. Simultaneously Mr. Fullerton and Mr. Cummin caught me by the arms and pulled both the bicycle and myself upon the platform of the

rear car. I was on the platform but a few seconds when the train dashed over the end of the boards between the rails. I would never have been able to back-pedal in time, and would have been compelled to finish on the ties, which, no doubt, would have resulted disastrously to me.

The excitement among the officials and representatives of the press was a sight that perhaps will never again be witnessed. Grown men hugged and kissed one another. One man fainted, another went into hysterics. While I was sore all over, from the hot cinders and rubber that came under the car, the scene I just described and the glory of my success, proved soothing, to say the least.

Although highly elated over the success of the ride, Mr. James E. Sullivan, the official referee, declared he would never again take part in an event of that kind, even if it was the means of "making" cycling for the next century.

I am the first and only man to undertake or accomplish this feat, and while twenty-seven years have passed since I rode a mile behind a Long Island Railroad train in 57 4-5 seconds, it still remains the fastest mile record ever made on a bicycle.

TRAIN DISPATCHERS:

Do You Need a New Watch?

The July, 1926 issue of The Railway Review, contains the following letter, written by its Managing Editor, Mr. Charles Dillon, and of particular interest to Train Dispatchers:

"Should train dispatchers be required, or permitted to relieve trainmen from rear end protection by train order?"

"Should train dispatchers be required to check and okay clearance cards?"

"I have some very firmly grounded opinions about both questions asked in the foregoing paragraphs. Those opinions were formed as a result of long experience as a train dispatcher. I should like very much to contribute something to this discussion which Bruce Crandall is going to have in the Monthly Extension Issue, but I understand Mr. Crandall won't let me enter the contest, so I have no chance either to air my opinions or to win a watch—and I need a new watch. The chances are I shall have to pay for it. Mr. Crandall is out of town this week, which explains why I am sending out this notice about the watch contest instead of having it bear his signature. But for that matter I don't know why an old dispatcher should not have the privilege of addressing his own people even if he is no longer directly connected with them.

"We have had no difficulty whatever in getting loads of manuscripts from locomotive engineers on the question of pooled vs. assigned locomotives, or from track men, and, indeed, from all the other departments of railroading. I hope the dispatchers will come to the front and contribute some good stuff to this discussion.

"The prize for the best contribution is a high-grade sixteen size railroad watch. Articles should reach the Railway Review, 307 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill., not later than September 15, 1926. The name of the winner will be announced the following month. Of course, the contest is open only to train dispatchers."

Reaction

"Well, learning to ride that horse of yours?"
 "Oh, I say, rather, I've learned to bump him now, instead of him bumping me."—Columbia Jester.