

ABC'S OF MUSTANGS



Aruba, Beaches, and Cool Y

Text by Francis Butler and Mark Travis
Photos by F. C. Butler Photography, Inc.

Don't panic, breathe slowly, and relax. You are not delusional or experiencing auditory or visual hallucinations. The pilot of your plane or the captain of your cruise ship did not make a mistake in your destination. You are safe and secure on this lovely island known as Aruba. The fleet of muscle cars that you see, particularly the Mustangs are not a mirage but are cars actually owned by the islanders.

Surprised and puzzled are you? Perhaps it is because you may be visiting this magnificent island for the very first time. Many people know or may have heard that this living tropical paradise is most noted for its friendly islanders, pristine beaches, and ideal weather conditions. What a place to be when you

think about the snow drifts, hazardous weather conditions, and the hours of dreadful commuting to and from work.

As you meditate on this graphic scenery, here is a little geographic perspective of this southern Caribbean island. Aruba lies 15 miles north of Venezuela and is approximately two-and-a half hours by air from Miami, Florida. The island is 19.6 miles long and six miles wide, with a total area of 70 square-miles.

This spot called Aruba is not just the envy of the Caribbean Islands but perhaps the world with its beautiful weather conditions and cooling prevailing trade winds. The average air temperature is 87 degrees. Aruba's trade winds blow from the Northeast. The wind blows at an average speed average of 17 miles an hour. The temperature entices you to a stroll on the beach or a splash into their breathtaking waters. Another great way

to spend a family day is at the De Palm Island Water Park, which is accessible by a short ferry ride. The De Palm company has several choices of outings including an Island bus tour.

Aruba is fortunate in that its ideal location places it outside of the hurricane belt, dramatically reducing the probability of a direct hurricane hit. The average rainfall is only 16 inches. To the islanders and tourist, this means an abundance of sunshine, cool prevailing winds, evening strolls, outside dining, sightseeing, and a little shopping activity. Are you getting the picture?

As alluded to earlier in this article, big fun for the islanders of this exquisite island is auto racing. Arubans love their cars and the faster the better. Under the hood of these muscle cars brings family, friends and neighbors closer together. Just the thought of mandated mass conversion of muscle cars to electric



Mustangs

cars would probably provoke a friendly populace to mass demonstration and protest.

Working on cars to obtain the perfect pitch is not just a weekend hobby but a way of life. It is embedded in every fiber of the people on the island. While soccer is still number one by many on this island, drag racing in Aruba is not far behind. No doubt, drag racing is a big dog that left the porch.

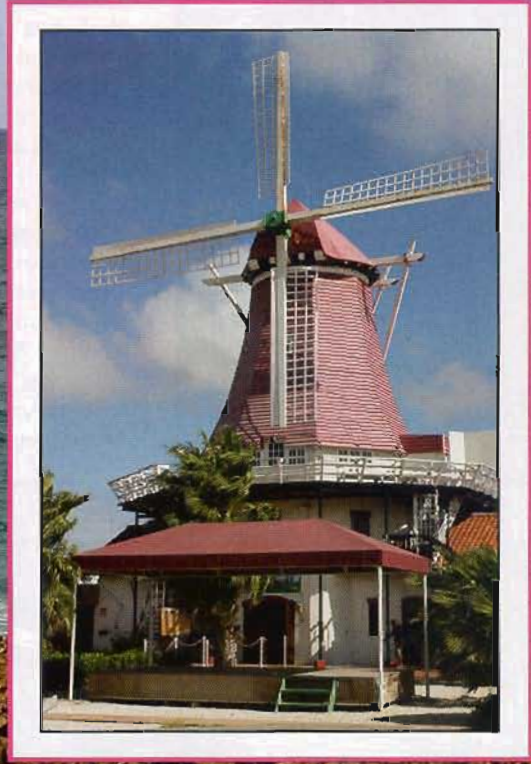
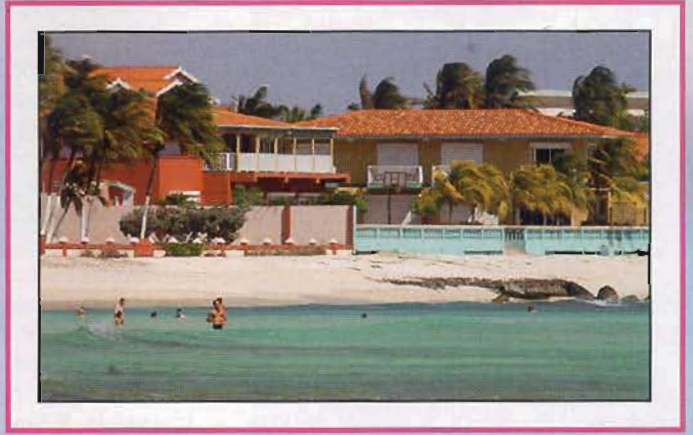
One well known spot on this island that is known for great hospitality, leisure atmosphere and patron's love and knowledge of cars is the Urataka Center. You will have no difficulty in finding this popular eatery. It sits in the middle of the island located in Santa Cruz. It is very accessible. If you happened to get lost, don't fret, a friendly islander will quickly point you to a bright yellow tavern that has a wrap-around porch with small brown bowling pin like columns. Interesting to note, the Urataka Center was once a rum shop. Along the interior wall is a show of model cars with many of them being vintage mustangs. For the modern art lover or creative car designer several display cars were created from nothing more than Ocean spray bottles, plastic washing machine soap containers and 32 ounce bottles of soda cut out and used as big wheels. Behind the bar are two over head television screens with one providing sporting updates and the other fixed on a drag racing channel.

