

## TILMAN HUSET

In 1954, Brandon area farmer Tilman Huset found another use for his soybean field near Highway 11 just east of Sioux Falls. The field is now the sight of Badlands Motor Speedway, one of the top sprint car facilities in the country. The track operated as Huset's Speedway from its first year of operation in 1954 until 2016 when it was purchased by Chuck Brennan and the Badlands Entertainment Group. Huset was an early day driver on the old IMCA 'big car' circuit. He started in 1928, in a car powered by a Whippet engine, at Ruskin Park in Forestburg, SD. He competed at the old Renner, SD half mile as well as Owatonna and Jackson in Minnesota, Mason City and Sioux City in Iowa and tracks in Missouri and Kansas. In 1949, the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) started a 'new car' late model stock car class and Huset removed the headlights and strapped the doors shut on the family Ford sedan and competed in the new craze of stock car racing. In 1953, he decided to build a dirt race track and selected the present site because of the hillside and the natural seating he could build among the Cottonwood and Oak trees. Early in the spring of 1954 Huset, along with his son-in-law Gene Gunther, began plowing up the former soybean field into a racing surface. Once the topsoil had been loosened, he began heaping the dirt into a banking with the aid of an old hand-me-down road grader. Satisfied with the degree of banking and overall configuration of the race track, Huset himself began the process of packing the track in his own Studebaker, minimizing the biggest dirt clods. He spent several long days in April of 1954 circling the track. When the first race was held on May 23, 1954 it was a stark, crude facility. There were no guard rails, lights, bleachers, concessions stands or Public Address system. A rented Sunbeam Bakery truck with two speakers mounted on the roof of the 1953 Ford panel truck parked at approximately the same location as the center aisle to the race track gate near the starters stand. That crude operation served as the first public address system at the speedway. The searing heat and uncontrolled dust problems forced Huset to alter his weekly program, and he ran his last Sunday afternoon race on July 4th, 1954. He then announced a suspension in racing until he could install lights for night racing and held the first night race at the track on Friday, July 23. Harold Petree won the first heat that night and became the first driver to win a race at Huset's under the lights. Huset started the 1955 season racing every Friday night, but small crowds and dwindling car counts forced another change in format. He tried Wednesday nights for two weeks with little success, and a Thursday night event on July 14 failed miserably. Huset announced another suspension in racing activity until improvements could be made. He once again mounted a grater and carved a 1/5 mile oval, using the original first and second turns, but started the third turn near the back straightaway pit gate. The turn then cut through

the present day location of the infield concession stand and hooked back to the front chute near today's flag stand. He left the third and fourth turns of the original 3/8-mile track untouched. The first race on the new 1/5-mile track was held on Friday September 2, 1955, and won by Al Fiedler. The rebuilt track still was not the answer, and the last event held on the new configuration was in September. It was the last event promoted by Huset. The track sat idle in 1956 and 1957 and looked like a weed-infested ghost of the past. In 1958, Huset sold the speedway to the Sioux Falls Stock Car Association. The first thing the new owners did was to remove the 1/5-mile circle track to its present original configuration. Although he no longer had any direct connection to the speedway, Huset was a weekly grandstand fan at the Huset's Speedway until his death in November of 1985