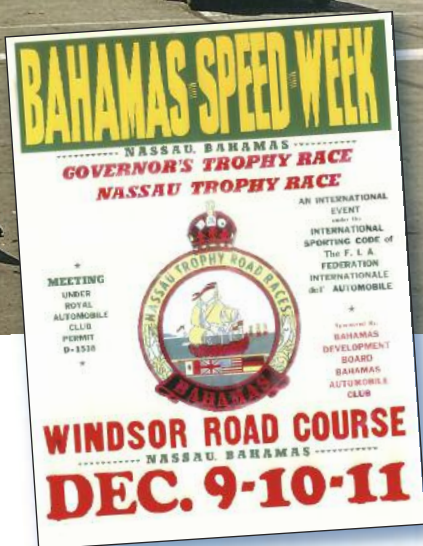
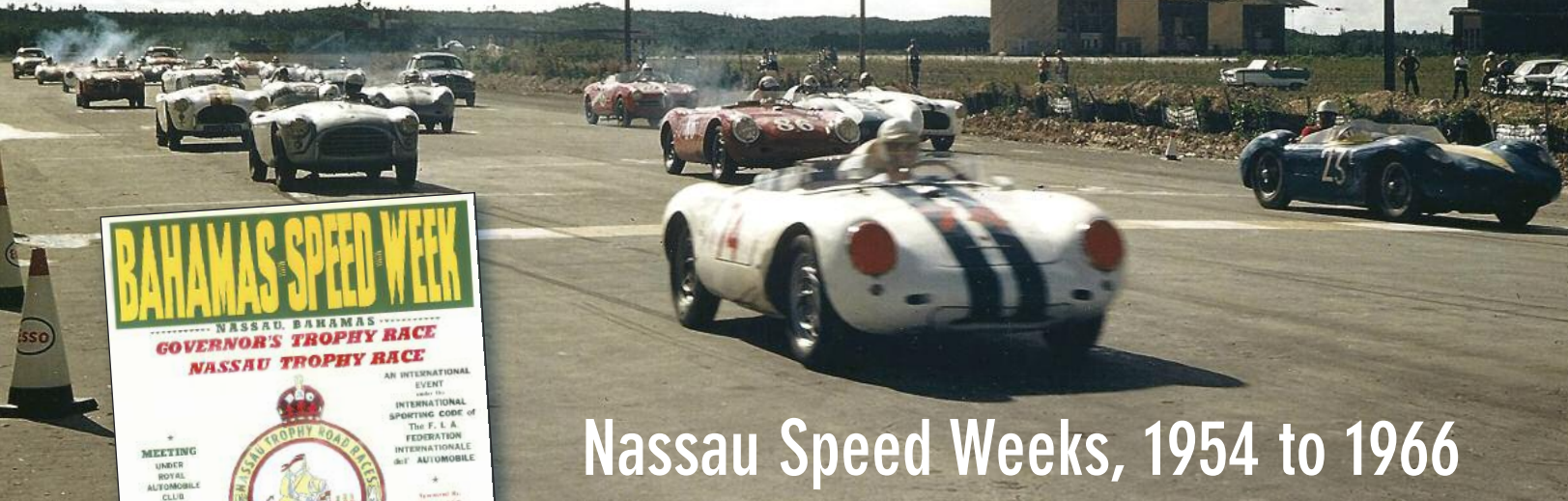


Caribbean Holiday



Nassau Speed Weeks, 1954 to 1966

By Phil Carney
and Terry O'Neil

Above: Although Don Sessler started out up front in the 1958 under two-liter Governor's Trophy Race, he would fail to finish. The winner was Rodriguez in 550A-0117 who was ahead of two Class E cars, a Maserati 200S and a Ferrari 500 TRC. (Charles Stockey photograph, Callier collection)



Sherman "Red" Crise, founder of the Nassau Speed Weeks. (From the Author's collection)

The Bahamas, located some 160 miles southeast of Miami, are today considered a playground by many Americans. It has had that reputation for many years, but it was not always the case. Captain Sherman 'Red' Crise and his wife started yachting the islands shortly after World War II. One particular spot that got his attention was the abandoned New Providence Windsor Airfield. During the war it had been used by the Royal Air Force to transfer aircraft to war theaters and as a station for patrol planes combating the U-Boat threat. Today it is known as Lynden Pindling International Airport (and formerly Nassau International Airport) and is the largest airport in the Bahamas.

