



### Memories of Meteors and Murders

Photos courtesy of the Jenkins Family Collection & LandSpeed Louise



remarked, "He is the man who made competition at Bonneville possible."

Although the first timed event was held on the salt in 1914, it wasn't until 1933 that Jenkins managed to convince the then all-powerful AA Contest Board to sanction record runs at Bonneville and when he convinced Malcolm Campbell to abandon Daytona...well the salt became center stage.

White also includes Marvin Jenkins' envious background. Not only did he grow up with his father's zest for speed, but worked alongside Augie Duesenberg, Ed

eras, the reader is happily absorbed into yesteryear.

White also authored the definitive book *Offenhauser, the Legendary American Racing Engine and the Men Who Built it* in 1996. Best of all, he's a Bonneville record holder who first got the bug when his father took him to see a race in 1939.

The 160 page soft-cover book is crammed full of black and white photos, cutaway drawings, ads and documents (ISBN: 1583881735) from the Jenkins racing career. Available from most retail book sellers, the 8.50w x 11.00h may also be purchased direct from the author (ask for an autographed copy). Send \$32.95 + \$4.95 s&h to: Gordon White Box 129, Hardyville, VA 23070.

I was very pleased that the publishers used my photo on the cover even if

swarm the courtroom and I figured I'd support Mickey's son, Danny Thompson and Mickey's sister, Collene, by having a friendly face among the crush of sensation seekers. I counted five network TV satellite trucks outside with their microwave poles extended way up in the air.

For me, there was nothing sensational about the day, only relief. I had worked with Trudy at Petersen Publishing Company (PPC), when she was at *Hot Rod Magazine*. I was lucky, I got to know the hot rodding kingpin early in my career and recall fondly the many professional kindnesses he showed a fumbling green photojournalist when he was cranking up the off-road racing portion of his profession.

Mickey's events held at the Los Angeles Coliseum are things of legend today. Here mechanical grasshoppers on steroids jump 50 feet into the air and land with amazing grace before instantly throttling up to attack another dirt mogul.

Here is where the sensationalism was, not in some dingy, crowded courtroom. Give me that magic, not the gruesome murder details any day.

I didn't get published much back



It takes just the right time and place to get started on a manuscript. The research part is great fun, but the actual writing can be a daunting step. Little did I realize that moment would arrive for me as I was sitting in the bomb shelter basement of Marv and Noma Jenkins.

I was thrilled to make contact with the son of Ab Jenkins who proved invaluable during the early research stage of my book: "Bonneville: The Fastest Place on Earth". Marv gave me complete access to mountains of historical material, photos and press clippings that inspired me to write - on the spot - nearly an entire chapter of the book.

There was so much salt history that Jenkins had lived and yet so little space for all of it in my book that I was thrilled to discover land speed racer and author Gordon Eliot White had set about organizing the material into his latest book: "Ab & Marvin Jenkins, The Studebaker Connection and the Mormon Meteors."

White points out that Ab Jenkins did not start his motor racing career in earnest until he was 42 years of age - an age when many hot shoes are thinking about retiring. Jenkins chucked his construction business in favor of driving cars fast, for long distances, up hills and on the salt. A great number of his records were set after age 50 with many still intact today!

He remained active and competitive until age 73, when he died of a massive heart attack in 1956, a few months after setting a pile of records in the Pontiac Series 860 that GM executive's renamed "Bonneville" in honor of the many records set.

Jenkins went on to set and break more American and international speed marks there than any man in history. Of Ab Jenkins, Captain George E.T. Eyston

and Bud Windfield. He met Malcolm Campbell, John Cobb and Captain Eyston when he was only 15 and set world records driving the famed Novi Indianapolis race car out on the salt.

Perhaps more astonishing is Marv's painstaking restoration of his dad's mighty Mormon Meteor III. Began in 1991 when he was 71, Jenkins completed not only a cosmetic restoration, but rebuilt the powertrain that included many magnesium parts destroyed over time by disgracefully poor maintenance on the part of the state of Utah. Say what you like, but those Jenkins boys are rock solid stock.

The Studebaker and Pierce-Arrow histories provide insight into how the nation's auto industry worked to inveigle itself into American daily life and how Jenkins' astonishing achievements helped them do it.

