

Cycling at a Mile a Minute.

THE TRUE STORY OF MURPHY'S GREAT CYCLING FEAT.

By FREDERICK A. TALBOT.



SOME months ago a thrill of excitement passed through cyclingdom at the announcement that the well-known American cyclist, Charles M. Murphy, of Brooklyn, had succeeded in covering a mile in 60sec., paced by a locomotive. Cyclists rubbed their eyes in astonishment, while the cycle Press with its characteristic incredulity urged its readers to accept the accomplishment of such a remarkable performance *cum grano salis*, slyly emphasizing the fact that the record was instituted in America, whither so many extraordinary yarns from time to time have emanated.

But the record was neither the invention of a highly imaginative brain nor a newspaper hoax. The following facts and photographs will comprehensively illustrate how this remarkable race against time was performed, thus conclusively proving that Murphy's record was genuine in every detail.

The race was run on June 30th of last year. The course was a section of the Long Island Railroad, New York, U.S.A., and the pacer was one of the fleetest locomotives belonging to the company. Mr. H. B. Fullerton, special agent of the passenger department of that railroad company, was solely responsible for the idea, and when I interviewed him upon the matter on behalf of THE STRAND MAGAZINE, he courteously rendered me all the information in his power.

"It must not be considered," began Mr. Fullerton, "that this race was contested on the spur of the moment. I, in company with the other officials of the railroad, went most carefully into the details of the scheme, and some months elapsed before our arrange-

ments were so satisfactorily completed as to enable the race to be run."

"What first induced you to decide upon such a unique feat?" I asked.

"Well, you see," he replied, "when I received my appointment I was specially urged by the company to study the convenience and requirements of the cycling public, so that the traffic of the railroad by this new class of travel might be considerably increased. Long Island is the veritable El Dorado of the cyclist. The scenery is pretty, the roads are level, well constructed, and maintained in constant repair. Last

year the New York State division of the League of American Wheelmen held their meeting at Patchogue, Long Island. Naturally, therefore, I sought for an attraction to draw cyclists to this spot. Various suggestions occurred to me, but finally I determined to give Charles Murphy, the fast cyclist, a chance to cover the mile in the minute, or, if possible, in less time. I have been an intimate friend of Murphy's for several years, and I have always been impressed with his tremendous pace, marvellous clear-headedness, and nerve. I knew very well that a clear head and great nerve



From a) CHARLES MURPHY. (Photograph.)

were more imperative in the contemplated trial than great speed. Therefore, I broached my idea to Murphy."

"And how did he receive the suggestion?"

"He accepted it with alacrity. Curiously enough, he had petitioned almost every railroad in the United States during the past five years to allow him to be paced by a locomotive. His endeavours, however, were always in vain. This was luck indeed. Murphy was willing to ride on any track that I could provide, even on the regular road-bed of the railway itself if no other were available. Of course, I quite realized that

he would need to have a perfectly straight, smooth track, and, if at all possible, fairly level. Now that Murphy was ready to undergo the trial I laid the matter before the President and General Superintendent of the railroad, and received their sanction. Thereupon I at once set to work upon the necessary details. In this part of the work I was admirably assisted by Mr. W. F. Potter, the General Superintendent; Mr. L. P. Pairo, Superintendent of Traffic; Mr. P. D. Ford, Chief Engineer; Mr. J. H. Cummin, Superintendent of Bridges; Mr. C. L. Addison, Permanent-Way Superintendent; Mr. L. S. Wells, Superintendent of Telegraphs; and Mr. S. F. Prince, jun., Locomotive Superintendent. Had it not been for the hearty co-operation of each of these departments the trial would never have been performed. They assisted me in every possible way, and each superintendent personally attended to, and carried out, all the details concerning his own department."

"I suppose you experienced a great difficulty in selecting a sufficient length of track that coincided with all your requirements, as to being straight, smooth, and level?" I inquired.

"Not so difficult as you would at first imagine," replied Mr. Fullerton. "Long Island is fairly level country. The chief engineer and myself examined the various sections of our system, and at last found a stretch of tangent track over three miles in length. The next thing was to find at least a mile of this level, and this was done where we figured that he could slow up sufficiently in a quarter of a mile. We then tested our engines to see how long a distance was necessary as a start to enable the desired speed of a mile a minute being attained. We found that any of our passenger locomotives, comprising regular equipment of tender (filled with water and coal) and car

could make a mile easily in a minute, the average time for covering the distance being only 52sec., while a start of about three-quarters of a mile was necessary in which to get up the requisite speed. Of course, I naturally desired to make this starting distance as short as possible, so as not to make Murphy ride at this high rate of speed any farther distance than was absolutely essential."