Prior to the war, Crise had been involved with midget racing on oval dirt tracks. After the war, he took notice of the foreign sports cars beginning to appear in increasing numbers in the United States and that runways were being used as their road racing courses. For Red Crise, the idea of combining his vacation paradise with his love for auto racing on the disused runways at Windsor Field must have seemed like a natural fit. After connecting with members of the Nassau Development Board, the Bahamas Automobile Club was formed to make Crise's plan a reality. Approval was received from the Royal Automobile Club (the Bahamas were under British jurisdiction up until 1964) and American Automobile Club (from where most of the racers

were expected to come) but the Federale Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) failed to endorse the event. In fact, the FIA was so opposed to the Nassau Trophy Races that they initiated a new policy to cancel the international license of any FIA members who participated. This turned out not to be a big concern, firstly because only a few Americans held FIA licenses, and secondly because the Nassau races would be held during December and any lost FIA license lasted only through the remainder of the year – two or three weeks. Enthusiasts in Florida were also worried that the Nassau races had the potential for overshadowing the Sebring and Daytona events.

Speed Weeks received wholehearted local support because it was proposed as a means to gain publicity that would attract more visitors to the islands. In retrospect, this claim seems to be substantiated. During the thirteen years the races were held, tourism went from 100,000 visitors in 1954 to half a million in 1966. Economic growth was equally impressive and as a result the resident population grew from 46,125 in 1953 to 101,182 by 1970.

Opposite: In 1956 the SS Queen of Nassau, sailing out of Miami, brought the majority of contestants and their vehicles to the Island of New Providence. With the assistance of the local license authority, special Nassau registration plates were offered to the race participants. From the docks, the cars paraded along Bay Street on their way to the British Colonial Hotel. (Bahamas News Agency)

A Rough Start

The proposed race track was 3.5 miles of crushed coral and asphalt surrounded almost along its entire length by thick, shoulder high tropical foliage with intermingled boulders. As might be envisioned, the coral was not easy on tires and spectator satisfaction must not have been of prime concern. A few abandoned buildings on the perimeter of Windsor Field were secured and used by the fortunate few to house their cars but the base of operations for most was an uncovered pit area along the side of the main straight. Safety was a somewhat secondary concern which was typical for the times.

For the inaugural December 1954 event, Red Crise sent out 60 invitations. Most of these were directed towards wealthy owner-drivers living in the States. Responses were slow in coming. When cancelling the event due to lack of participation was proposed, Red Crise successfully solicited involvement by several local car owners and, in addition, a motorcycle race was added to the schedule. In the end, race car appearance turned out to not be an issue. Over 100 applications were received; many from those who heard about the event second-hand. Courageously, the Bahamas Automobile Club rejected many of these requests as not consistent with the type of event they were sponsoring. But the Club



550-04 was driven by Porsche Race Director von Hanstein at the 1954 event.

pushed forward and, after many personal solicitations, they were able to secure entries for 52 contestants.

Most vehicles left Miami on the SS Queen of Nassau with others shipped via the SS Lapland out of New York. Highjinks began on the ships and continued after the passengers debarked. The first day was practice followed by an impromptu cocktail party at Dirty Dick's followed by a show at Nassau's Adastr Gardens. The party atmosphere would last for six days - in fact, it would last for years.

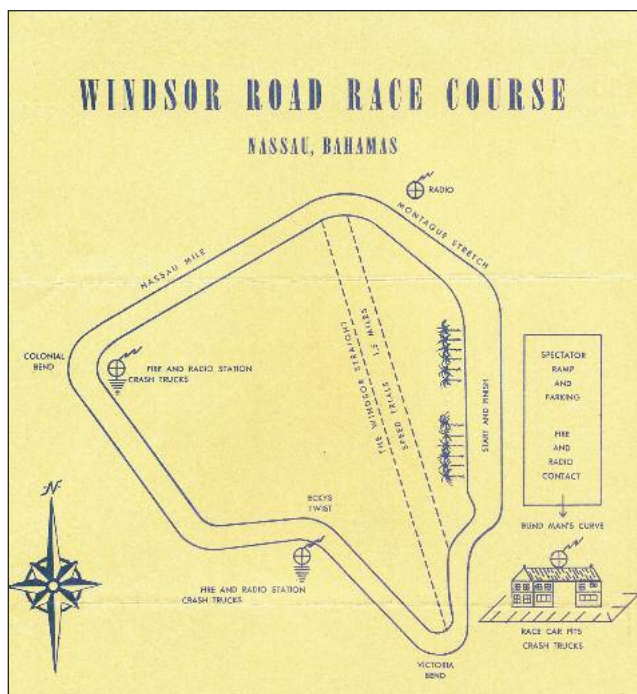
There were problems, though. The rough track was in terrible shape having degraded in almost every respect during the prior nine years of abandonment. The weeds and debris had