The Urataka Center is owned and operated by Doque Croeze who is also one of the three original founders of the Mustang Club of Aruba. The other two original founders are Eric De Cuba and Mark Kelly. Croeze, also a former President of the MCA states, he, De Cuba, and Kelly all own and love their Mustangs. De Cuba is also one of several members of the Mustang Club of America from Aruba. We knew there were other people on the island who had a fondness for this vehicle and a passion for drag racing. From meetings and conversations they had with each other, De Cuba decided it would be a good idea to send letters out to inform Mustang lovers that a Mustang Club of Aruba was being formed. The MCA was officially formed on August 24, 1997. According to Croeze, members of the MCA still gather at the Urataka Center at least bimonthly for comradeship, special occasions and discussions on drag racing. Need you ask, a focal point of discussion will always center upon the Mustang.

According to current MCA President, Roland Thysen, there are a total of 50 members with at least 30 active members. Thysen who has owned his 1990 green metallic Mustang for seven years has since converted his 4-cylinder engine to a 306 cubic inch V8 engine. He states that while food, fun, comradeship, and family gatherings will always be important to the MCA, there are other



ARUBA AT A GLANCE







things that are important to the club as well.

For one, he and other MCA members are very supportive of the International Raceway Park Palomarga Aruba. The MCA is very concerned with the safety of all drivers with particular interest upon the young race car driver. Thysen stressed the importance of young drivers being able to race their cars on a safe track like the International Raceway Park Palomarga Aruba, rather than on the streets where serious injuries and fatalities are most likely to occur. Secondly, he would like to increase the membership of the MCA. Thirdly, MCA is working toward obtaining small storage space in order that the club member can showcase their cars to the public.

The current MCA president adds that the club is busy trying to conduct fundraisers to help defray costs to its members who are actively involved in the racing aspect of the sport. Thysen adds, "... most of the drivers who race their cars pay out of pocket from having no sponsors or only a few small sponsorships." Thysen states that the MCA is approaching their 15 year anniversary come August 24, 2012. Donations collected from fundraisers

will help towards making this event a pleasant and successful one.

In April of 2009, he along with four other MCA members visited the Mustang Club of America in Birmingham, Alabama. Thysen states that the MCA had an awesome time and he would like for other members to be able to share the experience. Fundraisers can help other members share in the experience. Additionally, the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Mustang is slated in April of 2014. While a place has yet to be determined, he and other members of the MCA hope to well-represent Aruba.

Youngest MCA member Dario Wilson, 23, is already looking forward to celebrating the MCA 15th anniversary. He adds that he's going to make every effort to attend the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Mustang in America.

Wilson, who drives a 2000 Mustang V6 blend, which he describes as a cross of red and black, hopes one day to become a race car driver. He like so many Arubans acquired his love for cars from his parents. He states that his father owned a Mustang and his mother owned a Cobra. "Drag racing is in my blood. Your dad has it and your sons will have it as well," Wilson adds. "When I drive my

Mustang I have a sense of freedom."

MCA member, Oslin Henricus is also looking forward to attending the Mustang's 50th Anniversary. Henricus, who drives a green 1991 Mustang GT, will playfully and proudly tell you that everything under his hood is chrome and polished and his Mack wheels are pimping. He adds that his Mustang has a reinforced chassis so it won't bend or twist. He smiles when he tells you that his engine is turbo charged. "I loved cars when I was a child and I still love them now. Mustang cars are pure power," he says.