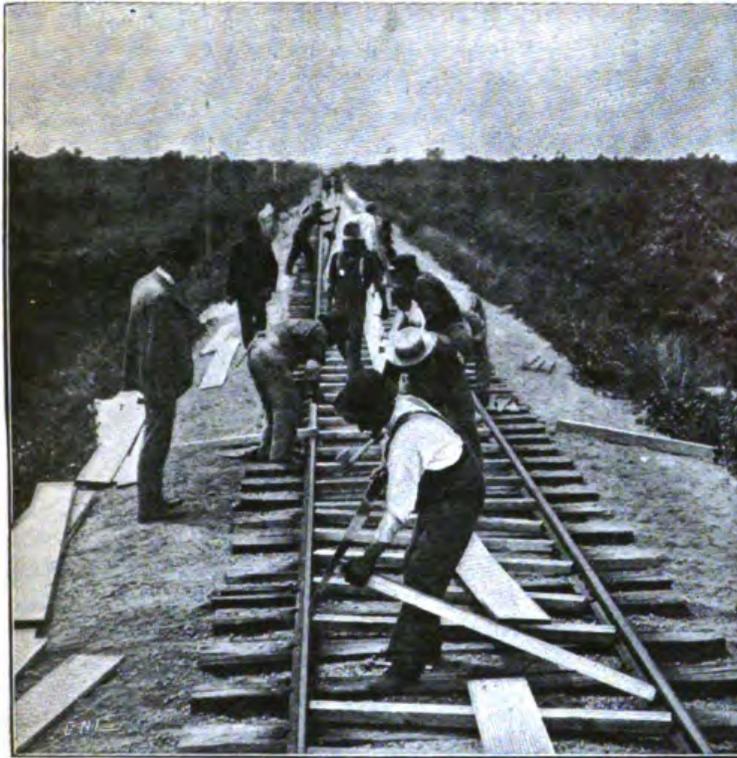
While these requisite details were gradually assuming concrete shape Murphy was undergoing a vigorous training, to remove all superfluous adipose tissue, so that he might attempt what was to him the *magnum opus* of his life under the best possible advantages. Then, again, to strengthen the muscles of his wrists Murphy exercised with electric dumb-bells.

The track upon which Murphy was to ride was made as follows: Stout wooden joists were firmly secured in a lateral position between the rails, and upon these were placed longitudinally five 10in. boards, side by side, so that the railroad was converted into a wooden pathway. Even in this task the Long Island Railroad established a record, for Superintendent Cummin laid 60,000ft. of timber with sixty men in one



MURPHY IN TRAINING—USING THE ELECTRIC DUMB-BELLS
From a [Photograph.] FOR WRISTS.

day. At the end of the car behind which Murphy was to ride was a huge hood, the object of which was to shield the cyclist from the rush of air displaced by the locomotive. This hood was built right up from the track to the roof of the car. It projected 11ft. 4in. from the back of the car, but as, of course, the gangway of the vehicle had to be inclosed, only 6ft. really protected Murphy, which was quite sufficient, if he could succeed in keeping up to the pacer. In our illustration on page 296, showing the interior of the wind shield, will be noticed a kind of projecting cross-bar. This was to act as a buffer, to prevent Murphy from getting beneath the car.



LAYING THE TRACK—PUTTING IN THE JOISTS AND CENTRE-BOARD.

From a Photograph.

“Of course,” resumed Mr. Fullerton, “there was one very important point to be borne in mind: the locomotive must not vary its speed. That is to say, if the first quarter of a mile were run in 20sec., the second quarter of a mile must not be run in 10sec. in order to make up time, since I knew it would be very disconcerting to Murphy if the driver of the locomotive decreased or increased his speed. Mr. Prince, the locomotive superintendent, came to my assistance in this respect with Sam Booth, one of the railroad’s most experienced and trusted drivers.

“On the day before the great event a trial trip was run to see if everything was in perfect and smooth-working order. Murphy had, of course, previously tried the track, and expressed himself as satisfied with it. Every condition

was exactly the same on this rehearsal as in the final trip, wind shield, buffer, and everything being in position. Murphy rode a bicycle geared to 116. I instructed the driver to cover the mile in 1’25min., but cautioned him most carefully to maintain the same speed throughout the minute as he made in the first fifteen seconds.

“Everything passed off satisfactorily, Murphy covering the distance in 65sec. This was 20sec. quicker than I anticipated, but the explanation was that the engine had gathered momentum a little faster than was expected during the first quarter of a mile, and the driver, obeying my strict injunction as to regularity of speed, had wisely kept it up. Murphy rode wonderfully well. For the entire distance he did not leave the middle plank, which was only 10in. wide, and

I do not think his wheel deviated beyond the width of a newspaper column.

“This trial run was interesting in many respects. I had entertained some fears as to what would happen if Murphy, unable to keep up to the locomotive, had dropped outside the wind shield. There were bound to be



FINISHING THE TRACK.