been cleared but that was about the extent of improvements. A clockwise circuit was in place for one race and then counter-clockwise for another resulting in completely rational complaints. Short time periods between consecutive races made it difficult to repair and set up cars properly. The grievance list was long giving organizing officials a fair share of headaches. But officials reminded drivers this was the first year for the Nassau Speed Weeks races and they also were quite adept to making real-time enhancements.

The sports cars that were expected to do well were the Ferraris and Jags that had been running on similar SCCA tracks in America. But the other high profile cars were those that had



The first course used for Speed Week was a 3.5 mile circuit setup on Windsor Field. The abandoned airfield had been used by the RAF during World War II for training pilots and patrolling Caribbean waters. Unsurprisingly, since closing the facility little or no work had been carried out to maintain the sprawling expanse of runways and the primary objective before the first race was to clear weeds and debris. The surface was uneven and very abrasive being made from a mixture of crushed coral and asphalt. Spectator viewing was heavily restricted by the tropical foliage growing up to 12 feet high around most of the runways. A 1.5 mile drag strip (the "Windsor Straight" was in the center of the course. (Author's collection)



recently competed in the Carrera Panamericana. In all some 16 different marques were represented on the field during the six races over three days. As for Porsches, eight cars were entered: Spyder 550-04, a highly modified America Roadster, and six 356s. Porsche became so popular that in the following year a Porsche-only race would be added to the agenda.

The first race on Friday was a running-start speed competition over a ¼ mile straightway using timing equipment borrowed from the Bonneville Salt Flats. As might be expected, a Ferrari 375 took top honors at 150.8 mph followed by a Jag XK120 at 125.4 mph. Herbert Linge in 550-04 was closely behind the Jag and went through the trap at 120.2 mph. Two other XK120s followed and then five Austin Healey 100s.

Of course, drag racing was not a Porsche specialty. The next race was a five lap heat and this time Huschke von Hanstein piloted 550-04. After a neck-and-neck duel, he was bettered by Alfons Koster in a 1.5-liter single overhead cam Maserati A6 GCS. It should be noted that at this point in its development, 550-04 was powered by a Super 1500 and not a Fuhrman four-cam engine. Another interesting anecdote was that 550-04 almost didn't show up in time for the first Bahamas race. According to von Hanstein, "Immediately after the Panamericana road race I put my Porsche Spyder into the shipper's hands without even washing the car off. The car should have been in Miami last Thursday, but when I traced it the machine had strayed to Birmingham, Alabama. After getting it out of Alabama it got tied up in Jacksonville where it sat for a full week."

Also in the five lap race, Jimmy Orr driving the highly modified ex-Crawford America Roadster (at that time owned by Brumos' Hubert Brundage) placed fourth in class. A 356 Coupe placed 5th with another way back in the field. In the Bahamas Automobile Cup 30 lap race the next day there were 46 entrants. It was a confusing Le Mans style start with two drivers seen vying for the same car. Von Hanstein did not have the power on the straights but made the most of his Spyder's nimbleness in the corners. At the flag, he won his class and finished fourth overall. Sunday was the main event, the 210 mile Nassau Trophy race in front of some 4,000 spectators. Von Hanstein's results were near identical; first in class and third overall. Equally satisfying was the fact that when handicaps were evaluated, Von Hanstein came in first.

If you have ever been involved with organizing a major event, you realize that putting on the affair requires much more work than originally anticipated. Furthermore, there are so many decisions that, despite the best intentions, it always seems in retrospect a better approach should have been obvious. So it was with the first



The first Carrera Speedster sent to North America was raced by Jan Brundage at Nassau in 1955. Peter Arnold of Elberon, New Jersey was also there in his Speedster.



