

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. "I was never so glad to get out of a race because I was scared to death out there," Petree later said. Following a stint in the U.S. Army, Petree returned to racing in 1954, driving a 1938 Plymouth tudor sedan. The car was painted a bright green, and numbered 63. Petree raced it for the first time on May 23, 1954 at Huset's Speedway's first race. One week later he ran the first show at the old Soo Speedway, just east of Sioux Falls, on May 31, 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 1954, Hall of Famer Til Huset suspended racing at Huset's Speedway until lights could be installed for night racing. Huset's re-opened on Friday night, July 23, 1954 for night racing. Harold has the distinction of winning the first night race at Huset's when he drove the Plymouth coupe in for the first heat win. Petree was in and out of a variety of modifieds in the 1950s and scored his first feature win in a 1940 Ford coupe, No. 99, owned by Lou Charette from Renner, S.D. In 1958, Petree, with his driving talents firmly in place, teamed with Dewey Dirkson, who had a burning passion for making a six cylinder GMC blow the doors off "them damn Ford V-S's." The duo of Petree and Charette etched marks in the record books at Huset's that took World of Outlaws driver Danny Lasoski to finally eclipse years later. Armed with a purple No. 39, 1931 Chevrolet coupe, powered by a 'Dirkson' 292 cubic inch GMC horsepower engine, Petree went on an incredible winning binge. From 1959 until his retirement in 1965, Petree won an amazing 36 feature events at Huset's Speedway. This was accomplished back in the days of no point averages, no time trials and no sandbagging. The high-point car started the feature in last position, every week. Despite a run during the 1961 season that had Petree score a record seven features in a row, he still finished a close second in the final point standings to Gil Haugan of Sioux Falls. In 1963, Petree drove the Dirkson car to the first Huset's Championship for either man, but the celebration was short-lived. A new rule went into the books for the 1964 season that allowed for the newer OHV engines to be used. 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. Petree and Dirkson 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 No. 15 OHV Ford, won the Huset's Championship that year, but Petree had the purple No. 39 running in second most of the year. Dirkson joined the parade of the newer supermodified cars for the 1965 season. He welded together a new car 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 Petree, 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's Championship. It was a fitting end to a long and colorful career. It was also Petree's last year, and the last year a six cylinder car would win a championship title in the supermodified division. Petree has 37 feature wins notched in his resume. Following his retirement from driving, Petree served as the official flagman at Huset's until the early 1970s. He served on the induction committee for the first year of the Huset's Speedway Hall of Fame to assist in the foundation and growth of the program.