MCA member and proud owner of a white and black stripe Shelby Super Snake, Rodney Geerman states his love of cars began when he was 5 years old. "I recall when my uncle would take me around to watch cars drag race." He smiles and adds, "now my little daughter drives around in a battery-powered Mustang car." And so it is, the tradition of Arubans and their fast cars will continue to pass from generation to generation.

If you want to take a break from the sport updates and the drag racing on TV provided by the Urataka Center, it would behoove you to visit some of the fine restaurants on this island.



continued from page 44

One such restaurant is the Old Man and the Sea. It is a perfect, quiet romantic spot to enjoy one another's company while dining on fine cuisine. As you bite into a grill salmon, you can do so under a planetarium of stars. Your table is sturdy and set upon a pristine beach as you gaze upon the beautiful Caribbean Sea just yards away from your table. Refreshing breeze of trade winds stimulate the air as you lose yourself in the delicious food and good company.

If you love music and good eating, don't fret. You don't have to settle for one or the other. Dinner at the Moomba is a restaurant that will whet your fancy. As you enjoy each morsel of fine cuisine, you'll find yourself tapping your feet to the live music as you watch a beautiful sun set.

For beef lovers, but not limited to just beef, it would be a disservice not to mention the sizzling steaks and sautéed mushrooms at the El Gaucho. If there were no restrictions upon copy, perhaps I could provide you with a list of restaurants to test your taste buds, but as a cuisine lover, it would be remiss if I did not include a couple other restaurants before ending my story. The Old Fisherman and the Amazing International Cuisine are can't miss restaurants. Not only was the food exquisite but their hospitality was splendid as well.

Suppose you can't decide on whether to eat out, bask in the sun, exercise or enjoy a nice alcoholic beverage. Well

who said you had to pick one over the other. If you choose the Mi Dushi you can enjoy it all. One minute you can be basking in the sun on deck and a minute later swinging on a rope diving into turquoise water. Maybe you decide instead to go snorkeling. Thirsty, don't worry, relax, because the bartender can stir up and shake up a mean mixed drink. No canned sardines or brown paper bags on this ship. The Mi Dushi really goes out their way to ensure that the meal that has been prepared for you satisfies your palate. What a pleasant surprise. I had resigned myself to munching on a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Now back in my hotel at The Mill Resort and Suites I had the opportunity to absorb the experience in solitude as I prepared to leave this beautiful tropical island for the states. The pictures on the island are forever embedded in my mind along with friendliest and most beautiful people I have met in my lifetime. The people of the island appear to be gracious and genuine regardless of race, color, creed or nationality. These are lessons which other countries could hopefully embrace.

I am eternally grateful to Race Promoter Frans Ponson, Minister of Tourism, H.E. Otmar Oduber, Theo de Jongh from the ATA and future Hall of Fame racing car photo journalist, Francis Butler for the opportunity to be part of the media coverage.

What makes the International

Raceway Park Palomarga Aruba uniquely different than other race tracks and is that difference sufficient enough to attract the novice and long-time track enthusiast.

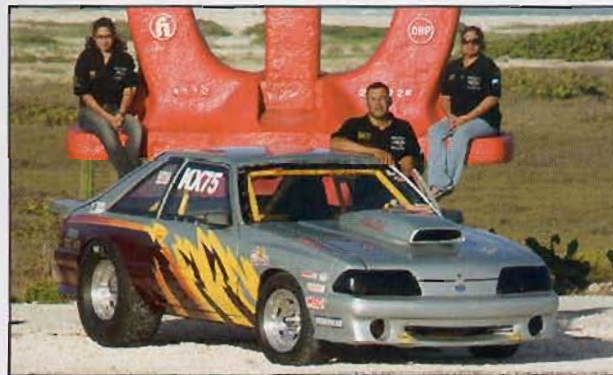
The simple answer would be to say that the Aruba race track is the only certified quarter-mile track in town and thus options are limited. In other words, it would be the equivalent of a "take it or leave it attitude." Sometimes things are not always as they seem.

Almost immediately you can sense something different about this race track. On the surface there appears to be a partnership between community and race track officials, with each other's survival contingent upon the other. Drag racers can speed down the track in a safe environment and the community helps keep the race track afloat by filling the stands.

