

# Wreck Of The Old 97

Words & Music:  
Charles Noell & Henry Whitter

*This is based on an actual wreck of the fast mail train in Danville, VA in 1903. Wikipedia has a nice paragraph on the authorship on this ballad. I've chosen the likely legal songwriters and not those who have commonly claimed authorship. Thanks to Gunther Anderson, I've also been able to include the first two verses of this American classic. Most covers (Vernon Dalhart, Hank Snow) sing verses 3, 4, 5, 6 & 9. Also, note the similarity between verse 7 and the chorus to "Charlie & The M.T.A." Finally, "97" is the number of the train, not shorthand for the year 1897 ('97).*

G C  
On one cloudless morning I stood on the mountain

G D  
Just watching the smoke from below.

G C  
It was coming from a tall, slim smokestack

G D G  
'Way down on the southern railroad

It was 97, the fastest train  
Ever ran the southern line.

All the freight trains and pass'gers take the side for 97,  
For she's bound to be at stations on time.

They gave him his orders at Monroe, Virginia,  
Saying, "Stevie, you're way behind time.  
This is not 38, but it's Old 97  
You must put her into Spencer on time."

He looked 'round and said to his black greasy fireman,  
"Just shovel in a little more coal.  
And when I cross that old White Oak Mountain  
You can just watch Old 97 roll."

It's a mighty rough road from Lynchburg to Danville  
And the lie was a three-mile grade.  
It was on that grade that he lost his air brakes  
And you see what a jump that she made.

He was going down the grade making 90 miles an hour,  
When his whistle began to scream.  
He was found in that wreck with his hand on the throttle;  
He was scalded to death by the steam.

Did she ever pull in? No, she never pulled in.  
And at 1:45 he was due.  
For hours and hours has the switchman been waiting  
For that fast mail that never pulled through.

97, she was the fastest train  
That the south had ever seen.  
But she run so fast on that Sunday morning  
That the death score was numbered 14.

Now, ladies, you must take warning  
From this time now and on.  
Never speak harsh words to your true loving husband  
He may leave you and never return.