

NORTH POLE PODCAST - THEORIES ABOUT SANTA'S NEW SLEIGH

Elf Frank Myrrh: Greetings and welcome to this new episode of the North Pole Podcast, I'm Elf Frank Myrrh of North Pole Radio News. I'm joined as always by the International Director of Santa Trackers, Elf Crash Murphy, who was recently in a Leon Day North Pole Chat. This episode will focus on the unanswered questions in that chat and will explore a bit some of the comments Santa made about his new sleigh. Crash, it's only June but it feels like we're in full swing already with Operation Merry Christmas.

Elf Crash: Hi Frank, and you're right, we're busy as ever. But it feels good, you know?

Elf Frank: I do, Crash. There's a warm positive kind of vibe so far to Operation Merry Christmas and after the stress of last year it feels pretty good.

Elf Crash: Well, it is only late June and we really don't know what the stress this year will be about, Frank. I think overall, we're right where we want to be in getting ready for Christmas but who can really tell this early.

Elf Frank: I realize that. The chat you held was pretty well attended but it is generating a fair amount of mail.

Elf Crash: I think you can thank that surprise visit by Santa for that, Frank.

Elf Frank: Santa has that affect on things. People have all kinds of questions about this new sleigh, Crash. Now more than ever after what Santa said.

Elf Crash: Yeah, and to be honest, I haven't had much time to look into the new sleigh myself, Frank. I usually don't pay attention to it much at this time of the year. I don't even get a good look at it most years until after the reindeer games.

Elf Frank: It seems to be the story of the year so far, Crash.

Elf Crash: Yes and I get it. This whole project is rushed, Santa himself has taken control over it, and honestly it's the only real thing going on at the North Pole right now that anyone cares about.

Elf Frank: Let's begin by comparing the usual routine with the sleigh every year and how this year might be different. The sleigh goes through an evaluation process after every Christmas flight and then flight engineers get together to make design tweaks. Then they draw up plans, they get approved by the Big Guy and they build a new sleigh and begin test flights in June. Which is where we are now. So what's so different this time around?

Elf Crash: It's a whole new sleigh, Frank. It's not based on last year's record setting model. From the ground up it's brand new. And it isn't unusual to go through a major remodel cycle every 10 years or so, so maybe this is due. I frankly have lost track. Normally when we start that cycle it is at least a 3-year project before Santa flies with it. Well, this year is unusual because Santa wants this new model with the radical new design and he wants it done this year for this year. So we're cramming 3 years of work into six months.

Elf Frank: Okay, that brings some things into focus, Crash. Santa just moved his office to Flight Command and he seems to be spending a great deal of his time involved. And most years Santa doesn't even get near the new sleigh project.

Elf Crash: Yes, and I don't read too much into that, Frank. I think that has more to do with it being developed in such a short time. Santa still hasn't test flown that new sleigh himself and to my knowledge hasn't even sat in it.

Elf Frank: Crash, Santa said something in chat the other day that just has elves everywhere here at the North Pole buzzing. He said that sleigh engineers are focused on speed and that they shouldn't be.

Elf Crash: Oh yeah, I've heard all about it and fans around the world heard that comment if our mail is to be believed and everyone wants to know what Santa means by that. And I think I'm starting to develop a theory. If it isn't about speed for Santa's new sleigh it has to be about just one other thing.

Elf Frank: What could that be?

Elf Crash: Capacity.

Elf Frank: Explain, Crash. I'm not a sleigh guy. I don't know what that means.

Elf Crash: Look, when Santa flies every Christmas he's concerned about on-time, accurate delivery. To do that the sleigh has to be fast. Over the last several years we have learned that small incremental improvements in pure speed are possible and for three years running Santa has broken that 30-hour delivery window, which eluded him for decades. From the high level engineering standpoint, it could be that further improvements in pure speed are going to have to come from somewhere other than aerodynamics and the art of messing with the laws of physics.

Elf Frank: And capacity is the way to do that?

Elf Crash: Sure. After all, if Santa can't go faster, the next logical place to improve his delivery time would be to up his capacity.

Elf Frank: But wouldn't that just mean building a bigger sleigh?

Elf Crash: Yes, it does. But if you build a bigger sleigh, what happens?

Elf Frank: I have no idea. What happens?

Elf Crash: Think logically, Frank. If it's bigger it's hard for the reindeer to pull. If it's harder to pull, it's slower. The bigger it gets the more it impacts the speed, which slows everything down.

Elf Frank: Okay, so if you can't build a bigger sleigh how do you increase the capacity?

