

DATA SHEET

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Utah	
COUNTY: Tooele	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	DEC 17 1974

1. NAME

COMMON: Bonneville Salt Flats Race Track
AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: Three miles east of			
CITY OR TOWN: Wendover			
STATE: Utah	CODE: 49	COUNTY: Tooele	CODE: 045

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____
		<input type="checkbox"/> Comments	_____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

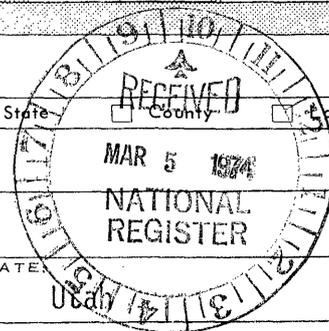
OWNER'S NAME: State of Utah - Division of Parks & Recreation			
STREET AND NUMBER: 1596 West North Temple			
CITY OR TOWN: Salt Lake City	STATE: Utah	CODE: 49	STATE: Utah

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Secretary of State			
STREET AND NUMBER: Utah State Capitol Building			
CITY OR TOWN: Salt Lake City	STATE: Utah	CODE: 49	COUNTY: Tooele

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Utah Historic Sites Survey			
DATE OF SURVEY: 1973	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Federal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State	<input type="checkbox"/> County
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Utah State Historical Society			
STREET AND NUMBER: 603 East South Temple			
CITY OR TOWN: Salt Lake City	STATE: Utah	CODE: 49	ENTRY NUMBER



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Utah
COUNTY: Tooele
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

A part of the Great Salt Lake Desert, the Bonneville Salt Flats were formed by precipitated salt from Lake Bonneville, an ice-age lake which covered some 20,000 square miles of which the Great Salt Lake is the last remnant.

The raceway is just north of Interstate I-80 and three miles east of Wendover, Utah.

The racing area is approximately 13 miles and consists of hard salt sufficiently thick to support the heavy racing machines.

During most of the year the racing area is either under water or too moist for racing. However, the dry Utah summer evaporates the moisture and by August and September the flats are ideal for racing. During this time a tent city of several thousand people springs up adjacent to the race area.

In 1939, Ab Jenkins enthusiastically described the quality of the Salt Flats in this manner:

"The salt beds are better than any of the existing board, brick, or cement tracks of the world because none of these is large enough. I made my first 24-hour run on the board track at Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1928, and know that on such a 1 1/2 mile circular course you can't exceed 145 MPH because the centrifugal force would send the car over the bank unless the track were on a 90 degree grade. Another factor too, is that the pressure of the car may crash it through the timbers. Also, board tracks are seldom over 40 feet wide, which doesn't give the driver much room to spin should he have trouble.

All of these handicaps are overcome on the salt, where there is plenty of room. The actual racing area on the flats measures about 10 by 15 miles. There would be an even larger area if it weren't for the dikes caused by the digging for potash on the beds during the war. [World War I]

Why are the salt beds better, then, than Daytona Beach, Florida, where world racing marks were met until a few years ago? Daytona Beach has a longer straightaway. It is 25 miles long. But Daytona Beach is only 100 to 200 feet wide. That doesn't give much room to spin.

Yet, even though Daytona Beach were wider, it wouldn't offer the safety of the salt. If your tire blows out, the rim of the wheel digs into the comparatively soft sand, and that means your car will likely go into a somersault...Never has a speed car overturned on the salt flats.

Then, too, the concrete-like salt has a cooling effect on tires which is found on no other track. However, because the salt is always a little moist, it does not furnish quite as much traction as does a dry dirt, board, or concrete track."

There is presently concern that the nearby potash operations by the Kaiser Chemical Company are causing a deterioration of the salt flats as a raceway. Two conflicting conclusions were drawn from a study done in 1967. The Division of State Parks and Recreation is planning another geologic survey to investigate ways of preventing further deterioration.

