

### **1999 Huset's Speedway Hall of Fame Inductees:**

- *Al Fiedler*
- *Bill Mellenberndt*
- *Arnie Nimmerfroh*
- *Harold Petree*
- *Harry Torgerson*

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### **1999 HUSET'S SPEEDWAY HALL OF FAME**

by Tom Savage

Forty-five years ago Bill Vukovich won the Indianapolis 500-mile race in a front-engined Offenhauser powered 'roadster' designed car. NASCAR was suffering from growing pains and attempting to book more half mile dirt tracks for their new Grand National 'New Car' division. Lee Petty was the hot ticket with the fledging NASCAR group driving a Plymouth. Bob Slater and Bobby Grim were battling for the IMCA 'big car' championship and Duane Carter and Troy Ruttman were the AAA 'big car' hot dogs. Shoppers in Sioux Falls purchased Fenn's Ice Cream at the local Red Owl grocery store, new Fords at the Prather Ford garage on Minnesota Avenue and had 'curb' service at Rickeys Drive Inn on East 10th Street. Out in Brandon, South Dakota, Husets Speedway gave birth to the Sunday race date.

Today Vukovich is just a faded memory of a driver who won back to back Indy 500 milers. The new concept Indianapolis roadster was obsolete by the early 1960's and NASCAR is no longer in search of more speedways. NASCAR, assisted by the sugar-baby of Winston, no longer refers to their sedans as 'New Car' but Winston Cuppers. Lee Petty has watched his son, grandson and now his great grandson, compete with NASCAR but Plymouth is no longer a part of Petty racing. Slater died in a 'big car' crash at Des Moines and Grim, Carter and Ruttman have passed away but not before they witnessed their beloved 'big cars' become caged and winged sprint cars. Fenn's, Red Owl, Prather Ford and Rickeys Drive Inn have all slipped over the horizon of yesterday. Out in Brandon, South Dakota, Husets Speedway is still hosting the Sunday race dates.

Four and a half decades of competition in its purest form, man and his machine against man and his machine, at Husets Speedway merits awe if not reverence.

The Huset Speedway Hall of Fame was started to recognize the people who have played an important part in the history of the 3/8 mile oval. The criteria is very simple. Candidates for induction into the Huset Speedway Hall of Fame must have been at Husets Speedway for at least ONE FULL SEASON as a driver, owner, builder, mechanic, sponsor, official, media representative or a fan. A candidate can not be incarcerated or a convicted felon and must be retired from competition for at least five years. A five-member induction committee,

representing former drivers, owners, media, officials and sponsors, make the final selection of the five inductees each year. Last year, the original induction, the committee sorted through 31 names. This year the list grew to 43 names. Five new inductees will be added for the first ten years and three every year afterward. Names for consideration into the Huset Speedway Hall of Fame should be submitted to Husets Speedway in care of the Hall of Fame.

Last year the charter inductees into the hall of fame were Fred Buckmiller, who promoted the speedway from 1958 until his death in 1981, Marshall Gardner, who was a former track champion and raced in the first Huset event on May 23rd, 1954, Tilman Huset, who built the original 3/8 mile oval in a former soybean field, Jim Matthews, the 1968 Huset supermodified champion and one of the most beloved drivers in Huset history, and Paul Stogsdill, a former top notch stock car racer of the 1950's who won the very first feature event at Huset on that May 23rd, 1954 historic race.

Joining those five men are the second class of inductees into the Huset Speedway Hall of Fame:

