

FUL TROT

Daniel de Kort, a former asst. managing director of a local bank in charge of treasury turned petrol head, now runs the non-profit SDDK Motorsports which, among others, seeks to promote Curaçao motorsports to a more sustainable level. Daniel is a former go kart racer with a couple of podium finishes and a professional mountain motor pro stock car owner and driver. Unbeknownst to most, he's the local Curaçao International Raceway track record holder, a FIA-accredited race photographer, a classic car owner and restorer, and a reluctant motorsports event organizer. Daniel will be contributing to Curaçao Sports Weekly with a wide variety of topics regarding motorsports.



Highlight of the 1980s: Curaçao GP (1)

The highlight of motorsports in Curaçao during the 1980s was undoubtedly the 1985 Formula 3000 Grand Prix, organized in downtown Willemstad, a Unesco World Heritage Site. The street circuit, which had its pits at the Waaigat inlet parking, must have been a blast to drive due to the many elevation changes and the picturesque setting. Pole position was naturally claimed by 'wunderkind' Mike Thackwell (Ralt RT20) who was more than a second quicker than Ivan Capelli. But the almost two-hour-long race was eventually won by John Nielsen (Ralt RT20), while Ivan Capelli (March 85B) was placed second and Claudio Langes (March 85B) third.

Like all street circuits around the globe, the first year is always the toughest. The second year, the organizers and stake holders, now with experience under their belts, improve their product. The same thing goes for businesses in and around the area. Entrepreneurs quickly adapt and reap the economic benefits. The third year, everything generally goes exponentially better and people start looking for a hero to erect a statue for. That's how these events go. And what's arguably the most prestigious street race in the world? Yes, the Monaco GP, held since 1929.

On another note, we often fail to realize the pedigree that took the start of our only Grand Prix. Many of them had moved up to the ranks of the Formula One and the 24 Hours of Le Mans, both the pinnacle of their respective branches. Drivers such as (in alphabetical order):

- Ivan Capelli (ITA), with 98 F1 races and three podium finishes
- Johnny Dumfries (UK), British royalty, drove the black and gold liveried JPS Lotus 98T in 1986 and won Le Mans in 1988 with co-drivers Jan Lammers (NED) and Andy Wallace (UK) driving a Silk Cut Jaguar XJR-9LM
- Michel Ferté (FRA), placed second at the 1991 Le Mans with co-drivers Davy Jones (USA) and Raul Boesel (BRA) driving a Silk Cut Jaguar XJR-1
- John Nielsen (DEN), won the 1990 Le Mans with co-drivers Martin Brundle (UK) and Price Cobb (USA) driving a Silk Cut Jaguar XJR-12
- Emanuele Pirro (ITA), competed in F1 from 1989-1991, and won Le Mans a staggering 5 times driving an Audi R8
- Gabriele Tarquini (ITA), competed in 38 F1 races but had more success in touring cars, winning the 1994 British Touring Car Championship driving an Alfa Corse
- Mike Thackwell (NZ), an F1 driver between 1980-1984, but better known as a 'maverick' and 'something of a cult hero'. He won the 1986 1000 km of Nürburgring with Henri Pescarolo driving a Sauber C8

Another notable fact about this one-off race was that Eddie Jordan's F3000 team achieved a podium result with Claudio Langes (P3). Irvine was the founder and owner of Formula One Team Jordan, which operated from 1991 to 2005. Michael Schumacher debuted in an F1 driving a Jordan-Ford in 1991.

The first Curaçao GP was supposed to be a stepping-stone to the higher ranks of the FIA, namely Formula One. And though a second Curaçao GP was scheduled as part of the 1986 International Formula 3000 Championship, it was later dropped from the race calendar. Substantial track improvements were needed to satisfy safety requirements. Unfortunately, exceptional cost overruns combined with a lack of understanding and political will sealed the fate of our GP. If it had been supported consistently, today our little island might have joined the ranks of countries having F1 street races, which include countries such as Monaco, Singapore, Russia, Canada and possibly even the USA (Miami). The Curaçao Motorsports Museum is curating an exhibit of this race. Should you have an item pertaining to it, please get in touch with us.

Next week: Curaçao GP (2)

