

BOB LUKES

Modified stock car racing in the 1950s was motorized madness at best. There were no move over flags, pit stewards or safety crews. It was bump-and-run, slide and stick 'em in the wall and fight your way out of the pits after the races. The drivers of that era were WWII and Korean War veterans, farm boys, back-alley mechanics and all thought they could outdrive, out-whip and outdrink anybody. Bob Lukes was the epitome of the early day stock car drivers. Lukes, along with his brothers Leo, Arnie and Don who formed a four-car team of 1938 Chevrolet coupes, started his career at the old Soo Speedway just east of Sioux Falls on the June 6, 1954. Lukes, who usually ran his own car but did drive for fellow Hall of Famer Mel DeYoung, Don Hood, Joe Clark and Bill Leesch among others, won his first feature race at Huset's in 1955. He won the Huset's modified stock car championship in 1958 (the first year points were kept at the track) after a season-long battle with Hall of Famer Arnie Nimmerfroh. In 1958 he won the South Dakota State Fair Championship on a Sunday afternoon and towed to Huset's for the Sunday night race where he finished second to Nimmerfroh. In September of that year, he won the Spencer, Iowa Fair. He was especially strong on the half-miler tracks, winning the Sioux Empire Fair three years in a row, twice at Huron and four feature wins at Jackson, Minnesota as well as the win at Spencer. He also survived some hellish spills including a 1959 crunch at Huset's. Running behind Hall of Famer Gil Haugan on the last lap, Lukes drifted high off the second turn for a run at Haugan and clipped the wall with his right rear tire. The Chevrolet coupe flipped, bounced and rolled down the back chute coming to rest upside down in front of the pit gate. He walked away from the wreckage but admitted later "hell man, I didn't know where I was until Wednesday". He also rode out a nasty front chute end-over-ender at the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds that left him with some re-arranged ribs. Lukes was a "life is short, let's have fun" guy and definitely a free spirit. He once swept the program at Jackson, Minnesota, winning his heat, the trophy dash and feature and earned over \$400 in cash. Following a stop at the Jackson VFW club and a late night Minnesota steak house, he had to borrow \$20 the next night to get in the Huset's pits. He once towed his 1938 Chevrolet coupe down I-90 and the pickup truck tow rig broke down just east of Mitchell, South Dakota. He unhooked the coupe, tossed in a couple of tires and his tool box and drove the race car down the Interstate to get to Huset's in time for hot laps. Lukes ran in competition for the last time during the 1972 season. He drove the Bill Leesch No. 1 supermodified and drove his final race on the August 9 of that same year, finishing second to Hall of Famer Harry Torgerson. He was truly a pioneer in the early days of Huset's Speedway.