#### AL FIEDLER

Al Fiedler was a genuine pioneer in short track early day stock car racing. Al built his first stock car in 1950, a 1937 Ford tudor sedan powered by the mighty Ford Flathead V-8 engine. The Ford Flathead engine was Al's forte and, in addition to building his own engines, he built another 150-200 of the V-8's in the 1950's and early 1960's for other stock car racers. His first driver was Hall of Famer Marshall Gardner and the team made their debut at Pipestone, Minnesota in the spring of 1950. That first trip was a memorable one recalled by Gardner years later. "We drove the race car to the track. Al was driving down highway 77 and I was sitting beside him. The car didn't have a windshield and we pulled up behind a cattle truck and one of the cows decided it was time to relieve herself. It started out as kind of a spray but before long it was a gusher and it all came right through the opening where the windshield used to be. By the time we got to the racetrack, we were both soaked and everybody at Pipestone that day kind of stayed upwind from us". The original sedan had a short life after Gardner flipped it and the remains were gathered with a magnet. Al then started building Ford Coupes and before he blew out his welding torch in the mid 1970's, he constructed 38 of the cars. "We used to run at Pipestone on Sunday afternoons and then hook a tow bar to the car and drive like hell to make it down to Sioux City for Sunday night. They had a little quarter mile dirt track at the Riverside Amusement Park and they would only let the first 100 cars in the pits. We made four trips down there before we finally got there early enough to get in the pits. The first night we got there late they told us we were the 161st car to get in line. That 's how I took the number of 161 for my first few racecars. They used to run a bunch of heats and the first four went to the A, the next four to the B, the next four to the C and the rest went in a Hooligan race. The first night we finally got inside the place, Marshall won the Holligan and we made it on the point sheet and never had any problems getting in there anymore". Fiedler and Gardner raced at Pipestone, Sioux City, Parker, Caseys Speedway in Yankton, Tripp, Kimball, Spencer and Milford and any number of unremembered long gone ovals. Gardner decided he wanted to build his own racecars and left Al with Al's parting

words "I'll help you any way I can". He did and Al remained a close friend and fellow competitor and the two are friends to this day. Al then employed a long list of drivers to manhandle his Ford coupes that included: Buster Moeller, Jack Peterson, Francis 'Pancake' Mach, Jerry Ross, Ed Arends, Marty Jacobs, Howard Allen, Loren Tschetter, Dave Engebretson and Ron Wagameester among others. When Husets Speedway opened on May 23rd, 1954, Al had a Ford coupe with Moeller at the wheel included in the 28 entries. Also in 1954 Al decided to give the driving a try and wheeled one of his Ford coupes to 3 A feature wins at Husets and 1 at the old Soo Speedway. A serious crash in Jackson, Minnesota in 1958 ended his driving career and he returned to his first love of building and tweaking his beloved Ford coupes. He built his last racecar in the late 1970's, a six cylinder modified for Jacobs, and served as an official at Husets until 1988. In addition to building 38 cars of his own he estimated that he helped build another '80 or so' in his tenure as a craftsman car and engine builder. Al is now retired and lives in Sioux Falls and has replaced a ratchet wrench for a fishing pole.

#### BILL MELLENERNDT

Bill Mellenberndt became involved in motorsports with motorcycle racing and drove a racecar for the first time in 1965 at Husets Speedway. At his first Huset race he performed relatively well for a rookie and finished in the top of the order. He coaxed his wife, Maxine, to come out the following Sunday and watch him race at Husets, where he promptly stuck the #77 supermodified into the front chute wall and flipped down the track. "On the way home that night 'Max' didn't think to much of car racing and thought I should give it up", Bill recalled years later. "But I finally convinced her to let me at least finish out the season so everybody wouldn't think I was a chicken". In 1967, he won his first Huset supermodified feature and any thoughts of giving up racing were shoved to the back burner. In addition to running Husets, Bill ventured to Brookings, Madison and the half miler in Jackson, Minnesota in the late sixties and early seventies and the feature wins were starting to come with more frequency at every stop. In 1971, just six years after his first attempt at supermodified racing, Bill hit Big Casino with Big Ron. Armed with the maroon colored #7 supermodified owned and maintained by Ron Tysdal, Bill wheeled the piece to the most lopsided victory margin in the history of Husets. He had the Huset championship title secured by late July and then turned his act loose on the fair circuit. During the three night stand, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, at the 1971 Sioux Empire Fair the Mellenberndt- Tysdal team raised the bar of supermodified supremacy. They entered eight events for the three days and won seven including all three features, two trophy dash runs, two heats and a second in the other heat. They were just getting warmed up and towed to the South Dakota State Fair two weeks later. Bill again dominated the half miler winning his heat, the dash and the feature and they still were not finished. Following the Huron afternoon show, they hotfooted it down the highway to the Saturday night show in Jackson, Minnesota. Bill won his heat, ran second in the dash and again was first over the finish line in the 25-lap feature. The 1971 year was also Bill's first attempt at sprint car racing when he purchased a cageless CAE car in Topeka, Kansas. Outfitted with a bolt-on cage and painted red with '44' on the tail tank, Bill finished an impressive fifth in the 1971 Cheaters Day run on the fairgrounds half miler. In 1974, Tysdal commissioned veteran car builder Bob Trostle to build a supermodified for