Jeffery Rey, who is a Mustang Club of Aruba member, stressed the importance of this race track for the younger race car drivers. Before this track, younger drivers would race their cars on the streets, which always had the potential of ending in disaster. He says the race track has a racing program called, "street legal," which occurs every Friday and Saturday and is quite popular among the young race car drivers. Rey states the driver is required to have a valid driver's license and a certified inspection that meets track requirements. Once the car clears safety inspection, the driver is given an official track number. According to Rey,



▲ Aruban, ex pro stock driver, Andre Loonstra dazzles the crowd with wheels up on his Fox Body blue Mustang at the International Racing Park Palomarga, Aruba.



▲ The only way to slow down Keldrick Holman and his Mustang is by anchor but easier said than done.

the track is well up-to-date.

Ryan De Mei of Boss Racing Foundation says while Aruba is a small island, the island has a great racing facility. He adds that the island has skilled race car drivers, which makes for competitive races coupled with a good track and good weather conditions all year round.

Roland Thysen, President of the Mustang Club of Aruba, stressed how glad he is to have a race track in Aruba. He also stressed that the race track will save lives because young race car drivers now have a place where they can legitimately race.

Economically, Thysen contends that because Aruba did not have a race track of its own before, race car drivers in order to compete raced on the streets or outside of Aruba. Thysen says that drivers in the past had to ship their race cars over to various islands to compete which needless to say can be very expensive. Thysen smiles and says that the International Raceway Park Palomarga Aruba "is a nice track and now we have our own."

Something else to consider about the race car drivers of Aruba are the obstacles they face that USA drivers don't routinely encounter. Imagine you and your race car are peaking simultaneously but a car part needs to be fixed or even replaced. It would be unthinkable back in the states to have to miss a race because the car part was not in the store or has

not arrived by mail. It's hard to focus on an upcoming race because you're not sure if the postman will deliver the part in time for the race. Maybe the part comes a week before the race if you're lucky, or maybe it could come the day before the race or worse, a day after the race. Lack of sponsors to help defray costs to the race car drivers is another bump in the road these drivers face, no pun intended.

No doubt this can lead to frustration, but instead of complaining or sulking, the race car drivers of Aruba are able to stay focused and channel their energy into competitive drag racing. Your eight cylinders against their four cylinders, no problem. They'll settle it on the track. Once the ordered car parts finally arrive, watch the ratchets in their hands move like magic wands.

What may strike you almost right away are the cars themselves. Import cars with their four cylinder engines dominate this track. Frans Ponson who recently sponsored Aruba's First Extreme Import International car race this past January states that the import cars have "small motors, big turbo and big power." Ponson, who owns a popular white 1993 RX7 Mazda dubbed Hailey after his daughter, has a goal to hit six seconds on a quarter-mile track. Ponson says his car was built by Tito Chassis and his racing team is called 3G Racing.

The geographic location of Aruba, a southern Caribbean island 15 miles north of Venezuela, makes for excellent

drag racing. Aruba has year-round great weather, cooling trade winds and friendly people. From the track, the scene is majestic as you overlook the Caribbean Sea from a small hilltop. Ten tall windmills in constant motion along the coastal line help power energy to the island. From the track, dusk gives way to darkness and the windmills disappear as 10 red lights flicker in unison.

Language is a great connector at this track where many Arubans speak three to four different languages and some five. While waiting in line for popcorn, hotdogs or cotton candy, you are subject to hear Dutch, Papiamento, Spanish, English and maybe a little German. Not knocking the USA, by no means, but try to find this linguistic diversity at the race track in the states. Arubans appear to be unified under one flag and cultural diversity embraced.

As cars and trucks leave the race track, a crab slowly crosses the dirt road as traffic yields the right of way to the crustacean. Who would have thought that it would take a crab to slow down these drivers? **MT**





▲ I've seen it all now, turning empty Ocean Spray bottles to model cars. That's truly creative. Can I have the patent rights?



▲ What can we say? We Arubans, both young and old love our Mustangs.



▲ What a beautiful day for a ride to the beach in my red convertible Mustang. Daddy, for my birthday can I get a Turbo.



▲ Father and son, Van and Trevor Eman, display their Aruba Pro Stock Car as part of Aruba's First Extreme Import International.



▲ If you are looking for a fun-filled family day, De Palm Island Water Park is a perfect location.



▲ (L-R) The Fab Four—Mark Travis, Francis Butler, equipment manager Franklin, John DiBartolomeo, and Tony Weber.