Elf Crash: I don't know, Frank. I think that is what Santa is trying to solve with this new design. From every engineer on this I've talked to, Santa is hoping to get incremental improvements in both speed and capacity at the same time.

Elf Frank: Just design alone can accomplish that?

Elf Crash: Evidently not.

Elf Frank: What do you mean by that?

Elf Crash: Santa is now meeting with the workshop team, with the Wrapping Department, with the logistics elves, with even the North Pole Post Office. And that is more important than anything Santa has said about the sleigh.

Elf Frank: Why, Crash? I still don't understand.

Elf Crash: If it's still June and Santa is meeting with those guys it means the sleigh has to in some way be impacting them. They've never met with anyone before during the test flight phase of the sleigh. And Santa's involving them now.

Elf Frank: So?

Elf Crash: So the improvements Santa is seeking has more to do with things other than sleigh design and how fast that sucker can fly, Frank. We're talking about more than a radical new design of the sleigh. We're talking about a change in process somewhere.

Elf Frank: You lost me. If all this is about going faster and getting the delivery job done better, how does process change that? Just what is the process you're talking about Crash?

Elf Crash: Look, Santa is delivering billions of presents to billions of believers around the world. That is a steady increase in demand every Christmas. Not all that stuff fits into Santa's sack or even on to Santa's sleigh. We've touched on this before in the Tracking Santa Around the World radio broadcast, Frank. Sleigh to sleigh transfers, just-in-time workshop-to-sleigh flow that gets the right things to Santa at the right time. That's process. Something is changing with that when it comes to this new sleigh.

Elf Frank: So you're saying this is about more than just the sleigh itself. It actually could be affecting everything that goes into getting the stuff to Santa when he flies.

Elf Crash: Bingo. That's it. In my mind it's the only way Santa can go faster.

Elf Frank: Well, if there's one qualified expert who would know it would be you, Crash. You follow Santa every Christmas Eve. You know how he works. You know the challenges he faces. You see where the kinks are. What do YOU think would make Santa faster?

Elf Crash: This is where I'm just a lunkhead, Frank. I think it's a miracle that Santa does this every year. I see it, and I don't believe it. So when you ask me how Santa can improve on that I'm drawing a blank, Frank. All I can say is that we as elves have to be open to new ways of doing things.

Elf Frank: Do you think that's what this new sleigh is causing to happen?

Elf Crash: It's looking that way to me, Frank.

Elf Frank: Crash, when Santa leaves the North Pole, and that sleigh is all loaded up, how long does that initial load last before Santa's sleigh has to be reloaded?

Elf Crash: When Santa actually starts his deliveries there is an immediate and constant effort to replenish his sleigh. We've talked about sleigh to sleigh transfers before. While Santa is unloading at the front end there are sleighs and elves and reindeer in place to reload at the backend of that sleigh, Frank. Once it starts it doesn't stop until Santa sets sight for home. We're a machine, Frank.

Elf Frank: So are you suggesting that this new sleigh with it's radical new design is really more about remodeling the machine?

Elf Crash: That is exactly what I'm suggesting.

Elf Frank: If it were you, how would you change the machine?

Elf Crash: I don't know, Frank. I honestly don't know how it could be made better. Only Santa has a real read on how he might want to do that and I think this year Santa is making some of those changes.

Elf Frank: Do you think this Christmas Eve will be different then?

Elf Crash: I think Santa is deliberately trying to make it different, Frank.

Elf Frank: Clearly what's going on with the sleigh is affecting other departments and teams at the North Pole. It's affecting Santa maybe and how he works. It could affect us and how

we do the news potentially. How might all that change the world? Will it make things different for believers out there?

Elf Crash: I don't think so, Frank.

Elf Frank: Why not? If it affects Operation Merry Christmas and nearly every elf associated with it, how could it not affect the world?

Elf Crash: I just don't think Santa wants to do that. Or that he needs to do that. On the backend, what Santa likes to call the giving end, things change all the time. That's why we have all these departments and a goal every year to do better. To be masters of the giving end. But on the front end, for the true believers in Santa, I don't think Santa wants that to change.

Elf Frank: So all this work, and all these things going on, and all the change happening to Santa, his sleigh and how things are delivered...well, they will be invisible to the world.

Elf Crash: Oh yes, that's just exactly how Santa wants it. He wants people to see Christmas as a time of complete joy. He doesn't want them stressed. He wants to be steady for them and he wants people to know he's going to show up and that there will be a Merry Christmas.

Elf Frank: Does this have much to do with the fact that Santa gains more and more believers every year?

