

BILL MELLEBERNDT

Bill Mellenberndt became involved in motorsports with motorcycle racing and drove a racecar for the first time in 1965 at Huset's Speedway. At his first Huset's race he performed relatively well for a rookie and finished in the top of the order. He coaxed his wife, Maxine, to come out the following Sunday and watch him race, where he promptly stuck the #77 supermodified into the front chute wall and flipped down the track. "On the way home that night, 'Max' didn't think too much of car racing and thought I should give it up", Mellenberndt recalled years later. "But I finally convinced her to let me at least finish out the season so everybody wouldn't think I was a chicken." In 1967, he won his first Huset supermodified feature, and any thoughts of giving up racing were shoved to the back burner. In addition to running Huset's, Mellenberndt ventured to Brookings, Madison and Jackson, Minnesota in the late 1960s and early 1970s. That many races started to result in several features victories. In 1971, just six years after his first attempt at supermodified racing, Mellenberndt teamed with Ron Tysdal, and the two had great success in the maroon No. 7. Mellenberndt raced to a Huset's championship title, securing it in late July. He then turned his act loose on the fair circuit. During the three-night stand of Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, at the 1971 Sioux Empire Fair, the Mellenberndt- Tysdal team raised the bar of supermodified supremacy. They entered eight events for the three days and won seven, including all three features, two trophy dash runs, two heats and a second in the other heat. But they were just getting warmed up and towed to the South Dakota State Fair two weeks later. Mellenberndt again dominated the half-mile circuit winning his heat, the dash and the feature. But they still weren't finished. Following the Huron afternoon show, they traveled to the Saturday night show in Jackson, Minnesota. Mellenberndt won his heat, ran second in the trophy dash and again was first over the finish line in the 25-lap feature. The 1971 year was also Mellenberndt's first attempt at sprint car racing when he purchased a cage-less CAE car in Topeka, Kansas. Outfitted with a bolt-on roll cage and painted red with '44' on the tail tank, Mellenberndt finished an impressive fifth in the 1971 Cheaters Day race at the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds. In 1974, Tysdal commissioned veteran car builder Bob Trostle to build a supermodified for Huset's competition. The car was the only 100-inch wheelbase supermodified ever built by Trostle, Mellenberndt drove it to the 1974 supermodified Huset's championship. Mellenberndt left the supermodifieds in 1976 to pursue a career in sprint car racing, and ran Knoxville Raceway, and other area tracks, on a weekly basis. At Eagle, Nebraska, in 1974, Mellenberndt finished third behind Indianapolis 500 veteran Jan Opperman and Lloyd Beckman. "Who the hell is that' Mellenhead' kid?" Opperman said as he got out of the car. "He really runs strong." Mellenberndt was in the chase for the 1976 point championship at Knoxville until a lateseason crash left him on the bench. Another Sioux Falls driver, Doug Wolfgang, won the title. Mellenberndt raced for the final time in 1981 and resides in Sioux Falls.