

MOTOR

MARKET

JANUARY 2021 | THEMOTORMARKET.COM



FLASHBACK'S FINEST

LUCKY NUMBER 6

GETTING TO KNOW LLOYD SCHWEIGERT

REMEMBERING RACER RON

REMEMBERING RACER RUT

Photo Credits: Family, TMc Performance Photos, Dennis Flynn, Jim Christensen, Tom Olsen

WRITTEN BY: TOM OLSEN



Photos from top to bottom: Ron relaxing by his 1957 Chevy station wagon in 1967; The Hairbender makes a pass at Thunder Valley Dragways

When Ron Roddell passed away unexpectedly on September 17th, 2020, many people lost a huge part of their life. Family man, business leader, great friend, and car guy; Ron meant so much to so many people! Ron's wife, Judy, his three children and their families, and Ron's other relatives, of course, suffer the greatest loss and the sympathy of so many of us goes out to them. As it relates to this magazine, I'll reflect on our friend's automotive hobby.

I've known Ron since 1964, long before he was known, to many folks, as "Racer Ron" and/or "Full Throttle Roddel". I met Ron around the time that he sold a nice 1956 Chevy to my good friend, Randy Williams. Ron and his dad, Harley, were also customers at our family business, Olsen Marine and Sporting Goods. But it was that car transaction where I became acquainted with Ron. From that time on, Ron and I were good friends.

Ron started out in the car hobby, as many of us have, with a street driven daily driver. The Chevy that Ron sold to Randy was a car that he and his dad had bought, freshened up a bit, and then "flipped" as we would say today. By 1966, I remember Ron around town in a beautiful, red, 1965 Dodge Polara which was always spotless! Many of us frequented the Barrell Drive-In at that

time, and Ron could normally be found in that Dodge, in the same spot, towards the west side of the lot.

Ron attended his first drag race in Sioux City, as a spectator, back in 1963. He was a fan of the sport from that time on. In 1967, the year Thunder Valley Dragways opened, Ron was a regular attendee. By this time Ron and his good friend, Bob Sherwood, were helping work on some race cars. In 1968, Ron was offered the opportunity to drive Jerry Ryan's 1950 Olds race car when Jerry was drafted into the service. Soon, Ron himself was drafted and he was off serving in the Army (in Korea) until 1970.

By the 1971 drag racing season, Ron and Bob (Sherwood) teamed up in their racing endeavors. This involved one of the more famous race cars to come out of Sioux Falls, "The Hairbender". The two purchased the 1964 Plymouth Savoy lightweight from original owner Gordon Stewart. The Hairbender was a purpose-built race car complete with aluminum body panels, stripped-down interior furnishings, and a 426 cubic inch race hemi. The Roddel and Sherwood team raced the Plymouth in Modified Production for three years learning, among other things, that it was very expensive to race and maintain a hemi-powered car! They eventually sold the Hairbender, a decision Ron regretted for years. (The value of these original hemi-powered race cars skyrocketed some years later.)

Next for the team was a much more economical 283 powered 1964 Chevy II Nova which was raced in Super Stock classes. In 1975, Bob Sherwood accepted a job offer in Alaska and Ron began driving his own race car in 1976. He installed

the drivetrain from the Nova into a 1965 Malibu Super Sport. Ron ran the Malibu successfully from 1976 to 1980, winning the points championship in Super Stock at Thunder Valley in 1976. Next, Ron traded the Malibu to fellow racer, Jerry Ryan, for a 1964 Chevelle station wagon. The Chevelle wagon was raced in Super Stock and Ron, again, achieved good success with this car.

This brings us to 1982. By this time, and for the next many years, Ron's three kids were very involved in high school and college athletics.

Ron was also heavily involved in Auto Body Specialties (ABS), the family business. Ron made the decision to step back from active racing for the next 20 years to better attend to family and business needs. Ron followed the drag racing scene from afar while he thoroughly enjoyed being involved with his kid's activities for those years.

Never having lost the racing bug, by 2003 it was time for Ron to get active in the sport again. That winter, construction of Ron's most recent race car was underway.



Photos from top to bottom: A wheels-up launch by the Hairbender at Empire Dragway, probably 1972; Ron (R) and friend, Denny Graber, watching the races at Thunder Valley Dragway.

The 2002 Pontiac Grand Am was built at Bob Sherwood's shop, largely by Bob's son, Aaron. Tom Dalesio and Gene Bichlmeier were instrumental in the build as well. The car is powered by a 265 cubic inch small black Chevy engine producing over 500 horsepower. It runs in Super Stock Eliminator in the GT/MA class. In the very first national race for the car at Topeka, KS, it won "Best Engineered Car"; quite impressive for a car built by local talent! Since that time, Ron raced the Grand Am at NHRA Division 5 tracks, Midwest Class Racers events, and National events around the country. In the winter months Ron regularly raced in Arizona,

Nevada, and California. As is appropriate, Ron's close friend, Bob Sherwood, now owns the Grand Am and it will continue to be raced.