White, who also serves as Auto Racing Advisor at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American History, has organized the mostly forgotten racing life of Bonneville's greatest patron and by including actual newspaper clips, ads and record certificates of the respective

my credit line was forgotten. The cover is from the same photo session in 1998 that yielded the photo on page 135 of my Bonneville history book. As a stop-gap, White is pasting stickers with the appropriate credit line into each copy he sells. Thanks Gordon.

The black and white photos printed here are from the Jenkins Family Collection, most of which you will find in White's new book. The color shots are mine.

#### Mickey Thompson Murder Trial

Unlike medicine, or law enforcement where it is imperative to keep a "professional distance", motorsports is populated with alluring people who have a penchant for startling behavior and an abundance of great humor. You can't spend as much time as I do covering the beat and not get attached to some of them.

One expects to attend a funeral now and again, but never a murder trial. Nevertheless, that is precisely what I did on November 6, 2006. Michael Goodwin walked into a Pasadena, California courtroom accused of arranging the murders of land speed racing legend Mickey Thompson and his wife Trudy 18 years prior.

By the time you read this, it will be over, and hopefully, justice will be served once and for all. I was conflicted about why I should attend, but in the end, I knew the media would



then, but Mickey and Trudy always gave me the best press and photo credentials with a premium parking pass to every event. Trust like that inspires one to work harder.

So it was particularly hard for me to sit in that front row as the handsome young prosecutor brimming with quiet confidence laid out the sordid tale with unnerving details of what the District Attorney's office believed had led to that sad day of March 16, 1988.

Danny, dressed in natty suit and designer eyewear, sat front row center. Impeccably dressed Collene and her husband Gary were in the next row back. Repeatedly my eyes closed and fists clenched listening to the DA and then my heart would ache as I looked over at those three. Sitting there had to be silent torture for them.

Drag racing legend Bob Muravez, alias Floyd Lippencott Jr., also sat in the front row with his wife. Mickey had spent time at Muravez's birthday party 48 hours before he and Trudy were gunned down. Muravez was compelled to be there. I understood completely, it was what needed doing.

Oddly, just like a wedding, the folks who supported Goodwin sat on the left side, behind the defense table and the Thompson folks were in the center and on

the right. Most of the witnesses sported gray hair, a testament to how long this case has taken to bring to trial.

Both sides did a good job of presenting their case. Judge Teri Schwartz's no-baloney presiding demeanor gave me confidence that a fair trial was off and running. Did I think Goodwin was guilty? If the prosecution could back up its opening statement with evidence, Goodwin would spend the rest of his life in the gray bar hotel.

An entire generation has grown up in the time it took to get this case to trial. Danny and Collene lost the most at 6:05AM that fateful March morning. It was a day when your life radically changes forever and you have nothing to say about it.

I studied the faces, expressions, and mannerisms of each of the 18 jurors (12 seated and 6 alternates) wondering what resonated within them as the two sides laid out their cases.

I heard three witnesses give their accounts of Goodwin's unvarnished hatred for Thompson, including repeated boastful death threats. That taste of reality made me think myself hijacked by some horrific made-for-television movie.

Hollywood producer John Bilecky, who is making "Gearhead, the documentary" The legend of Mickey Thompson was also there and was visibly troubled by the proceedings. On one hand, the guy had a duty to his investors to craft a feature film that would make money. Some of

them want him to minimize the racing and play up the murders.

Thankfully, Bilecky is already under the Mickey Thompson speed spell; he knew the heart of the story had nothing to

do with lawyers. Never mind he had never met M/T, Bilecky seemed ready to fight to bring Mickey's marvelous racing legacy to life on the silver screen. Let us trust he finds the fortitude not to waver.

"This is compelling stuff," he said after mentioning I had thoughts of attending daily, "My friends warned me about succumbing to 'courtitis' this can get to you." I took heed and didn't go back. **EW**



Note: Photojournalist Louise Ann Noeth is the authoress of the award-winning book, "Bonneville: The Fastest Place on Earth," a complete historical review of the first 50 years of land speed racing now in its 6th printing. For more details and to order, go to: [www.landspeedproductions.biz](http://www.landspeedproductions.biz).



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