Race organizer Red Crise told newcomers the Speed Week was a great social occasion and that racing would be purely coincidental. While this was a distortion of reality, the party atmosphere was a powerful draw. Herbert Linge (2nd from right) was at the inaugural event. The gentleman at right may be Cuban Johnny Cuevas. (Porsche Archives)

Nassau Speed Weeks. Many things did not go smoothly but the organizers put in extraordinary efforts to make things as best possible. Their reward was an exceptional first race. So successful was the racing and the social scene, participants (and many who ignored their invitations) were excited about returning the next year and for many years in the future.

Growing the Fun

The formative phase continued for two more years. In 1955, it was a must-attend event. Over 200 applications were received and several prominent drivers were on the scene: Stirling Moss, Ken Miles, Marquis de Portago, Phil Hill and Masten Gregory just to mention a few. Three new single-marque races were introduced for Ferraris (the Alberto Ascari Memorial Trophy), Jaguar and Porsche. The motorcycle races were cancelled and the FIA stepped up to recognizing the event.

The Ferraris came out in force with 17 cars entered, the largest collection outside of any European race. Many Ferraris were prepared under the watchful eye of America's Ferrari importer Luigi Chinetti. The Enzo cars took first in every event in which they started.

Porsche was also out to make an impact and was represented by seven 550s, and two 356 Carreras. In the under 2-liter five lap heat, Porsches occupied the top nine slots. Spyderman Ed Crawford was the winner in a Type 550 and he almost lapped the trailing car. Behind him were five more Spyderys. Seventh overall was the first Carrera Speedster on this side of the Atlantic. It was imported by Brumos and the entry sheet names the driver as Lyle Lee. This was actually a bit of subterfuge. The real driver was Jan Brundage but he couldn't use his real name because Volkswagen had put a rule in place that their dealers could not race.

The 30-lap Governor's race included all classes and the Ferraris dominated the leader board. Crawford however took first in class with his Spyder. Although he did not fare well in the five lap Porsche race, in the feature 60-lap Nassau Trophy race two days later he again took the class win.

The party atmosphere continued in 1955. A welcoming party at the Pilot House Club drew 200 people. On Wednesday evening there was another party at Dirty Dick's and 400 racers, crew members, wives and girlfriends showed up. On Friday the place to be seen was at Lady Greta Oakes' (an Austin Healey driver) party in the Hillcrest House. Although identified as a by-invitation-only event, reportedly 600 guests were in attendance. The big bash was the Motor Ball held on the following Monday evening in the Continental Room at the British Colonial Hotel. This is where the trophies were given out and it

seemed like there was an excuse to give almost everyone an award of some kind. In addition to these outlandish social gatherings, dozens of other revelers enjoyed an equally good time in bars and hotel rooms. The only shadow hanging over total cajolery was the big accident at Le Mans that past June and speculation on what the fallout might be.

The year 1956 was more of the same, only bigger. It was not just racers but their sports car fans who enjoyed the ambiance, and tourism during the race was up 65%. One of the reasons for this was that three boat races were held at Lake Cunningham in conjunction with the sports car races that year. There were 120 invitations sent out for the car races and the applications rolled in as fast as the mail could carry them. Forget Watkins Glen, forget Elkhart Lake, forget Pebble Beach. If you had the money, this was the

#1 "social occasion" that American sports car enthusiasts planned for months in advance. Car owners like John Edgar limited his later year North America race entries so his cars could be prepared properly for Nassau. Chevrolet sent a contingent of Corvettes to the Bahamas because GM wanted to part of the spectacle (Ford Thunderbirds would show up in 1957). It was becoming a much more serious business and entrants not only did exceptional groundwork but also sent an enormous cache of spare parts and mechanics along with their cars.

