

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

JIM HURTUBISE

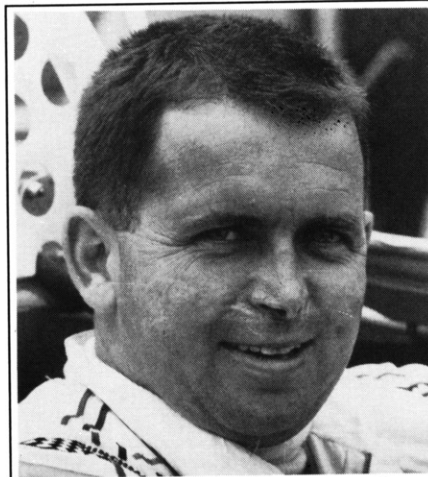
Jim Hurtubise, born on December 5, 1932, grew up in North Tonawanda (N.Y.). He started racing in upstate New York in modified stock cars in 1951 and he later competed in that same division while stationed in Tampa (Fla.) with the U.S. Coast Guard. While in the military, he raced a couple of beach races in Daytona. When he was discharged, he returned to New York where he again raced stock cars.

Jim decided to move to the West Coast where he soon began racing at Ascot Park with the California Racing Association (CRA). In 1957, "Hercules" finished tenth in CRA points. One year later, Hurtubise had moved up to fourth place in the final standings, with friend Parnelli Jones in sixth. Hurtubise also ventured into the Midwest in 1958, finishing fourth in the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) points behind Bobby Grim, Don Carr and Arnie Knepper.

In 1959, he finished tenth in CRA points although his heart was heading eastward (towards Indianapolis) quickly. In IMCA 'big car' competition, "Herk" finished second in points to Pete Folse (Sr.), with Parnelli Jones in fifth. In the autumn of '59 Jim moved up to United States Auto Club (USAC) championship racing at an event in Sacramento (Calif.). The rookie sensation wound up winning that day, beating such name drivers as Don Branson, Eddie Sachs, Rodger Ward and Tony Bettenhausen.

After posting one- and four-lap qualifying records, Hurtubise fin-

ished 18th in the Indianapolis 500 in 1960, which was good enough to clinch "Rookie of the Year" honors. He also began racing USAC sprint cars in '60, finishing third in the Eastern Division (behind Foyt and Branson) and fifth in the Midwestern Division (behind Jones, Branson, Foyt and McCluskey). He was wheeling the Barnett Brothers Sterling Plumbing & Heating Special number 56 sprinter with its Chevy V-8 engine.



Jim Hurtubise (Photographer: John Mahoney)

In 1961, Parnelli Jones, aboard the Fike Plumbing Chevy Special, beat Herk by a slim margin for the USAC national sprint car title. In August, Jim thrilled the Langhorne (Penna.) crowd by winning both ends of the twin 50s. The following year, Jones again won with McCluskey second and Herk third. By the end of the year, Jim Hurtubise had recorded his fourth career Dirt Championship victory, this time in Springfield (Ill.).

In '63, Hurtubise finished fifth in the point chase. It was during the early sixties that Jim was at his peak in terms of excitement. He thrilled the crowds with his wild antics and nar-

row escapes. No where was he more exciting than at the Terre Haute (Ind.) Action Track, one of his favorites and one of his most successful venues.

Herk's luck at narrow escapes ran out in 1964 during a USAC national championship race in Milwaukee. Suddenly, Jim was involved in a horrible crash and he struggled to free himself from the inferno. When it was over, Hurtubise had suffered critical burns to his hands and other parts of his body. He was laid up for months, fighting for his life. His courage and fierce determination to race again brought him through the unbearable recuperative period.

In March of 1965, Jim was again racing on asphalt at Phoenix and he drove to a remarkable fourth place finish. Dirt track racing was harder on Herk's hands and he generally stayed away from the clay surfaces that he loved so much. However, in 1975 he took on the USAC Championship Dirt circuit and was able to finish the year eleventh in points.

In his USAC career, Jim scored a total of 18 sprint car wins and three stock car division victories. However, the New York native's only NASCAR stock car victory came in 1966 at the Atlanta (Ga.) 500. What makes the achievement even greater is that he did it without power steering. Herk later admitted that this one win was the biggest of his career.

Jim Hurtubise is survived by his widow, Jane. They have three children: Karen, Patricia and Andrew.