1 Jenkins & Ashton The Salt of the Earth pp. 34-35.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1911

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

William D. Rishel is credited with being the man who discovered the Salt Flats as an ideal speedway. In 1896, George Randolph Hearst had just started his New York Journal and felt it would be an exciting publicity stunt to send a message by bicycle from his San Francisco Examiner to his New York Journal. Rishel, then living in Cheyenne, Wyoming, was hired by Hearst to blaze a bicycle trail from Cheyenne to Truckee, California. Accompanied by his friend, C.A. Emise, Bill Rishel crossed the Salt Flats in twenty-two hours. However, their experience nearly rivaled that of the ill-fated Donner-Reed Party of 1846. In many places their bikes broke through the thin salt crust and they were forced to carry their mud-clogged bikes many miles. In addition, they ran out of drinking water and had to contend with sticky marshes and sweeping clouds of mosquitoes.

Rishel returned to the Salt Flats again in 1907. By this time he had envisioned the possibility of a highway across the flats and the opportunity for some racing. Rishel and two Salt Lake City businessmen, Frank Botterill and Wallace Bransford, started out for the Salt Flats in a four-cylinder Pierce-Arrow. As they neared the salt beds, they saw what they thought was a lake of water covering the flats. Discouraged, they returned to Salt Lake City. A short time later Rishel learned from some of the old timers that they had been fooled by a mirage.

Finally Rishel and his friend, Ferg Johnson, succeeded in driving Johnson's Packard onto the Salt Flats via the railway ties. After driving on the smooth, flat salt beds, Rishel became fully convinced that they would make the world's best speedway.

The following year, 1912, Rishel took A.L. Westgard, National Pathfinder for the National Trails Association, onto the salt flats and convinced the national automobile figure of the area's potential for racing.

Westgard did not fulfill his role as a propagandist for the salt flats and it was up to local enthusiasts to seek other ways of publicizing the salt flats as a speedway.

In 1914, Ernie Morass, who had been barnstorming the country with a fleet of several racing cars, arrived in Utah. His fastest car, the Blitzen Benz, driven by Teddy Tezlaff, had set a world's land speed record for the mile with a 140.87 MPH run at Daytona Beach on April 23, 1913.

(cont.)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ab Jenkins and Wendell J. Ashton, The Salt of the Earth, (The Deseret News Press, Salt Lake City, Utah 1939).
 Paul Clifton, The Fastest Men on Earth, (The John Day Co. New York, 1964).
 George Eyston and W.F. Bradley, Speed on Salt, (B.T. Datsford LTD., London, Great Britain, 1936).
Salt Lake Tribune, October 24, 1971 and August 13, 1973.
The Tooele Bulletin, April 4, 1972.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES							
CORNER	LATITUDE				LONGITUDE			LATITUDE	LONGITUDE			
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	40°	52'	38"	113°	45'	00"						
NE	40°	52'	39"	113°	45'	27"						
SE	40°	44'	34"	113°	55'	28"						
SW	40°	44'	34"	113°	53'	20"						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 31,400

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
 A. Kent Powell, Preservation Historian

ORGANIZATION: Utah State Historical Society DATE: Oct. 23, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:
 603 East South Temple

CITY OR TOWN: Salt Lake City STATE: Utah CODE: 49

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name: Milton L. Heilenmann

Title: State Historic Preservation Officer

Date: October 25, 1973

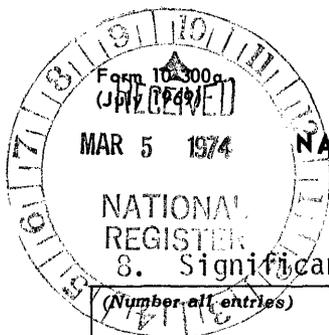
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Acting Jerry A. Rogers
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 12/18/73

ATTEST:
[Signature]
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: _____



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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
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Tooele	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
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W.D. Rishel and other Salt Lake City businessmen arranged for an exhibition of the racing cars. They were able to secure the railroads help hauling the cars to the flats after one hundred railway tickets were sold. According to the stop watches of the timekeepers, Tezlaff pushed the Blitzen-Benz passed its earlier world record speed to 141.73 MPH. To the dismay of local promoters, both the American Automobile Association and the Automobile Club of America refused to acknowledge the new record.

In 1925, to commemorate the completion of 40 miles of highway constructed across the salt desert between Knolls and Wendover, the Salt Lake City Rotary Club planned a special celebration. One of the events was a race between Ab Jenkins, a local racing enthusiast driving a Studebaker, and the special excursion train traveling from Salt Lake City to Wendover for the official ceremony. Jenkins won the race and in so doing became a stalwart convert to the possibilities of the Salt Flats for a speedway.