[Photograph.]

wind skirls, and I knew Murphy would fare badly if he were caught in the vortex of air. I had made various experiments, however, with silk handkerchiefs, kites, pieces of paper, etc., and found that the air dis-



MURPHY AND SAM BOOTH, THE ENGINE-DRIVER.
From a Photograph.

placed by the locomotive, and rushing in furious currents on either side of the car in almost parallel lines, did not come together immediately behind the train, as is generally supposed, but met in two swirling circles something like 200ft. behind the train while travelling at sixty miles an hour. Consequently there was absolutely no back draught, nor any wind pressure upon Murphy in any way. Some of the spectators on board the car proved this fact by holding a handkerchief where Murphy was riding.

It never fluttered in the least, while the hair on the cyclist's head was not disturbed a particle, as would otherwise have been the case had any breeze or current of air existed. The cyclist rode in an absolutely still atmosphere. I had thoroughly explained to Murphy the result of my experiments regarding the whirlwinds, so that he knew pretty well what to expect should he lag too far behind the pacer.

"I must not forget to mention one curious incident that occurred during the trial. I had previously arranged with Murphy that, when the mile was covered, I, who was to lay down flat upon the platform just above Murphy's head, would wave my cap across a white board fixed just in front of him, and upon which he would keep his eyes. On receiving this signal, he was to decrease his speed, to drop gradually out of the wind shield, and to dismount in the ordinary way. He carried out my suggestion to the letter, but, unfortunately, he was caught in the wind skirls, and twisted about considerably, though he did not swerve from his track. Realizing the situation, he gathered speed once more and caught the train up again, and was hauled on board.

"Now that Murphy had acquitted himself so splendidly in the trial trip, personally I did not entertain the slightest doubt as to his ability to accomplish the distance in a minute, nor did I for a moment apprehend any danger or serious results. Murphy was quite in accord with me in this feeling of security.

"The next day the final attempt was



MURPHY AFTER THE TRIAL TRIP.
From a Photograph.

made. Mr. James Sullivan, whose reputation is world wide, and whose character is unassailable, acted as referee, while he was supported by four other well-known time-keepers, whose watches were in first-class condition; there were also various Pressmen and representatives from other railroads on the train, so that there can be no possible question regarding the time made, or the thoroughly sportsmanlike manner in which the contest was carried out.

"Murphy, only attired in a sweater and full-length tights, mounted his cycle, which was geared to 120—four points higher than the one he rode the previous day—and took up his position. We started almost imperceptibly, and the engine gathered momen-

was finished and that I would haul him on to the car. Although this seemed a startling proposition at first, working with a man of such perfect self-control as Murphy it was really the easiest thing to do, and the danger element was reduced tremendously.

"As we finished the mile Sullivan gave the word, and I flashed my cap across the white board in front of Murphy. The cyclist, acting on my instructions, immediately dropped back about 25ft., and the air brakes were applied to the train so gently and steadily that not the slightest vibration was felt—in fact, those on the car were unconscious of the application of the brakes. I gave another signal, and Murphy immediately spurred and caught us up again. Mr.



From a

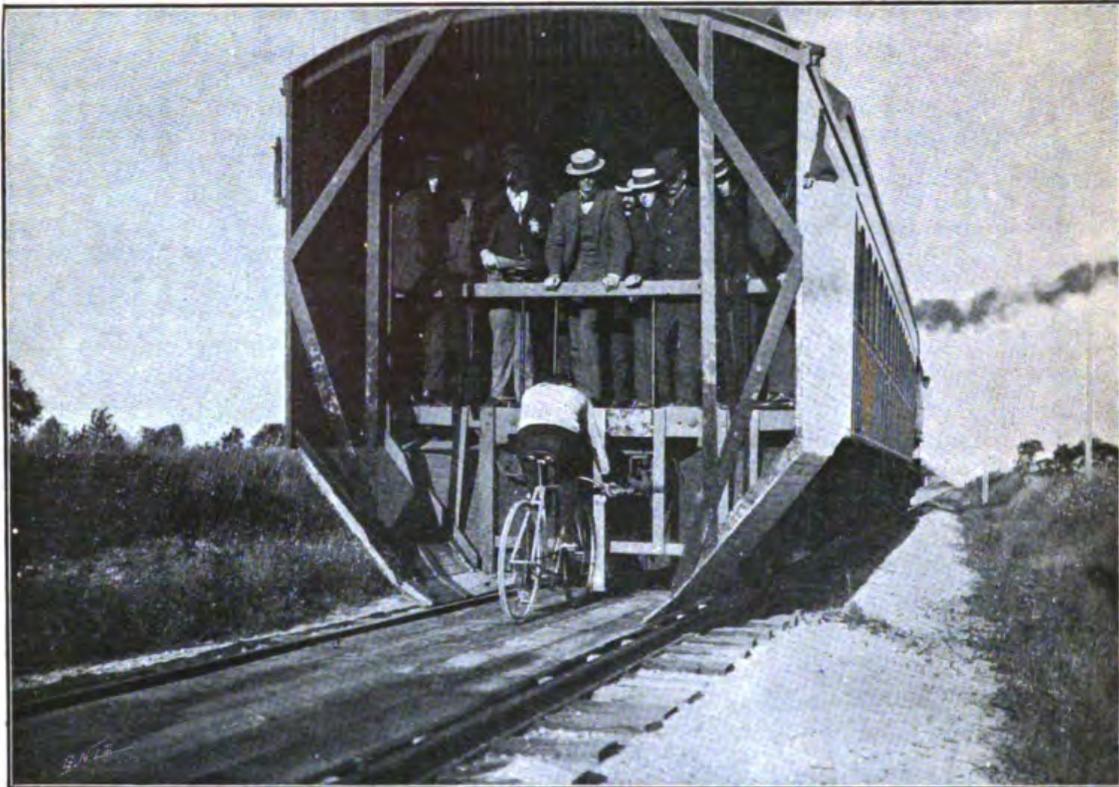
GETTING READY.

