

# 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 Curaçao Sports Weekly with a wide variety of topics regarding motorsports.

## Drag racing

The sport of drag racing has been practiced here for some four decades, though occasionally with intervals of inactivity. Unfortunately, we've just gone through one of those. However, there's light at the end of the tunnel for the Curaçao International Raceway has a new track operator, and pretty soon drag racing action will resume.

Drag racing is arguably one of the most expensive sports in Curaçao. Consequently, in an economic downturn it takes a great deal of effort by all stakeholders to keep it going with any degree of continuity. There have been many race organizers over the last couple of years, but one thing has never changed: the level of professionalism and competition.

I for one value history. And it is in this context that it's worthwhile revisiting the accomplishments of the last track operator, Curaçao Extreme Foundation. Led by Dan de Freitas, born from Portuguese and Lebanese parents, Dan started drag racing in 1986 campaigning a Marlboro sponsored VW bug. In 1992 he relinquished driving duties and assumed other race related functions.

A couple years ago Dan and his team were asked by the track owner to organize the local points series, called 'Ronde Klip Shootout', which consists of about six one-day races a year. After having done this successfully for some time, in 2015 they were asked to take over the big races as well, which led to them becoming the track's operator until 2018.



Curaçao Extreme Foundation started with a big race right of the bat, a three-day race in early December 2015. And with each race event under the belt, the team gained more experience and renewed optimism. Moreover, they continued making upgrades to the track's facilities. De Freitas recalls: "Our highlight surely was the 'Dia di La Reina' Drag Fest of April 2018 for the following reasons: the professionalism of the organization, the line-up of cars, including those which came

from abroad, was extremely strong, and the fact that everything went without a hitch".

All in all, Dan and his team have organized some seven large multiple day drag races and about thirty one day races, which is no small feat. Their total spectator count varied between 400 and 5000, which is also commendable in a society that's high on instant gratification promulgated by the rise of social media. And all of this without any major accidents, which can be attributed to the excellent job of the track's technical inspection and safety safari.

In retrospect, de Freitas sums up the experience as a track operator as: 'strengthening the view that it's impossible please everyone'. And this poses a big problem for the racing community as people are quick to subscribe to the notion that if you don't side with them, you must be against them. But nothing could be further from the truth. Occasionally, the track operator or race organizer must make hard choices stemming from macro issues, such as lack of economies of scale. It is for this reason, we must always focus on that which we have in common, instead of only focusing on what we don't.

As we head into a new era, the drag racing community is eager to get back to what it does best; which is to compete. And though there will be a new host of challenges to resolve, such as bracket racing vs. heads up, a 1/4 mile vs 1/8 mile racing, or whether to use traction compound or not, it's up to all of us to make it happen. Naturally, the purists will prefer the quarter mile, but should we go one eighth-mile racing, embrace it and try to excel at it. Put one's personal differences aside. It's worth restating that we should always focus not on what divides us, rather on what unites us. And we all love drag racing. Since the early 1970's!

