Eddie O'Donnell Collection, ca. 1913-1920

1913-1920
Descriptive Summary
Title: Eddie O'Donnell Collection, ca. 1913-1920
Dates: 1913-1920
Collection Number: P-062
Creator/Collector:
Extent: .2 linear feet (Boxes: letter)
Repository: Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County
Abstract: 81 black-and-white photographs of race car driver Eddie O'Donnell, some picturing the Duesenbergs that he drove, and of other race car drivers. ca. 1913 to 1920, undated.
Language of Material: English
Access
Research is by appointment only

Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Eddie O'Donnell Collection, ca. 1913-1920. Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

Biography/Administrative History
Eddie O'Donnell was born in Whitewater, Wisconsin in 1889. He began his track career as a mechanician in 1912 and drove in his first race in Kalamazoo in 1914, taking 2nd place in a 100-mile event. That same year he came in second in the Corona, California road race on a circular boulevard. In 1915 O'Donnell started in ten races and finished in nine, winning 2 firsts, 3 seconds, 2 thirds, and 2 fifths. The following year, he won the Ascot Sweepstakes as well as the Corona and Fresno road races. (The Corona race in April of 1916 is the one in which Bob Burman was fatally injured.) O'Donnell broke his arm in 1917 at Kansas City and didn't compete again until 1919. That year he participated in two races at Sheepshead Bay, New York where he finished fourth in one race and second in another. In 1920 O'Donnell placed fifth in the 250-mile event at Los Angeles, third in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, fifth in the Elgin road race near Chicago, fourth in Uniontown, and second in Fresno, California. (This latter race was a 200-mile race won by Jimmie Murphy.) O'Donnell's last race was on Thanksgiving Day in 1920 where he was killed during the race on the 1¼ Los Angeles speedway at Beverly Hills. The accident also killed Lyall Jolls, O'Donnell's mechanician, and Gaston Chevrolet of the famed Chevrolet brothers.

Scope and Content of Collection
81 black-and-white photographs of race car driver Eddie O'Donnell, some picturing the Duesenbergs that he drove, and of other race car drivers. ca. 1913 to 1920, undated. There are action photos of the races as well as more posed shots of O'Donnell and several other racecar drivers. Photographs of other race car drivers include Ralph DePalma, Jimmie Murphy, Joe Thomas, Eddie Pullen, Eddie Rickenbacker (in World War I uniform), and several unidentified individuals. Most of the photographs are 8 X 10, but some smaller ones are included as well as a few postcards of O'Donnell in his Duesenbergs. The twenty-seven folders in the collection are arranged alphabetically by subject, usually the most identifiable persons in the photograph. Southern California locales associated with some of the pictures are the Los Angeles Speedway, Corona and Santa Monica. Tying a specific photograph to a specific race is difficult if car numbers are used as references because it wasn't until 1924 that car numbers were assigned based upon the driver's standing in the prior year's AAA point total. In the early years, car numbers were assigned anew for each race, sometimes based upon date of entry and sometimes the night before to prevent bootleg programs being printed. Thus, a moderate amount of detective work is necessary to verify drivers, cars, and races.

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