

# ***Kevin Brownlow on Harold Lloyd's last silent masterpiece***

The end of the silent era caught Harold Lloyd nostalgic for an America that was fast disappearing. The star of his last silent was a horse-drawn trolley car.

'We wanted a big city picture as a change,' said Lloyd, 'and began with a plot of New York politics, gangsters and such. The franchise plot grew until it crowded out the original underworld story.'

Enough remains to give a startling picture of New York life in the 1920s. Harold has a girlfriend whose grandfather operates the horse line and so long as he runs a car every 24 hours, the city can't stop him. But gangsters can...



*Speedy*, which happened to be Lloyd's nickname, was an ideal title for a picture which is so fast-moving and in which there are such brilliantly sustained pursuits. There are also wonderfully ingenious sequences on the subway, in Coney Island and at Yankee Stadium.

In addition to a set that cost \$80,000, the picture called for a location trip to New York. Considering the trouble Keaton experienced while attempting to shoot in New York for *The Cameraman*, what Lloyd got away with on *Speedy* is positively breathtaking. Any film-maker would give his eye-teeth to be handed the freedom of New York, but despite having the police department at his command, excited crowds so blocked progress that Lloyd's four week schedule stretched to twelve.

He plays a taxi driver who has at one stage the biggest sporting personality of the day in the back of his cab – baseball star Babe Ruth. He is late for a vital game and Lloyd breaks every traffic law to get him there. 'If I ever want to commit suicide, I'll call you,' says Babe Ruth.

When gangsters threaten to shut down the eccentric streetcar line, a group of Civil War veterans reform their battalions to stop them. (The extras for the battle scene came from Bowery rescue missions).

Lloyd had a genuine crash. His gag men came up with an inspired solution to get the streetcar rolling again so Lloyd could keep the spectacular event in the film. For the long shots of the horsecar tearing across town – Wall Street, Washington Square - the city was brought to a halt. You will spot a handful of matte shots - they make the remainder of the location shots seem all the more genuine. Director Ted Wilde was nominated for an Academy Award.

**Kevin Brownlow**

