

## All Business: Lee Petty Turned Modest Operation Into Powerhouse Team

*(Note: This is the first release in a series on the five 2011 inductees into the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, N.C. The induction ceremony is scheduled for May 23. Bobby Allison, Ned Jarrett, Bud Moore, David Pearson and Lee Petty are the inductees. This installment spotlights former driver and owner Lee Petty.)*

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (April 27, 2011) – Lee Petty was single-minded when it came to stock car racing as both driver and owner.

It would be his business – and he would make it a successful one.

Petty, born in 1914, grew up dirt poor in rural North Carolina. He sold biscuits and operated a trucking company, but Petty's overriding passion was automobiles. Gifted as a mechanic – he would tell his wife Elizabeth he was “just improving” cars – perhaps it was pre-ordained that Petty would create a racing dynasty from the humblest of beginnings.

And oh could he drive, although you might not have guessed Petty



would become NASCAR's first three-time premier series champion based on his performance in the organization's 1949 inaugural race in Charlotte, N.C.

Petty, already age 35, borrowed an unsuspecting friend's Buick Roadmaster, enticed by the race's \$6,000 purse. He wound up rolling and demolishing the car when a part broke.

It may have been an expensive lesson but one well-learned.

The thrill of competition, the pre- and post-race camaraderie with friends and fellow competitors and the cheers of the crowd brought many to the sport but not Petty. The only way to survive was to win

and you couldn't win if you didn't finish.

His son, Richard, a seven-time NASCAR premier series champion and member of the NASCAR Hall of Fame's inaugural class, remembers his father saying, “There ain't no second place. You win or you lose. That's the only two parts there are to racing.”

That said, Petty outworked and outraced his rivals bringing his sons Richard and Maurice, the engine building whiz, along for the ride. Petty was not always popular with his rivals – he even spun out his son during one race – and many proclaimed him the most difficult driver to pass during that era.

But all gave Lee Petty his due. “There wasn't anybody better than Lee Petty in his day,” said NASCAR Hall of Fame member Junior Johnson.

Fellow competitor Glen Wood, a NASCAR Hall of Fame nominee, said, “There might have been more colorful drivers but when it came down to winning the race, he had as much as I've ever seen. He was one of the toughest competitors there was at the time.”

As a driver, Petty won 54 races – which is still tied for ninth all-time – beginning in 1949 at Heidelberg Raceway near Pittsburgh. He won on Daytona Beach's famed road-beach course and the inaugural Daytona 500 in a finish that required three days to determine the winner. He won NASCAR premier series championships in 1955 and 1958-59.

But Petty's Hall of Fame driving career was just the opening act at Petty Enterprises. Lee Petty was anything but retired as the owner of what became a flagship for Chrysler Corp. during the 1960s and 1970s and later entered Fords and General Motors cars. Petty Enterprises fielded more than 2,800 entries over a 60-year period, ending in 2008 winning 268 races and 10 championships.

Until Petty's death in 2000, there was no doubt who was at the organization's helm.

“Richard had his job to do and I had mine,” said son Maurice. “And then Lee told us what he wanted us to do and that's what we did.”