A Change in Venue for 1957

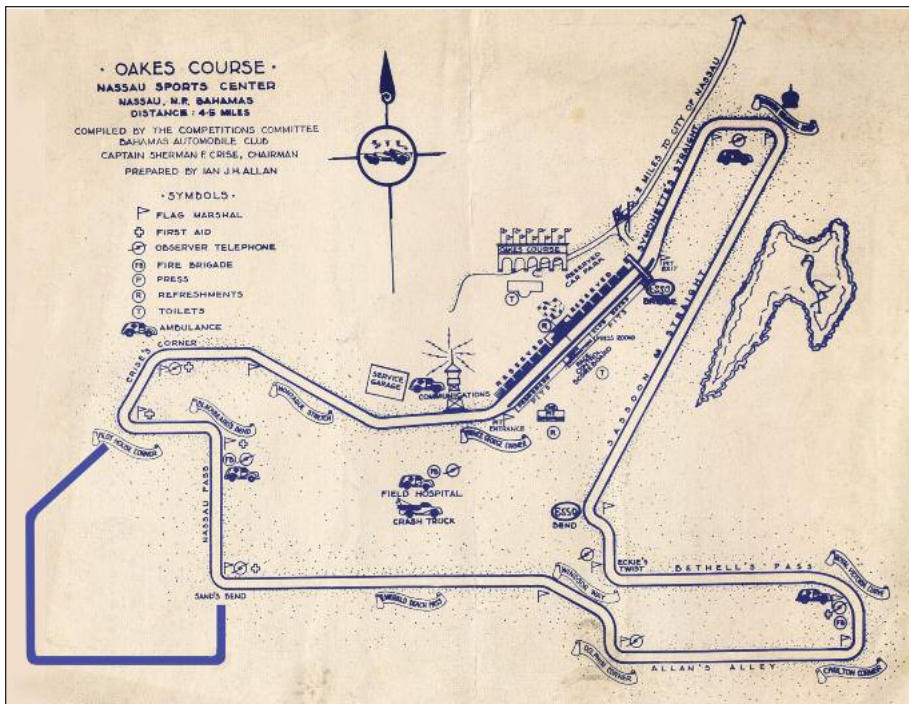
During the preceding years, Oakes Field had been the commercial airport for Providence. Due to both lack of repair and failure to make improvements needed to handle the larger airplanes and greater number of passengers, Ba-



Above: At the 1955 event "Lyle Lee" runs to his Carrera Speedster, the first seen in the Americas.



Right: During the 1957 races, Ed Crawford (left) and Ricardo Rodriguez (center) were driving Porsche 550As. Crawford took the honors in the two Governor's Trophy races while Rodriguez was the class winner in the Nassau Trophy Race. Stirling Moss (right), driving a Ferrari 290MM, took first overall in the feature race. From the looks on Crawford and Rodriguez's faces, it seems they might be wishing their four-cam engines had as much displacement as Moss' car. (Bahamas News Agency)



In 1957 the races were moved to Oakes Course, New Providence's former commercial airfield. The first year's circuit was 5 miles (dark blue line at lower left) but shortened to 4.5 miles the following year. It would remain that way through the life of Speed Weeks. (Courtesy of George Waltman)

hamas officials decided that commercial operations would move to Windsor Field in 1957. As a result, the now very popular races were moved to Oakes Field. £50,000 was donated by the legislature to turn Oakes Field from an airport into a race course. The changeover wasn't perfect but it was doable. Perhaps the only significant problem was the location of the pits on the inside of the counterclockwise track. The difficulty arose for two reasons. The pit entry and exits were loosely defined meaning there was a lot of cutting in and out at the last minute. Furthermore, the darting traffic was between the slower pitting cars and the very fast cars in the other lane of the track. But again, safety was not yet a priority in races such as these.

From the 217 applications received, race officials selected 120 entries. Practice opened on Saturday and the first two races were held on Sunday, December 1st. The ten lap race was won by a Corvette with a 356 Carrera placing 4th overall and first in class F. In the 34 lap Nassau Tourist Trophy race, Masten Gregory in his Maserati 450S took the winner's spot followed by two Ferraris and Ed Crawford in a Porsche 550. Also in a Porsche Spyder were Jack McAfee (7th OA), Denise McCluggage (9th OA), Ernie Erickson (11th OA), followed by six other Spyderys and a 356 Carrera. Looking at the entry lists it seems pretty obvious that if you lived in the Western Hemisphere and owned a Porsche Spyder, you were expected to vacation in the Bahamas during the first week of December.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were dedicated to partying and the intermittent arrival of other cars. The next big Porsche event was the five-lap Governor's Trophy heat for classes E & F on Friday. Crawford and his Spyder dominated followed by John Fitch in a Maserati 200S and then Jack McAfee in a 550RS. In the 15-lap Governor's Trophy race Crawford again dominated followed by Ricardo Rodriguez in his 550RS. The Spyderys whipped the four two-liter Ferrari 500TRs that were racing in the E class.

