

LARRY MOLZEN

If not for a fire at his garage in LeMars, Iowa in 1969, open wheel racing fans might not have ever heard of Larry Molzen. The two-track Huset's Speedway track champion lost his entire drag racing enterprise at his home in LeMars, forcing him to make a decision.

Fortunately for Huset's Speedway crowds, he chose to go oval racing, and history at the famed race track will forever help to write his story.

Following the fire that gutted Larry's Automotive that housed his dragsters, Molzen bought a stock car from Lloyd Lee, who'd raced it frequently in South Sioux City, Nebraska. When Molzen bought the car, it was painted No. 00. Molzen stayed with that number for his entire racing career.

Ape Hanson and Ralph Peterson drove for Molzen at Collins Field Raceway in LeMars for two years before Molzen got behind the wheel of a six-cylinder car, which were very popular at the time. He and co-owner Marlyn 'Whitey' Renken brought the No. 00 six-cylinder to Huset's with pit crew members Loren Oetken and Jerry Wilmes, and almost immediately won the track championship in 1974.

After the championship, Molzen decided to take it up a notch and bought a supermodified from Hall of Famer Bill Mellenberndt. Two years later, he again took the No. 00 to the top, winning the championship in the track's highest division.

Following his impressive championship run in 1976, Molzen bought a new Trostle-built sprint car for the 1977 season. But a nasty crash at Hartford Speedway in Hartford, South Dakota ended his season, and career.

"My wife had seen enough after that crash, and I knew it was time to quit," said Molzen, who spent two days in a Sioux Falls hospital after the crash.

He still deals in cars and owns Larry's Auto in Merrill where he handles some of the nation's premiere muscle cars, hot rods, Corvettes and classics. He normally has 35-40 classic cars in his inventory and frequently sells to the famed Mecum and Barrett Jackson Auto Auctions.

Molzen and wife Sharon live in Hinton, Iowa and will be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary in August. Molzen's two sons, Tim and Mike, remain in Iowa. Tim Molzen manages Larry's Auto in Merrill and Mike Molzen is a CPA in Iowa City.

ROGER MULDER

Roger Mulder was a pioneer in sprint car racing in the area. When the transition from supermodified cars made the big switch to sprint cars, Mulder was in his heyday, winning several sprint car features in the area.

But it was the fender variety of cars that gave Mulder his most success at Huset's. He won 16 feature events in the Late Model stock car division and was a two-time champion of the class at Huset's in 1971 and 1972.

He grew up in Larchwood and got behind the wheel of his first race car in 1967, driving for Sioux Falls resident Gary Christensen. Christensen fired his driver midway through the season, and he asked Mulder to take over. The car was No. 00, and over the next 16 years until his retirement, all of Mulder's cars carried the familiar number.

With the exception of his brief ride with Christensen, Mulder owned all of cars. He primarily raced at Rapid Speedway in Rock Rapids, Iowa early in his career, but broke through at Huset's in 1971 with his first track title.

Mulder was a constant in sprint car racing in the area in the 1970s. He won feature events, not just in sprint cars, in South Dakota at Huset's, Rapid City, Huron, Hartford, the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds in Sioux Falls, and the old Soo Speedway just east of Sioux Falls, along with Rapid Speedway in Rock Rapids and Jackson Speedway in Minnesota.

In 1978, Mulder towed his sprint car from Larchwood to Rapid City each Friday to race at Black Hills Speedway. He raced in a special bonus championship that competed twice per month, winning the title.

Mulder quit racing regularly following the 1982 season, but made one final appearance after borrowing an engine from fellow Hall of Famer Bill Mellenberndt. Mulder's final race was at the 1983 Cheaters Day race at the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds in a sprint car powered by Mellenberndt.

Although he doesn't attend races very often, the No. 00 Mulder tradition continues at Rapid Speedway as his grandson, Ryan Mulder, competes in the Hobby Stock division. Roger Mulder's brother, Rick, owns the car.

Mulder still works at Mulder and Son, a sandblasting and painting company in north Sioux Falls. When the property was first purchased by Mulder's father in 1967, there was a covered horse barn in the back. The barn was transformed into a racing garage, where Mulder housed the familiar No. 00 for years. The barn is still stands.

Mulder and his wife, Dana, live in Valley Springs.

KENNY HANSEN

Kenny Hansen did everything he could to get his racing career started in 1974. But, he wasn't old enough.

At age 14 in 1974, the Nunda, South Dakota resident tried to race a street stock at Brookings Speedway, but was not allowed because of his age. But the spring of 1975 dawned a new age, and Hansen began tearing up the racing scene for the next 30-plus years.

He won a handful of feature races in a late model and six cylinder car before making the switch to a sprint car in the late 1970s, which is where he had most of his success. He won the 1990 360-sprint car championship at Lake County Speedway in Madison, South Dakota before turning his attention to the bigger, 410-class. He raced for Greg and Harold Krull out of Flandreau, South Dakota for four years before owning his own car for the remainder of his career.