Ab Jenkins went on to set several records including the crosscountry record from New York to San Francisco, 76 hours in 1927; and the world's stock car record of 82.5 MPH average on a board track at Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1928.

In 1932, Ab returned to Utah to prepare for an attempt at setting the world's 24 hour record on the Salt Flats. Enlisting the help of the Utah State Road Commission to survey the course and some of his Utah friends, including W.D. Rishel of the Utah State Automobile Club and Gus P. Backman of the Chamber of Commerce, Jenkins set out to break the world's record.

The course was marked off with four foot stakes placed every 100 feet and was lighted by 20 small oil flares. In describing the race Jenkins recorded:

...I remained at the wheel the full 24 hours without a relief driver. Though I stopped about 12 times to refill the gas tank, not once did I leave the seat of the car. The machine wasn't equipped with plumbing either!

After I had driven a few hours, I was stone deaf. This, however, did not bother me so much as did other factors. The weather was ideal throughout the run, but the mirages on the salt drove me almost crazy. At night there was a bright moon. Shadows were cast over the sparkling salt. Sometimes they took the form of huge walls. I thought I was steering right into them. I could almost hear the sound of the crash.

On other occasions, the railway tracks on the beds some miles away would teasingly come off and on the course. Every once in a while the locomotive would seem to run across it, directly over my path. There was an airline beacon on a hill about ten miles from the course which seemed to change position everytime I rounded the track.

Yes, the beds were like one big haunted house.¹

¹ Jenkins & Ashton, The Salt of the Earth, p. 41.

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3. Significance (Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

The Pierce-Arrow driven by Jenkins traveled 2,710 miles during the 24 hour period; however, the 112.92 MPH average was not officially recognized because it was not clocked by the American Automobile Association.

The following year officials were on hand when Jenkins, driving the same car over the same course, set a new world's record averaging 117.77 MPH for 24 hours. During this run Jenkins noted that he had no difficulty shaving at 125 MPH.

The record set in 1933 brought glances from the world's leading racers, but still no firm converts. Setting out in 1934, the zealous Jenkins sought to allay all doubts about the future of the Salt Flats as the world's best speedway. Driving a more powerful Pierce-Arrow, Jenkins established a new record with an average of 127.229 MPH for the 24 hour period.

The new world's record, set by Jenkins in 1934, convinced England's three most famous drivers: Sir Malcolm Campbell, Captain George E.T. Eyston, and John Cobb, that they should investigate the Salt Flats and in 1935 they arrived in Utah.

On September 3, 1935, Campbell reached his goal of surpassing the 300 MPH mark with a world record run of 301.13 MPH for the mile and the Bonneville Salt Flats earned international recognition as a raceway.

Since the early efforts of men, like W.D. Rishel, Ab Jenkins, Gus P. Backman, and other Utah businessmen, promoters, and racing enthusiasts, the Bonneville Speedway has become the site of all the major world land speed records. The world's most famous names in racing, including Craig Breedlove, Donald Campbell, Art Arfons, Tom Green, Mickey Thompson, Bobby Summers, and others, have found the Salt Flats to be the most ideal site in the world for their attempts at new speed records.

The significance of the Bonneville Speedway is its importance to the history of automobile racing. Because of the ideal racing conditions, the sport developed more rapidly than other wise possible. In turn, the American automobile industry benefited greatly from the innovations.

Finally, the history of the evolution of the Salt Flats, from its recognized potential by William D. Rishel at the beginning of the century to its international acceptance in 1935, illustrates the conquering of a peculiar western frontier. Because of its isolated location, extreme temperatures, lack of water, boggy mud, and salt flats which hindered access to the racing area, nearly 40 years passed before its potential was universally accepted.



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DATE ENTERED DEC 18 1978

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 2

BONNEVILLE SALT FLATS

Geographical Data has been computed using the UTM Reference System and is as follows:

Acreage of Nominated Property: Approximately 36,650 acres

A	<u>12</u>	<u>270500</u>	<u>4530600</u>	B	<u>12</u>	<u>269800</u>	<u>4513600</u>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	12	252600	4514400	D			