Husets competition. The car, the one and ONLY 100-inch wheelbase supermodified ever built by Trostle, was steered to the 1974 supermodified Huset championship by Bill. Bill left the supermodifieds in 1976 to pursue a career in sprint car racing and ran Knoxville weekly and other area tracks. He ran one night in Eagle, Nebraska, where he finished third behind Jan Opperman and Lloyd Beckman and prompted Opperman to later ask, "who the hell is that 'Mellenhead' kid he really runs strong? Bill was in the chase for the 1976 point champion at Knoxville until a late season crash left him on the bench and another Sioux Falls driver, Doug Wolfgang, won the title. Bill ran in competition for the final time in 1981. He is now a businessman in Sioux Falls and watches over his son-in-law Gregg Bakker in weekly Huset action.

### ARNIE NIMMERFROH

Early day modified stock car drivers were a select group of men who were of the mind-set that they could outdrive, outwhip and outbrave anybody any day of the week and twice on Sundays. They raced and lived hard in fender swapping duels on the track and settled differences in pitside fisticuffs when necessary. Into this aura of motorized madness, Arnie Nimmerfroh first drove in competition. He fit right in. Arnie's first race was in Slayton, Minnesota in 1949 driving a 1937 Ford coupe. The car was painted cream and orange and numbered '11'. That same color / number combination was on every one of his cars throughout his career and all of his race cars were Fords powered by the fabled flathead V-8 engine. Arnie ran at every track within towing distance in the early 1950's and a few well beyond. When he didn't win, he made the guy who did win know he had been raced every inch of every lap. His first recorded feature win came at Rock Rapids, Iowa in 1953 but others suggest he won his first feature on the old Sioux Empire Fairgrounds in 1952. Regardless of the date of his first feature win, he amassed an incredible number of wins in the 1950's and 1960's. He also had his share of 'confrontations' and the post-race antics were at times more entertaining than the racing action. Angered at the driving tactics of another driver one night in Jackson, Minnesota, Arnie jumped on the roof of the offenders car and jumped up and down several times smashing roof down to the roll bars. On the 4th of July, 1954, Arnie crashed hard at the old Soo Speedway. He was knocked out in the spill and his limp body was loaded into an ambulance for a quick trip to the hospital. Halfway to the hospital he woke up and told the driver to return to the race track. The driver continued toward the hospital until Arnie finally wrestled the steering wheel away and drove back to the race track in the ambulance. Mel Hagberg, owner of the #32 modified driven by Hall of Famer Jim Matthews, recalled another Arnie episode from long ago at the Madison, SD speedway. "Jim and Arnie got to banging and slamming into each other one night during the feature. When the race was over they got to yelling and shoving at each other and the next I knew they were swinging away. Ya' know both of them guys were put together pretty good with big 'ol muscular arms and they were just wailing on each other. Arnie would Jim and Jim would go down like a shot duck. He'd get up and lay one on Arnie and Arnie would land flat on his back. After a few minutes they just decided to call it a draw and both walked away. The next night at Husets both of them guys really looked tough. Lips were cut and faces had bruises but ya' know they both were working on Arnie's car like nothing had ever happened" Nimmerfroh's hair trigger sensitive temper got him into a lot of scrapes but he was known to

