

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

JOIE CHITWOOD (SR.)

George Rice Chitwood, better known as Joie Chitwood (Sr.), was born in Denison (Texas) on April 14, 1912. He began his illustrious racing career on June 14, 1935, in Winfield (Kansas) at the age of 23, driving a 'big car' to victory in a heat race and finishing second in the feature event. Although he started out on the smaller and lesser-known tracks because "the associa-

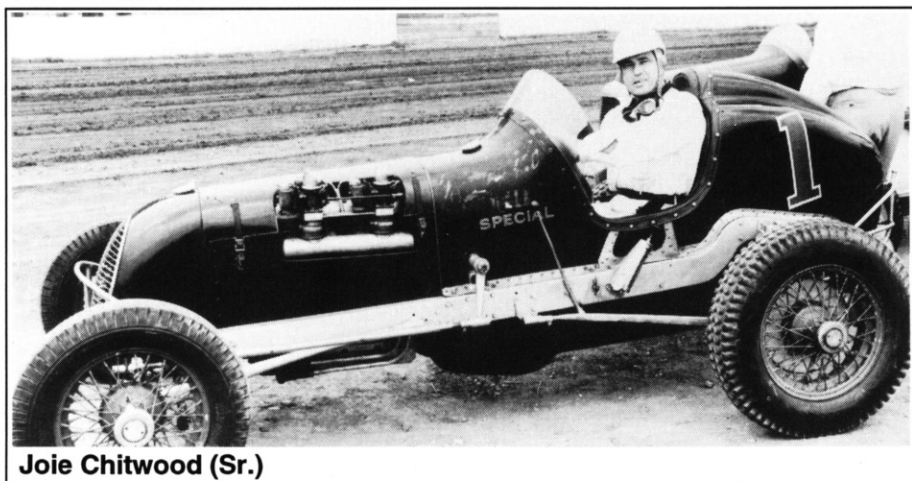
ly. By the year 1939, Joie had headed east to compete in AAA races against some of the greatest drivers of the era. His high-groove driving style, taught by the master Ira Hall, proved a great advantage for Joie against such fierce competitors as Ted Horn, Bill Holland, Tommy Hinnershitz, Mark Light, Bob Sall and Tony Willman. He would claim the AAA East Coast sprint car championship in '39 and again in 1940. That year also

seatbelt out of his dirt track car and installed it in the Indianapolis car. Only after promising Rex Mays and Wilbur Shaw, then the heads of the AAA Drivers Association, that he would release the belt if he thought he was going to crash was Joie allowed to wear it!

In 1942, Chitwood once again was the CSRA sprint car champion, having won 14 consecutive races. The Indy 500 was resumed in 1946 at the end of World War II. Joie would place fifth on three separate occasions in the big race from 1946 through 1950.

Joie Chitwood (Sr.) retired from racing in 1950 to devote considerable energies to managing his renowned auto thrill show. However, the racing world had recognized his achievements many times as he had been selected president of the Champion Spark Plug "100 Mile An Hour Club" at Indianapolis in 1967, inducted into the Eastern Auto Racing Club Old Timers Hall of Fame in 1979, and named recipient of the Walt Ader Memorial Award in 1986.

Joie Chitwood (Sr.) died at age 75 on January 3, 1988, leaving behind a truly great motorsports legacy. In fact, his racing and thrill show exploits have been chronicled in a new biography titled, "Safe At Any Speed: The Great Double Career of Joie Chitwood" by Ed Watson and Jim Russell. The thrill show that bears his name will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a special "Nostalgia Tour" in 1993. Joie's sons Joie (Jr.), Tim and his grandson Joie III continue to run the family business.



Joie Chitwood (Sr.)

tion circuits were too big-time for us", it didn't take Joie long to graduate to the American Automobile Association (AAA), Central States Racing Association (CSRA) and International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) sanctioning bodies. During 1935 and 1936, he competed against the likes of Gus Schrader, Red Campbell, Emory Collins, Buddy Calloway and Ben & Morris Musick.

In 1937 and '38, Joie Chitwood (Sr.) placed second in CSRA points behind champions Everett Saylor of Dayton (Ohio) and Jimmy Wilburn of Los Angeles (Calif.), respective-

ly. marked his debut at the Indianapolis 500, where he drove Paul Weirick's Kennedy Tank Special to a 15th place finish.

In 1941, Joie Chitwood (Sr.) would make racing history by being the first man to wear a seatbelt at the Indy 500, much to the objections of the other drivers who felt it was safer to be thrown from the car in the event of a crash. Chitwood's reason for installing the seatbelt in the Blue Crown Special was not purely for safety, however. Joie had been getting bounced around on the track and couldn't hold his foot on the accelerator, so he got the