

Gerald 'Red' Hartford

When Til Huset stuck a shovel in the ground in 1953 to start carving a race track out of his soybean field just outside of Brandon, Red Hartford was a wide-eyed 26-year old looking forward to one day making a circuit or two around the $\frac{3}{8}$ mile oval. A year later, he got that shot on May, 23 1954, and raced in the first race at Huset's Speedway in a 1939 Ford coupe. All told, he won five feature events at Huset's. First ballot Hall-of-Famer Paul Stogsdill won that first race, run in the afternoon, under a hot sun, with no grandstands, no wall, no PA system, no concessions, and no restrooms. "I remember it being so dusty," Hartford said. "You couldn't see anything, and there weren't very many cars." Hartford said he doesn't remember if he finished that first race, but he also said it didn't matter. The Stogsdill boys "had it figured out" when they came to Huset's that day with air cleaners in their engines. Hartford said no one else did. That first race at Huset's in 1954 wasn't his first race overall. He started at Casey's Speedway in Yankton before making the trek to Brandon. That first race in Yankton actually wasn't even supposed to happen, but racing luck fell Hartford's way. Hartford had teamed up with Woonsocket native Wally Warner to build a jalopy to race in Yankton. Hartford said it was his responsibility to tow the car to Yankton, and Warner was scheduled to drive. But Warner never showed, and Hartford got in the car and won the first race he ever entered. In those early years, Hartford was known as much for his engine-building prowess as well as his driving ability. He had worked with a number of the early racers to help make their cars more competitive. As time progressed, he honed his overall car-building knowledge to complete the trifecta of racing skills. Engine building, car construction, and a winning driver. Hartford was the complete package. Those first years were also notable for his close and long-time friendship with Jim Matthews. The two were both from Mitchell, S.D., and crisscrossed the countryside in two cars built by Hartford, sometimes running four nights a week, winning consistently. In 1958 Hartford sold his racing inventory to redirect his talents to late model stock cars. He campaigned successfully at tracks in Huron, Miller and other towns in eastern South Dakota. In 1966, the move from Mitchell to Winner created a hiatus from racing. However, in 1969, he started again and had arguably some of his most significant success over the next few years. In the 1970-1971 seasons, Hartford compiled an impressive 49 feature wins at six different tracks. Hartford finally retired from racing in 1972, but his impact of over nearly 20 years of racing in the area was far-reaching as he was an engine and car builder that helped power many drivers in the area. After retiring from racing at age 43, Hartford continued to work as Sales Manager for Miller Brothers Auto in Winner while purchasing a rough lumber business in 1976. He built up the lumber yard and left Miller Brothers to work fulltime to expand the lumber and hardware business, known as Hi-Way Lumber. He also started a hardware and lumber business in Hill City, S.D., along with a grocery store structure in Hill City, known as Krull's. His touch in Winner is evident as he's built over 20 homes in the town, served as a City Councilman, built the UPS facility, and converted an old Main Street building into a mini-mall. He sold Hill City Hardware and Lumber business to his daughter and son-in-law, sold the grocery store to Krull, and sold Hi-Way Lumber. At age 65, Hartford started the Hartford Cabinet Shop for commercial and residential cabinet and display case products. At age 85, he sold his cabinetmaking equipment. The U.S. Marine still lives in Winner and has been married to Alice Jons of Bonesteel for 73 years. The couple have four children, six grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.