Ron's automotive interests didn't involve only race cars. Shortly after his return from service in the Army, Ron became the second owner of a nearly new 1969 Chevelle 300 Deluxe. This was an exceptionally rare car being a 2-door sedan model and equipped with the L78, 375hp/396ci engine and a 4-speed transmission. But, as things in the car hobby go, Ron sold the car after a couple years. Nearly 30 years later, in 2000, Ron bought

the car back and had it totally restored. It is now a correct, numbers-matching beauty! Some years later Ron bought and restored a red 1965 Chevelle 300. This Chevelle received a late model Chevrolet "LS" style engine conversion, automatic transmission, and air conditioning, making it a comfortable performance-oriented cruiser. Ron had other cool classic cars over the years, but these are two that really stand out.

So, what was it like to know Ron Roddel?

Travis Gusso, a "next generation" racer, recalls Ron



Photo: In 1976 Ron was the Super Stock Eliminator points champion at Thunder Valley racing his 1965 Chevelle Malibu.

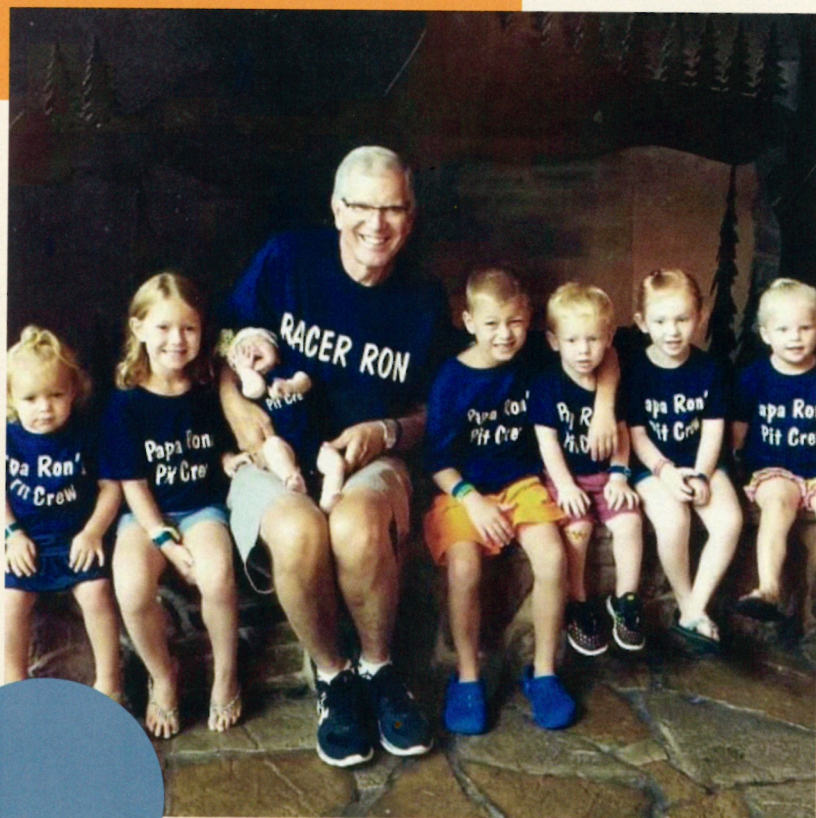


as a performance oriented Super Stock racer that enjoyed "the endless pursuit of the perfect run, and making your combo better". Travis and his twin brother, Trent, met Ron while the Grand Am was being built. They became good friends with Ron and soon were traveling with him to races around the country, each racing their own cars and helping each other out. "For Ron, racing was an equal mix of the people involved, and the love of the sport. Ron was always a gentleman; you couldn't help but like him."

Al Nyhus met Ron through his older cousin, Don Breen, in 1968. Al was just 14 and he and his buddy, Steve Koppien, went to the races with Don and loved hanging out with all the racers. Al recalls Ron as "an older brother figure" to him and Steve... "a good, steady influence and mentor." Later, Al and Ron went to races together and shared two different shops: each helping the other out on car projects. Al recalls that Ron



Photos from top to bottom: The Grand Am off on a good pass at Thunder Valley; Ron (L), Trent and Travis Gusso, and Jeff Cullison at the US Nationals, Indianapolis, IN; Ron's beautiful, and rare, 1969 Chevelle SS396



Photos from top to bottom: Station wagons, such as Ron's 1964 Chevelle, made great race cars. This one is now a cool street cruiser in Sioux Falls; "Racer Ron" with his "Papa Ron" pit crew

focused on family first, as well as business, for many years. He only returned to racing after those priorities were handled. "Ron was honest in business and well thought of wherever he went". Al will be the driver of Ron's former Grand Am next season.