Elf Crash: Oh, I think that's at the heart of it, Frank. If there are more believers this year than last year then naturally the job is bigger and the challenge is greater. Santa not only wants to go faster, he has to, Frank. We always have to be looking to improve.

Elf Frank: What if six months here isn't enough. What if this new sleigh cannot be ready in that amount of time?

Elf Crash: Well, then there's always last year's sleigh, Frank. It just won't be as fast or done in the time we did it last year because there are more believers to get to this year.

Elf Frank: Okay, Crash. But all that's just a theory, right?

Elf Crash: Right. I'm not sitting in these meetings, Frank. I'm a tracker. That's my part in all this. Regardless of what kind of sleigh Santa is using or how many believers there are out there, I'm tracking Santa for Santa. So all I can do is observe and tell you what I think. I could be totally wrong here.

Elf Frank: When will we know?

Elf Crash: We will just have to watch it all play out, Frank. I think we might learn during the months ahead or maybe it'll come after Christmas. I don't know. But this is how I'm seeing it. If Santa says its not about speed, then it has to be about capacity.

Elf Frank: Okay, we'll talk about this some more, I'm sure in the months ahead of news reports and podcast episodes and such. Are you sure this doesn't impact the world of tracking Santa?

Elf Crash: Santa has certainly steered us to higher performance as Santa trackers this year, Frank. He always does. But I don't see how a change in speed of the sleigh or the capacity of the system changes much for us.

Elf Frank: Tracking Santa for Santa has been given a lot of credit for improving Santa's flight performance these past several years, Crash. How will tracker elves have to be more on their game this year?

Elf Crash: It's all the stuff we've been working on. Better reports, better responsiveness, better information for Santa.

Elf Frank: You recently relaunched the Elf Community at SantaTrackers.net. How does that help improve things?

Elf Crash: We almost lost that community. Santa nearly shut us down because late in the season we always get a surge of people who want to be elves who were really just bringing us down, Frank. So to just have the community at all is a blessing.

Elf Frank: What saved it?

Elf Crash: Elf Max saved it. He'd been working on an upgrade for sometime and he asked to present to Santa that upgrade so a few of us went to Vancouver where Max lives and he sold us. And you've seen it, Frank. The new Elf Community at SantaTrackers.net is fast, efficient and it teaches what it means to be an elf in all new ways.

Elf Frank: But you're NOT expecting an increase in elves there?

Elf Crash: I'm not expecting an increase in the wrong kinds of people there, Frank. For the serious elf, the ones who want to really help Santa get around the world, I am expecting an increase in elves there. You see, this principle of continual improvement works on everyone, even tracker elves, Frank.

Elf Frank: In going through all the questions in the mail, and in the questions Elf Ernest sent me from the chat the other day, I think that's the most common: what can I do to help Santa? How can I be a better tracker elf?

Elf Crash: I'm gratified to hear that question, Frank. I really am. But I'm not surprised by it. I think we all have to answer that question, no matter where we are as an elf. And I think to be a better elf we need to all be in tune with Santa. Think like Santa thinks. Act like Santa would act. You see right now that Santa has moved his office to Flight Command, that's he thoroughly involved at every level, that while he doesn't have all the answers he's got ideas and he's got urgency and he's got a willingness to work. I'm inspired by watching Santa. He makes me want to try harder. And I think that's the answer, Frank. To try harder.

Elf Frank: Okay, Crash. Good advice and I think it lays a great foundation for the efforts ahead. Christmas in July is next, what does that mean for fans of Santa and for your tracker elves?

Elf Crash: It means bringing Christmas into focus, Frank. Having a little fun, which is a key tenet of working for Santa, you know, work hard, play harder. That's what we do as elves.

Elf Frank: Does the world really need to play harder in July?

Elf Crash: Maybe in some parts of the world, but I get what you're saying. Christmas in July is great fun just about everywhere. For our part, we'll be replaying the radio broadcast from last Christmas Eve, we'll have the chat with Santa and Mrs. Claus towards the end of the month. It'll all be lots of fun. But it always amazes me how everything looks and feels different from Leon Day in June and about the 1st of August, Frank. We begin here as June ends and Christmas seems so distant. And on August 1st it seems so close.

Elf Frank: And that's why we have podcasts and North Pole Radio News, Crash. Great thoughts. Thanks for joining us here on the North Pole Podcast. We encourage you to check in daily at SantaUpdate.com and the associated Official North Pole websites as we bring you all the news of Santa, the North Pole and Christmas. On behalf of my radio partner Elf Crash Murphy, we thank you for listening this time around on the North Pole Podcast.