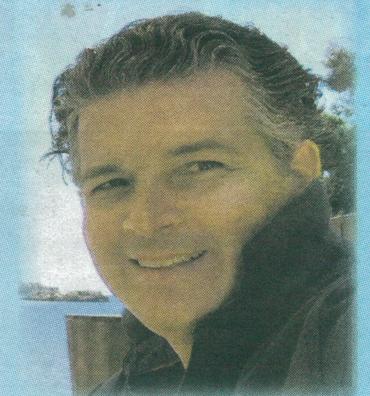


# FÜLIRUTT

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 Curacao 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 Curacao 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 (2)

### Curaçao GP, the story of polesitter Mike Thackwell

From all of the drivers who competed in the 1985 Formula 3000 Grand Prix in Curaçao, one stands out heads above the rest, Mike Thackwell. Not for what he accomplished on the track, but just for what he left unaccomplished. Before taking the start of the Curaçao race, he had already entered in 5 Formula One races. And in that period, he was the youngest driver to ever start a Formula One race. His team manager James Weaver tipped him to be the Ayrton Senna of his day.

However, top-line Formula One seats somehow eluded the blue-eyed New Zealander, even though he deserved and eventually would get one. His ascension through the ranks of Formula Ford, F3 and F2 was nothing but meteoric, only to fade out during the 1985 Formula 3000 title, which he should have won but somehow lacked the motivation. Though he continued for a while longer with sports cars such as Mercedes and Jaguar, at the age of 26 he simply walked away.

How fast was he? At the age of eighteen (1979) Thackwell was instantly a front-runner in the Vandervell British F3 Championship with five wins in a works March 793, ahead of the likes of Sir Nigel Mansell (1992 F1 World Champion) and "the professor" Alain



Prost (4-time F1 World Champion).

When Jochen Mass (DE) got injured, Thackwell stood in for him at 1980

Dutch GP at Zandvoort with Arrows. "That was tough," he recalls, during an interview for Motor-sport Magazine. "I'd never sat in the car before practice and the ground effects, with those skirts, made it so heavy to drive. My neck was all over the place and I struggled to hang on to it through the long right-hander on to the straight. But I loved that run down and into Tarzan, a great corner, and we only just failed to make the grid."

In a later interview he recounts, "You know, it was so easy for me, right from when I started racing bikes and karts in Australia. I'm not being arrogant, but the speed came

so easily. I had no fear, none of it was difficult for me, and I learnt how to race in karts." When Mike moved to England to give Formula Ford a try, things initially went very well. But soon enough, he entered the realm of sponsorships and championship points, and all the fun of racing seemed to fade away, unfortunately. In hindsight, he thinks he might have been too young and should have followed the advice from some of the older and wiser champions.

And though he kept getting better rides with brilliant drives, the results stayed away, due to too many retirements. At the end of 1987, he simply

walked away from racing. He'd had enough. Or simply realized that Formula One just wasn't in his future. So little integrity, so little appreciation of the privileges. Way too corporate.

Unfortunately, Mike Thackwell's Formula 3000 race in Curaçao was just more of the same. Pole position by the widest of margins, only to have to retire due to an electronics failure. However, we got a glimpse of his enigmatic personality as he gladly took the time before the race to take a picture with Gerardo de Kort (9 years old, at the time). It seems Thackwell was "post corporate" long before the term was coined.