cool off just as suddenly. Still the man who painted 'Widow Maker' on the side of his Orange and Cream colored #11 was an intimidating figure on the speedway. His abrasive and gruff manner was only one side of Arnie and he was the FIRST driver to volunteer to visit the Crippled Children's Hospital and School and often gave his entire purse winnings to a child with a terminal illness at the annual Sertoma Charity event. When Huset Speedway opened on May 23rd, 1954, Arnie finished 8th in the A feature behind Hall of Famer Paul Stogsdill, Leonard Stogsdill, Verdeen Rath, Bucky Wagner, Hall of Famer Marshall Gardner, Joe Volsch and Red Hartford. One week later he won his first of many A features at Huset with Gardner and Paul Stogsdill following. Arnie was the first three time modified champion at Huset winning the titles in 1959-1960-1962. Arnie Nimmerfroh passed away in 1969 from natural causes.

### HAROLD PETREE

Harold Petree drove in his first race in 1951 at Pipestone, Minnesota. He dropped out of that first feature race when he hit a berm and tore off a spindle and in his own words " I was never so glad to get out of a race because I was scared to death out there". Following a stint in the U.S. Army, Harold returned to racing in 1954 driving a 1938 Plymouth tudor sedan. The car was painted GREENER than a gourd and numbered 63 and Harold raced it for the first time on May 23rd, 1954 at the Huset opening show. One week later he ran the first show at the old Soo Speedway on the 31st, of May, 1954. The sedan was quickly wasted in fender bending duels and was replaced by a 1938 Plymouth coupe, with the same color / number combination. In June of 1954, Hall of Famer Til Huset suspended racing at Huset Speedway until lights could be installed for night racing. Huset re-opened on Friday night, July 23, 1954 for night racing. Harold has the distinction of winning the first night race at Huset when he wheeled the Plymouth coupe in for the first heat win. Harold was in and out of a variety of modifieds in the 1950's and scored his first A feature win in a 1940 Ford coupe #99 owned by Lou Charette from Renner. In 1958, Harold, his driving talents firmly in place, teamed with a gentleman named Dewey Dirkson, who had a burning passion for making a six cylinder GMC blow the doors off 'them damn Ford V-S's', and this team etched marks in the record books that took World of Outlaw driver Danny Lasoski to finally eclipse. Armed with a purple #39, 1931 Chevrolet coupe, powered by a 'Dirkson' 292 c.i. GMC horse that belched blue flames three feet long and created whitecaps on nearby Split Rock Creek, Harold went on a winning binge. From 1959 until his retirement in 1965, Harold won an amazing 36 feature events at Huset Speedway. This was accomplished back in the days of no point averages, no time trials and no sandbagging. The high point car started EVERY feature in LAST position. Despite a run during the 1961 season that had Harold score a record seven A features in a row, he still finished a close second in the final point standings to Gil Haugan of Sioux Falls. In 1963, Harold drove the Dirkson creation to the first Huset Championship for either man but the celebration was short-lived. A new rule went into the books for the 1964 season that allowed the newer OHV engines to be nestled under the hoods. The engine rule change was the beginning of the era of the supermodifieds. Fiberglass bodies soon appeared, racing wheels and wide tires were joined by tubular frames and cockpit mounted in-and-out gear boxes. Many thought the days of the flathead V-8 and six cylinder racing engines had passed. Harold and Dewey faced the challenge of all of the new equipment by re-building the

GMC, changing the oil and adding six new spark plugs. Dave Engebretson, at the controls of the Egge brothers #15 OHV Ford, won the Huset Championship that year but Harold had the purple #39 running right up the exhaust stacks most of the year. Dewey joined the parade of the newer supermodified cars for the 1965 season. He welded together a new unit that was lower and narrower. It was painted purple, numbered 39 and for a horse under the hood he opted for ..... a 292 c.i. GMC six cylinder flame thrower. There were no flathead V-8 engines left in the field in 1965 and only a handful of six cylinder engines. But Harold, who would announce his retirement at the end of the season, went on another streak and smoked the newer OHV crowd to win his second Huset Championship. It was a fitting end to a long and colorful career. Harold Petree's last year and the last year a six cylinder car would win a championship title in the supermodified division. He has 37 feature wins notched in his resume second only to Danny Lasoski with 38 in supermodified / sprint wins. Following his retirement from driving, Harold served as the official flagman at Husets until the early 1970's. He served on the induction committee for the first year of the Huset Speedway Hall of Fame to assist in the foundation and growth of the program. Harold is retired and still lives in Sioux Falls.