Although Crawford had controlled races to this point, the featured Nassau Trophy race on Sunday yielded a different story. A very young 15 year old Ricardo Rodriguez battled with McCluggage, Erickson and McAfee for Class F rights. In the end Rodriguez took fourth overall and first in class for the 100 mile race. He followed this up in the 50-lap race with another first in class. The Ferraris and Maseratis driven by Moss, Shelby, Bonnier, Ginther and Hill that bettered Rodriguez, sported engines with more than twice the displacement. Ricardo Rodriguez took five trophies home to Mexico that year.

The Professionals and the Politicians

Prior to 1958, the two ingredients that put you in the North American sports car racing scene were a lot of money and a little talent. At the dawn of the 1960s, race cars were not yet plastered with sponsorship names but it was pretty obvious that to be competitive you needed to be backed up with some serious technical talent and very deep pockets. Entrant lists were no

longer filled by private owners but rather teams with factory connections. This doesn't mean that private owners were no longer welcome; it just meant they were no longer as competitive. (The reader might note that there were direct factory entries in races at Sebring during this period. This was because Sebring and others were rounds on the World Sports Car Championships and there were awards for manufacturers and drivers alike. Red Crise approached the FIA to see if he could have the Speed Week Nassau Trophy race elevated to the series but the FIA refused him.)

The other big issue on the table was starting money and prize money. The big name drivers like Hill, Gregory, Moss, Erickson and Bonnier expected to be paid for their skill and not have some recreational club like the SCCA limit the awards. When this happened at the Nassau Speed Weeks, the professional drivers boycotted the event. Mother Nature also had a hand in spoiling things in 1958. It rained and it rained some more. The first race scheduled for Sunday, November 30th had to be postponed and it was not until Thursday that racing could get under way.

The 1958 Nassau races were expected to match their previous reputation, so three TV stations showed up to film the event. But with all the bickering and negative weather, the races were less than spectacular that year. Five Porsche Spyderys competed and they took first in classes E and F in the 56 lap Nassau Trophy Race main event.

By mid 1959, the issue of prize money was resolved in favor of the professional drivers. The Nassau Speed Week organization fell in line and offered appearance money, expenses and cash prizes to the top ten racers. For the Nassau Trophy Race the winner would get a healthy \$8,000 plus up to \$5,000 in bonuses. (With this kind of money available to the overall winner, would a professional driver rather be behind the wheel of a 4.5-liter Ferrari or a 1.5-liter Porsche?) In all, the organizers set aside \$96,725 for expenses and awards and it made the Speed Weeks races the top paying sports car race in the world.

This situation set up a new problem. A local political organization, the Progressive Liberal Party, started questioning the value of the event. Their mouthpiece, *The Nassau Herald*, claimed that the event did little to boost the local economy and they also noted that this much prize money "...could have built two schools for the local community." While the race organization was able at the time to ignore the criticism, they could not afford to close their eyes to it completely if the races were to continue in future years. The immediate action they took was to gain countering press coverage by offering free accommodations to journalists as well as race

passes and tickets to attend the various parties.

With all the financial incentives and press attention, over 400 applications were received and 90 "A-list" entries accepted in 1959. (In a bit of irony, Augie Pabst, a former owner of the Milwaukee brewery of the same name, drove a Bocar owned by beer-making competitor Peter Hand Brewery Company.)

Johnny Cuevas won the first race in a 356 Carrera. When asked why he wasn't driving a 550 Spyder, he simply replied, "...my frame doesn't fit inside the car." The Carrera was good enough for Cuevas because he also took first overall in the 25-lap Tourist Trophy Race later that day. It is interesting to note how the selection of Porsche models had changed so quickly. In 1959 there were no Type 550 Spydres on the entry list but that year there were seven 356 Carreras and nine Type 718 RSKs on the track. Owning and preparing the newest and most competitive model every year for the biggest races was an expensive obsession that a gentleman driver – no matter his skill level - could hardly afford.

Porsche of course did well in its class. In the main event on December 6th they took first in class but were bettered overall by a Class C Aston Martin and a Class D Ferrari 250 TR. Importantly, Holbert's RSK did outshine Brabham's Class E Cooper Monaco as well as some 60 other assorted cars of equal or larger displacement. The 1.5 liter Porsche may have not been the overall winner but there was no shame.