[Photograph.

tum with every second. By the time she entered upon the mile run she had easily gained a velocity of sixty miles an hour. Murphy clung to the pacer with marvellous tenacity throughout the whole mile. He did not ride quite so steadily as on the previous occasion, but this he subsequently explained was due to the fact that the bicycle was of a higher gear than that to which he had become accustomed during his training.

"After his experience at the finish of the former trial I had, after careful consideration, proposed to Murphy that, instead of dropping out from behind the wind shield and slowing down alone and cutting the whirlwinds, he should ride up to the train when the mile

Cummin and myself put a hand under each shoulder and lifted him firmly off the wheel. Murphy put his right foot through the top bar of the cycle until I could get hold of it with my other hand, and then both rider and cycle were hauled on the car. It was a hazardous performance with the train rushing along at sixty miles an hour, but it was successfully accomplished. Thus it was that Murphy had established the world's cycling record by riding a mile in 60sec., certainly one of the greatest cycling feats ever attempted. He had not been supported or guided by any ropes or contrivance of any description to aid him in his run. He had simply ridden behind the railway train in just the same manner as he would have



From a]

OFF!

[Photograph.

ridden upon the asphalt track behind the conventional cycling pacer."

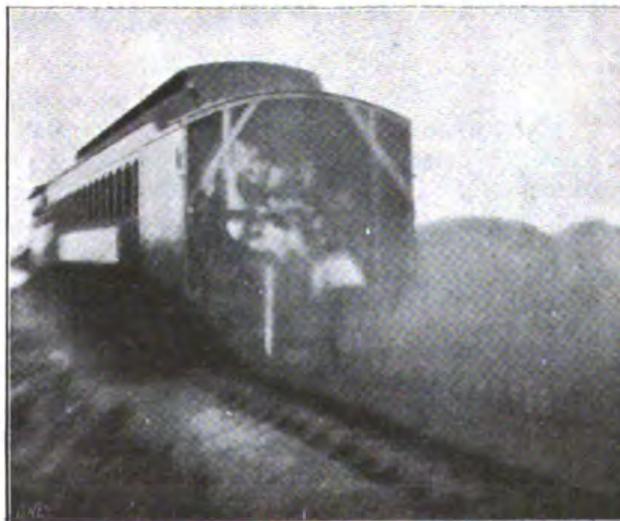
Our last photograph, which was snapped about 30yds. from the finish, shows Mr. Fullerton and Superintendent Cummin ready to assist Murphy off the cycle. The intrepid cyclist can scarcely be discerned through the dust that was thrown into the air by the travelling train, but a comprehensive idea of the magnificent manner in which he clung to the pacer is conveyed.

At the instant the photograph was taken he was only about 4ft. distant from his guiding star, the white board, which may plainly be seen.

"There is one thing I must say in conclusion," remarked Mr. Fullerton. "I have

seen some of the English newspapers in which it was asserted that I, as a Press agent, had fooled the newspaper men of the States, by concocting a vivid picture of a cyclist being paced by an engine. There are two errors in such an assertion: one is that I am not a Press agent; and the second is that I do not believe the man is yet born who can fool the newspaper men of New York, or, in fact, the clever writers of any large city on the globe."

There may be a great divergence of opinion as to the foolhardiness of such a cycling feat, but certainly as an example of physical endurance, clear-headedness, and iron nerve, Murphy's achievement would be difficult to beat.



MURPHY FINISHING THE MILE IN A CLOUD OF DUST.

From a Photograph.