Steve Koppie has many of the same recollections as his friend Al Nyhus, having met Ron around the same time. Steve is another racer that spent countless hours with Ron at the drag strip and working on cars. Steve did much of the re-assembly of Ron's 1969 Chevelle at his shop, Koppie Automotive. He also built the engine for the car. "Ron was well respected, you always felt better about your decision after talking to Ron. Ron was always good about repaying favors of help with help in return."

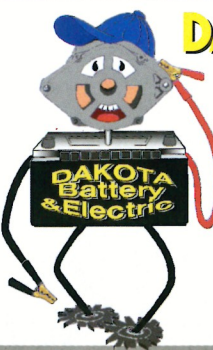
As you've read, Bob Sherwood and Ron were involved together in the car hobby for years. Like others, the terms "sincere, integrity, and steady influence" come to mind for Bob. He recalls many NHRA class records and "Number 1 qualifiers" for Ron.



Photo: Carrying on the tradition in 2021 will be Al Nyhus (L), Bob Sherwood, and Ron's spare engine.

This story wouldn't be complete without mentioning Ron and Bob's involvement in Midwest Class Racers. The two were instrumental in founding the organization in 2008. At the time, local Stock and Super Stock class racers had limited opportunities to go racing; only NHRA Divisional and National events. They saw a need to get more local racers involved in racing again. Early on, Ron and Bob put some of their own money into the organization to get it started. This was an effort to get a decent level of payout money for the competitors. Soon, the two were able to get other sponsors on board. When the organization was formed, there were 25-30 racers involved and they hosted three 2-day events. In 2020 MCR had nearly 250 racers involved and conducted 22 events throughout the midwest. What a success story!

Our friend, Racer Ron, touched many lives and leaves an impressive legacy. The comments above are from just a few friends, but I know the same sentiment would be shared by a host of others. Ron made a positive impression on many people over the years. His presence in automotive circles will certainly be missed.



DAKOTA BATTERY & ELECTRIC

740 Deadwood Ave., Rapid City, SD 57702

Specializing in Rebuilding & Repairing
Alternators, Starters & Generators

Your #1 Source For All Your Battery Needs

Auto, Truck, Commercial, Industrial,
Agriculture, Motorcycle, Deep Cycle,
Golf Cart & AGM Batteries

Phone: 605-348-8631
Thomas Barret: 605-484-3549 • Casey Barret: 605-484-8965



BLAINE WOLLMAN
Co-owner

REX GERBER JR.
Co-owner

1800 Fourth Ave. SW, Watertown, SD 57201
service@dkdieselinjection.com

Phone: 605-886-2750
Toll Free: 1-800-334-1836
Fax: 605-882-0484

Fuel System Specialists & Service Center

www.DKDieselInjection.com



**TUESDAY
JULY 13TH**

**WEDNESDAY
JULY 14TH**

**THURSDAY
JULY 15TH**

**FRIDAY
JULY 16TH**

**SATURDAY
JULY 17TH**

JERRY'S CHEVROLET WELCOME EVENT, Beresford, SD

- Registration
- Merchandise
- Lunch
- Corvette Showroom
- Entertainment
- Vendors

HOT SUMMER NITES, W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds, Sioux Falls, SD

- Show & Shine
- Food Trucks/Beer Garden
- Quick 60 Races

CARAVAN, Sioux Falls, SD, to Spearfish, SD

- Stop for lunch at Al's Oasis

WHITE'S QUEEN CITY MOTORS MIXER

- Registration
- Buffet
- Merchandise
- Entertainment
- 1st Riddle's Diamond Give-away

Autocross

- Showcase for Women
- Photo Session with Your Car
- Arts in the Park Craft Festival

Dream Cruise

- HyVee Poker Run
- Tours
- Entertainment

Drag Races

- Vette Street USA
- Photo Session with Your Car
- Arts in the Park Craft Festival

HyVee Poker Run

- Tours

BREAKFAST / BRUNCH AWARDS BANQUET

- 2nd Riddle's Diamond Give-away
- GRAND FINALE ENTERTAINMENT - Deadwood, SD

OFFICIAL SPONSOR

JERRY'S
CHEVROLET & CORVETTE
BERESFORD

Sioux Falls
Corvette Club

RIDDLE'S
JEWELRY

NORDSTROM'S
AUTOMOTIVE, INC.

Whites
QUEEN CITY
MIXER

HOT SUMMER NITES

Holiday Inn
Sioux Falls, SD

Express Z
copy printing

HyVee

www.blackhillscorvetteclassic.com | info@blackhillscorvetteclassic.com | © Black Hills Corvette Classic
Text HELLO to 605.546.1601 to join our community texting service and stay up-to-date on the BHCC.