

ROGER LARSON

Roger Larson started his driving career at Huset's in the early 1960s aboard a 1956 Ford tudor sedan "hobby" stocker. He later carved the fenders off the baby blue No. 104 stock car to compete with the open-wheeled modifieds. He secured a ride in a modified and made his debut at Interlakes Speedway (now Lake County Speedway) near Madison, South Dakota. "I passed a bunch of cars in the first turn on the first lap and I was going to show them how good a driver I was," Larson said years later. "I forgot about the open pit gate on the backstretch and I hit it a ton and flipped and flipped and completely destroyed my first good ride in a half lap." But he got more good rides, and started finishing in the top of the order running against Hall of Famers Jim Matthews, Bill Mellenberndt, Earl Thomas and Harry Torgerson. In 1970 he teamed with Jack Mader, and the blue No. 99 supermodified was the class of the field. Larson won the 1970 supermodified title in the car and also made his first sprint car appearance at Knoxville Raceway in Iowa later that season. "Actually I was scared to death thinking of running at Knoxville," he later said. "I was sure I would be last and the end of the first lap." He actually finished sixth in his first Knoxville feature. He later moved to Solomon, Kansas to start a business, and to be closer to the mainstream of sprint car racing. He ran the old IMCA circuit, the fair dates, open shows and made it back to Knoxville every Saturday night. Hearing of the tough Pennsylvania circuit and three-and-four-nights of racing, Larson moved to Emigh, Pennsylvania and competed at famous race tracks such as Williams Grove, Selingsgrove, Port Royal and Reading, racing against the likes of Jan Opperman, Kenny Weld and Steve Smith. When Opperman vacated the famous Bogar No. 99, Larson ran the car for a spell until a flip during a USAC event at Reading. Larson lost the ride after that. He also drove the Al Hamilton No. 77 before returning back home to South Dakota. In 1976 Larson drove a new Trostle for Dale Hanisch and won the sprint car championships at Jackson, Minnesota, the old Hartford, South Dakota half-mile track as well as features at Fairmont, Minnesota, Rapid City, South Dakota and Knoxville. Larson assembled a new team for the 1979 season and competed with the World of Outlaws, the National Speedway Contest Association and ran both Knoxville and Hartford. In July of that fateful season, Larson lost his life in a crash at Knoxville that also claimed Daryl Dawley. Larson was inducted into the Knoxville Raceway Hall of Fame in 1980.