

# *From Big Bend to the Need for Speed: Speed, Phillips*

## *County Kansas*



**Figure 1. Speed became a hustling and bustling town during the festival. Note that people of all ages appear to be enjoying the need for speed. Source: <http://www.boomspeed.com>**



Speed, Kansas is normally a quiet hamlet near the county seat of Philipsburg, but on August, 6 2006, Speed

swerved into the fast lane. Mattel, Inc. brought Hot Wheels to Speed in a celebration of “America’s Need for Speed,” and with it swarmed in nearly 10,000 people to a town with a population of less than 50. The celebration included a parade of classic cars, a beauty pageant, and free Hot Wheels, of course. Over the years Speed has experienced its fair share of excitement and even national spotlight. It is hard to believe the Hot Wheels event, which is arguably the most exciting experience in the town’s history, almost didn’t happen.

Speed was first founded as Big Bend during the Railroad boom. The first settlers arrived in 1874, and a post office was established in 1878, the settlement became known as Big Bend because of the broad curve the Missouri Pacific Railroad’s tracks made nearby. It wasn’t long before the post office was moved from Big Bend, much to the displeasure of the early settlers. At first they took turns making trips for mail, but it wasn’t long before they lobbied to have the post office returned. Although willing to return the post office officials cited a regulation saying they were unable to return a post office to a former location until a period of six months time had elapsed. Not satisfied by the impending wait the settlers rectified the problem by changing the name to Speed. There is far from a consensus on why the name of Speed was chosen, but I venture the idea came from an effort to add humor to the realization that changing the name was the only way to get the post office back quickly. For whatever reason in 1895, Big Bend officially became known as Speed, although the railroad station stayed Big Bend. Speed continued to grow, and in 1928, it became incorporated. Despite this status, Speed began to lose population, in part probably due to the 1939, opening of the oil refinery in nearby Philipsburg, and the jobs that came with it. With Speed’s current population only 37, it might be tempting to say that Speed is running on fumes, but as the Hot Wheels celebration shows, Speed is far from out of gas.

Sources: Kansas State Historical Society. Philipsburg – Philips County Centennial 1872 – 1972. Quick Reference to Kansas. Wheelin’ into Speed, [www.salinajournal.com](http://www.salinajournal.com). 2010 Population Finder, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).