In 1992, Hansen won the 410-sprint car championship at Huset's and was a weekly force in the area throughout the 1990s. He racked up 15 360-sprint car feature wins at Lake County, 12 feature wins in the 410 class at Huset's, and three 360-sprint car wins at both Huset's and Hartford. He also won a NCRA (Northern California Racing Association) feature event at Park Jefferson Speedway near Sioux City, and a pair of 360 features at the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds and in Rapid City.

But it was actually a fifth-place finish that Hansen is most proud of. At the 1992 Knoxville Nationals, Hansen won Saturday night's C Feature after starting on the front row. He started

24th in the B Feature, and finished fifth, just one transfer spot away from making it to the main event at the Nationals.

“Things just came natural for me,” Hansen said. “There were a few years there in the early 90s when we just couldn’t do anything wrong. But there were also years when you could barely step on the gas without getting upside down.”

During his peak, Hansen raced all over the country, but focused much of his attention at Huset’s, Knoxville, Rapid City, Fargo and Jackson. He made trips to Texas and Oklahoma several times.

Hansen got his start in racing at a young age when he witnessed the birth of Brookings Speedway, which is now gone. His grandfather was the flagman, his father and uncle worked at the track, and his mother and aunt spent long hours painting the bleachers.

Hansen’s son, Cody, now races a 360 sprint car at Rock Rapids and Jackson, and Kenny Hansen still works on the car every week. After retiring from racing, Hansen owned 410 sprint cars driven by Micah Schliemann, Wade Nygaard and Chad Meyer.

Hansen and his wife, Chris, live in Nunda where they farm and raise cattle.

MILLARD “SHORTY” RICHMOND

When Harold Petree drove the famous purple No. 39 to the 1963 and 1965 championship at Huset’s, he had a healthy engine under the hood thanks to Shorty Richmond. Richmond was a longtime machinist at L&L Supply in downtown Sioux Falls, and he cranked out some monsters in the mid-1960s.

Richmond partnered with Dewey Dirkson, and the pair put Petree in the car for the pair of championships.

Richmond had a unique ability to take a six-cylinder GMC stock engine and turn it into a racing powerhouse. Several of his racing engines were reconditioned Sioux Area Metro bus engines before the bus line switched to diesel power. Once the GMC motors had served its purpose with the city of Sioux Falls, Richmond bore out the cylinders for more horsepower.

But Richmond was much more than an engine builder. He was efficient in every aspect of the racecar and would serve as a mentor to many in the pit area.

The Watertown native died in 1979 at the age of 59, but his racing legacy continues today. Longtime sprint car driver Don Reiners worked for Richmond at L&L Supply, and Greg Gunderson still drives micro-sprint cars at Huset’s. Gunderson is the grandson of Dirkson, the former co-owner of the cars won by Petree.

MATT RICHARD

Matt Richard tore onto the local racing scene shortly after graduating from high school. The husky former middle linebacker and standout baseball player for the Sioux Falls Lincoln Patriots made a decision to focus his attention on auto racing rather than stick-and-ball sports as a teenager, and the racing scene was never the same.

Richard began racing sprint cars in 1990, and he went on to win three 360-sprint car championships in 1993, 1994 and 1996 at Huset’s. He is one of only two drivers to have won three championships in that class at Huset’s.

He began his career behind the wheel of a go-kart. Richard's father, Maury, owned Maury's Repair Incorporated in Sioux Falls, and the two began building competitive go-kart engines. Richard began racing go-karts at Saddleback Raceway in Renner, South Dakota as a child, and for 11 years, he and his father visited the track on a weekly basis.

In 1986, the Richard duo took the karting competition to a new level and began to attend races around the country.

"We found out pretty quickly how fast we weren't," Richard said. "But when we came back to saddleback, we dominated. They say you're only as fast as your competition, and that was proven by us. We dominated out there in 1986 and 87. Traveling around really made us better."

Richard got his break in sprint car racing in 1988 when he went to work for legendary car builder Brian Schnee at Schnee Chassis. Richard helped build the No. 8D driven by Doug Wolfgang that went on to win a lot of races.

Prior to the 1990 season, Schnee gave Richard a damaged sprint car frame so he could jump into the sprint car fray as a driver. The car was used only once by Wolfgang, but was damage was enough to retire it to Richard.

Although the car was damaged, it wasn't terribly significant, and Richard began his rookie season with solid equipment. His son, A.J., was on the way and budgeting for a child a new race team was difficult, but Richard clearly made it work.

Over the next seven seasons, Richard won the three track championships at Huset's, and 46 360-sprint car features between Huset's, Lake County Speedway in Madison, Wagner, Rock Rapids, Hartford and the Sioux Empire Fair. He also won two 410-sprint car features at Huset's and Rock Rapids. In 1993, he raced a total of 72 nights.

In 1997 at the age of 28, Richard retired from the sport.

"I loved the cushion at Huset's," Richard said. "The higher it got, the more I liked it. It separated the men from the boys. I always told people that if you could be fast at Huset's, you could be fast anywhere in the country. There are a lot of obstacles and you have to be flat-out in shape. The car is like a raging bull that wants to throw you off and you need to control it for 25 laps.

Richard now lives in Mt. Vernon, Washington - just north of Seattle - where he works as a job foreman for Tanco Engineering.