

# Mighty Mouth



What better way to mark the occasion than pulling a 328-ton train as far as you can with your teeth?

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ILLUSTRATION  
BY CHARLIE O.  
HAYWARD

Does the name Rathakrishnan Velu ring a bell for you? Us neither.

If Anna Chidambar, acting as Rathakrishnan Velu's manager, has her way, his name will be on everyone's lips before the year is out, once they learn to pronounce it. This is not in dentistry's best interests. Should our patients learn of Velu's feat and attempt to emulate it, 90 percent of their dental work will have been for naught.

Here's why: Down in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where he is known as Raja Gigi, or King Tooth, Rathakrishnan is hot stuff. If you had been at the city's railroad station recently as part of the chanting crowd jostling for a better viewpoint with its digital cameras, you would have witnessed history in the making.

King Tooth is standing erect between the rails. Clenched in his mouth is one

end of a steel cable about 15 feet long. The other end is attached to a seven-coach train. The enthusiastic crowd is chanting "Malaysia Boleh!" which as near as we can make out, means roughly "Go, idiot!"

King Tooth, wearing a bright orange reflective vest, has one gloved hand to his forehead evoking an Indian form of meditation. This involves a longish period where the mind is banished to some distant point where it can't interfere by offering advice. The chants attain an almost lyrical pitch; King Tooth meditates. He is meditating on Newton's laws of motion, particularly the one that states "a body in motion tends to remain in motion." The trick is to get the motion going in the first place, because he is going to attempt to break his world record set in 2003 by pulling this 328-ton train as far as he can with

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his teeth. Apparently his dentist hasn't mentioned a few of the things that could go wrong with this notion, i.e., disengaging his mouth from his face. Informed consent hasn't entered any one's mind at this point, so the stunt remains a focal point of the day's festivities.

Actually, this is more than a stunt. Velu explains to the Bernama News Agency, it is his personal tribute to Merdeka Day, a holiday in Malaysia celebrating the 50th anniversary of its independence from British rule. And what better way to mark the occasion than pulling a 328-ton train as far as you can with your teeth? We can think of a couple, neither of which involves trains or teeth.

In the U.S. we have our share of all-out dare devils. Remember "Nuttier-Than-a-Fruitcake Day" in September 1974 when the alliterative Evel Knievel tried to rocket himself across the Snake River Canyon in Idaho strapped in his Sky-Cycle? The major difference between the two pioneers is that Rathakrishnan actually succeeded in his attempt.

Here's how the *Associated Press* describes the great moment:

"Dozens of onlookers clapped and chanted when Rathakrishnan sat down and pulled the train, holding both tracks for support and pushing his booted feet against the wooden rafters (railroad ties) to propel himself backward."

"Grunting and gasping, Velu's neck muscles strained and his face distorted Thursday as he hauled the nearly 328-ton train over more than 9 feet along tracks at a railroad station in Kuala Lumpur."

Interviewed by reporters after his feat, the Raja Gigi claimed he was disappointed he didn't make his goal of around 14 feet

— like that extra 5 feet would have made all the difference. But who's counting? You don't get the title "King Tooth" for nothing in Malaysia.

Nursing his mandible back into position, he declared buoyantly, "I'll be back in December for another try." His main concern seemed to be how long he would be required to suck his curry through a straw.

In the meanwhile, the *Guinness Book of Records* agrees that Rathakrishnan Velu

holds the world's record for pulling heavy weights the longest distance with his teeth. Look under "C" for "certifiable weirdoes."

If you have any patients who might wish to share your desire to test the compressive and tensile strength of your restorations and whose IQs test out in the lower 80s, we're sure Amtrak can be persuaded to ante up the train and a length of cable. We could start working on a suitable chant right away. ■■■■