### HARRY TORGERSON

Harry Torgerson started racing in 1946 driving a midget at Riverside Amusement Park Speedway in Sioux City. He ran against future Indianapolis 500 drivers Lloyd Ruby and Myron Fohr before moving to stock cars in 1949. He ran his first stock car race at the same Riverside track driving a 1937 Ford tudor sedan. He started the hooligan race in 41st position and won. During the 1950 season at River- side he flipped his Ford coupe in his heat. Following a quick repair job of replacing the radiator, two bent wheels and wiring the drivers door shut, he started the D feature in last place and won. He transferred to the C feature and won and started last in the B feature and won. He lined up last in the A feature and amazingly won that race also for one of the more incredible sagas of early day stock car racing. He was still working for the railroad in the early 1950's and his racing adventures sometimes interfered with the timetables of the railroad. He was scheduled to leave Sioux City at 10:30 p.m. on Sunday nights and many nights he wasn't finished racing when the train left town without him. Following the racing, Harry and brother 'Tinsky' would drive down highway 77 to find, and run down, the train so Harry could get aboard. In 1953, Harry and Tinsky built one of the most successful modified stock car racers in history. The black and orange 1940 Ford coupe numbered 33 was entered in 27 events and won 25 of them. "That was one of the best cars I ever drove and we won some big races with it" Harry said. They ran the car at Sioux City, Cherokee, Onawa and Council Bluffs in Iowa, Yankton in South Dakota and Columbus, Nebraska. Two of the hottest stock car racers of the early 1950's were Johnny Beauchamp, who finished second in the first Daytona 500 in 1959, and Tiny Lund, who won the Daytona 500 in 1963. The two Iowa drivers ran a pair of team coupes for Dale Swanson of Omaha and usually finished one-two at the Playland Park Speedway in Council Bluffs. Harry and Tinsky towed the '33' to Playland Park for the 4th of July run in 1953 and defeated the pair. "I'll never forget that night as long as I live. It was as hot as a furnace inside that car and both of those guys were running alongside me the whole race, that was really a big win" Harry recalled. Harry ran Husets for the first time in July of 1954 and finished in sixth place

in the feature driving a '38 Ford coupe, 'the Meadowgrove car', which also had a lot of wins. In the mid 1950's , Harry left the railroad and moved to Sioux Falls to start a trucking business. His racing continued at both Soo and Husets when he drove a car owned by Marshall Gardner. Harry then took some time off from racing to concentrate on his business interests and didn't turn a wheel for several years. But the urge, coupled with a successful business that allowed time to go racing once again, returned and in the mid sixties he built a supermodified for Jackson and Fairmont. He returned to supermodified racing at Husets driving for Harry Pollman and nailed his first supermodified feature win in 1969 with the Pollman #33. At the 1970 Sioux Empire Fair, with Governor Nils Boe in attendance and waiting to present a trophy to the winner, Harry performed a horrifying series of end over end gyrations that had the #33 finally coming to a rest right side up near the wide-eyed Governor. Harry climbed from the wreckage and said to Governor Boe " I didn't think the damn thing was ever going to stop" In 1972, Harry and his crew built their own supermodified and engaged in some classic duels with Hall of Famers Bill Mellenberndt and Jim Matthews. Harry won the '72 supermodified title and repeated the feat in both 1973 and 1975. Harry's last year of competition was in 1976 when he purchased the ex-Barry Kettering Maxwell sprint car and ran it that year at Jackson, Knoxville and Hartford. He became a car owner only in 1977 and had drivers Doug Wolfgang, Roger Larson, Dick Forbrook and Junior Parkinson at the wheel. Harry is fourth in career feature wins in supermodified / sprint features with a total of 34 victories. Now retired and spends his winters in Arizona and summers in Sioux Falls.