

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 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 Curacao Sports Weekly with a wide variety of topics regarding motorsports.



Large crowds in motorsports

Most of us may recall one of the first motorsport events in Curaçao drawing large crowds: the 'Dia di La Reina' drag races at Koraal Tabak. Some estimates had the spectator count at more than 10,000, and this was back in the 1970's. What many don't know, however, is that there was an earlier motorized event that attracted huge crowds as well, though not specifically for drag racing.

Back in the late 1960's there was a very popular series of entertainment events called 'Waterfestival'. The events consisted of various parts, so as to keep things 'fresh'. One event, held on Sunday, July 2, 1967, is of particular interest.

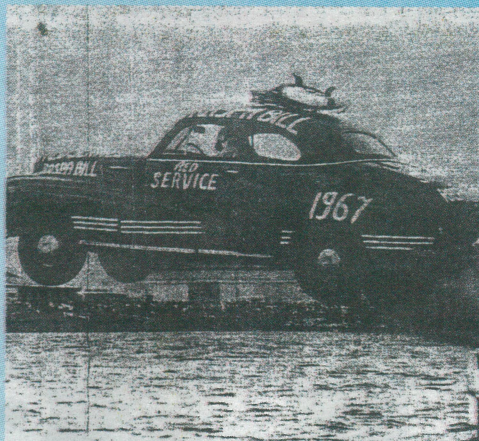
Shon Benchí, a well-known figure, acting as master of ceremony, along with Franki kept the crowds, numbering well into the thousands, entertained with jokes and anecdotes. A well-thought-out program had the spectators spellbound with awe inspiring stunts using motorcycles and cars. Acts which many had never seen before and were most likely inspired by Evel Knievel's stunt shows, which started in 1966.

Hailed by the media as the 'hero of the day', Pappy Martínez stole the show that Sunday with his dangerous but spectacular main feature stunt. It called for Pappy to drive a 1947 Chevrolet Fleetwood at high speed onto a wooden ramp, fly into the air and crash into the waters of Nieuwe Haven. So, at the drop of the proverbial flag, Pappy sped off and hit the ramp going some 80 km an hour, somersaulted a couple of times and crashed hard into the water. After what must have felt like an eternity, spectators watched in awe as Pappy surfaced a couple of moments later, shaken but unharmed.

"As I hit the ramp, the car went flying into the air and completed a couple of somersaults. Hitting the water felt like hitting a brick wall. I didn't expect things to happen so fast, and before I knew it, I was still strapped in the car as it hit bottom. Through sheer mental toughness, I managed to contain my fear, released the safety belt and got out of the car. As I started making my way back to the surface, about midway I encountered a couple of divers on their way down", recalled an exuberant Pappy Martínez to a reporter.



Shon Benchí interviewing Pappy Martínez.



The early model Chevrolet is seen leaving the ramp with Pappy behind the wheel. Notice the life buoy affixed atop the roof.



Shon Benchí (center) explaining about the Waterfestival he used to organize to museum attendees.

It's worthwhile mentioning that it was during this Waterfestival event that the very first drag race in Curaçao took place. It was described by the media as a well-organized competition between sports cars and motorbikes that was well received by all, and which, back then, called for a round of applause.

Earlier this year, while Shon Benchí, the organizer of the Waterfestival, was in attendance at the inauguration of the Motorsports Museum, he shared some of the amazing stories and anecdotes of that by gone era.