

## **ARNIE NIMMERFROH**

Early day modified stock car drivers were a select group of men who were of the mindset that they could outdrive, outwhip and outbrave anybody. They raced, and lived, hard in fenderswapping duels on the track and settled differences in the pits with fists flying, if necessary. Into this aura of motorized madness, Arnie Nimmerfroh fit right in. Nimmerfroh's first race was in Slayton, Minnesota in 1949, driving a 1937 Ford coupe. The car was No. 11, painted cream and orange. 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. Nimmerfroh ran at every track within towing distance in the early 1950s, and a few well beyond. When he didn't win, he made the guy who did 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 1950s and 1960s. 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 several times up and down on the roof of the offender's car, smashing roof down to the roll bars. On the July 4, 1954, Nimmerfroh crashed hard at the old Soo Speedway, just east of Sioux Falls. 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 No. 32 modified driven by Hall of Famer Jim Matthews, recalled another Nimmerfroh 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," Hagberg said. "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 hit 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 Huset's 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 quickly. Still, the man who painted 'Widow Maker' on the side of his Orange and Cream colored No. 11 was an intimidating figure on the speedway. His abrasive and gruff manner was only one side of Nimmerfroh as he was the first driver to volunteer to visit the Crippled Children's Hospital and School in Sioux Falls, and often gave his entire purse winnings to a child with a terminal illness at the annual Sertoma Charity event. When Huset's Speedway opened on May 23, 1954, Nimmerfroh finished eighth in the 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 features at Huset's with Gardner and Paul Stogsdill following. Arnie was the first three time modified champion at Huset's, winning titles in 1959, 1960 and 1962. Nimmerfroh passed away in 1969 from natural causes.