The Race Menu Evolves

In 1960 Speed Weeks was in its seventh year and over that time it had enhanced its reputation worldwide as an event not to be missed by racers and enthusiasts alike – both for the exciting racing and the hectic social scene. *The Nassau Guardian*, another local newspaper heartily endorsed the race, offsetting some of the detrimental publicity received the prior year. But the atmosphere was still changing. It was no longer simply a story of professionals replacing amateurs; it was also about commercialization (races being scheduled around the wishes of the media) and unacceptable behavior by some rowdy party-goers (driving their rental car into the hotel pool for example).

While big money attracts the best marques and the big-name drivers, it also can alienate the fan base who can't afford the price of competition. Red Crise was sensitive to this and between 1959 and 1961 he added the World Kart Championships to the schedule. It proved quite popular and over 100 karts were entered the first year kart races were held. Also added to the schedule between 1960 and 1962 was a Formula Junior race. One might be inclined to think of Formula Junior as a less expensive endeavor



but this was hardly the case when you had manufacturers like OSCA and Elva supplying cars and drivers like the Rodriguez brothers piloting. Because of cost, a Formula Vee class came on the scene and was incorporated into the Speed Weeks menu beginning in 1963. It would continue until racing in the Bahamas ended in 1967. Other low cost events were also tried out in the '60s including midget races and a VW GT race.

For the major races, the high profile marques were the big bore cars of Ferrari, Aston Martin, Maserati, Mercedes and Corvette. The popular cars in the lower displacement classes were Porsche, Alfa Romeo, and Austin-Healey. Porsche Type 718 RS60s and RS61s equipped with 1.6 and 1.7 four-cam engines were the strongest competitors in 1960. When all classes were on the track at the same time, it was common for the majority of the Class C and D drivers to be looking up the tailpipes of Porsche's latest Spydres running in classes E and F.

Lloyd "Lucky Casner" formed the Camoradi (Casner Motor Racing Division) team in 1959, purchasing Jean Behra's center-seat Spyder and his Carrera Coupe after Behra's death. Above, in one of the disused hangers at Oakes Field, the team prepares its fleet of 718 RSK Spydres. The #48 RSK was driven by Jack McAfee. In all there were a total of eight 718s on the track that year running in both Classes E and F. (Courtesy Ferret Photographics)



Other well-known drivers that year were Jo Bonnier (above), Bob Holbert and Harry Blanchard. Below: Local James Coley placed fifth in the Tourist Trophy in 1959, one of three Carreras in the first eight slots.



In preparation for the 1961 races, some track resurfacing was performed but nevertheless there were still deep scars in multiple locations. The drivers loudly complained about these conditions but, as in earlier years, Red Crise deflected the criticism with promises of more improvements to come. Another issue that year was the windy and wet weather.

The Porsche model selection changed in 1961. There were three 718 RS-61s but the most popular model that year were five 356 Carerras. The cars did well with Chuck Cassel and Bruce Jennings taking class wins on the first day of races. In the big Governor's Trophy Race and Nassau Trophy Race at week's end, the 718 RS61s were the class winners.

In 1962 the mix of Porsches and their accomplishments was similar to the previous year. There were significant changes in the larger displacement classes though. The Ferrari 250TR had lost most of its luster and the new 250 GTO was the car that the well-heeled Ferrarista with factory con-

nections campaigned. The GTO proved to be quite the race car. In 1962 and 1963, of 25 events that counted towards the Manufacturer's World Championship a Ferrari 250 GTO was in the winner's circle 20 times.

In addition, Ford Motor Company was now big into racing. Although they could hardly be called sports cars or even GTs, Ford was sticking as much horsepower as they could under the hoods of Falcons and Galaxies. One of each showed up at Nassau in 1962 and the Galaxie came in seventh overall to win its class in the feature race that year. Ford-powered cars were another factor. In the Formula Junior race there were Ford-powered Lotus 20, Lotus 22, Brabham BT2 and Lola Mk5 cars.

The special car that showed up in 1962 and is still a great American favorite was the Shelby Cobra – a lightweight English sports car with a 289 ci Ford V8 under the hood. There were three cars that year: CSX2002 driven by Billy Krause, CSX2009 driven by Augie Pabst and CSX2011 with John Everly at the wheel. The Krause Cobra's best accomplishment was fourth in the Governor's Trophy Preliminary with Pabst's car in eighth. Everly's car did not do much better. No matter, it was a learning year for Shelby. His cars would go on to make history and in a few more years Ford GTs would soon take away Ferrari's overall dominance at Le Mans.

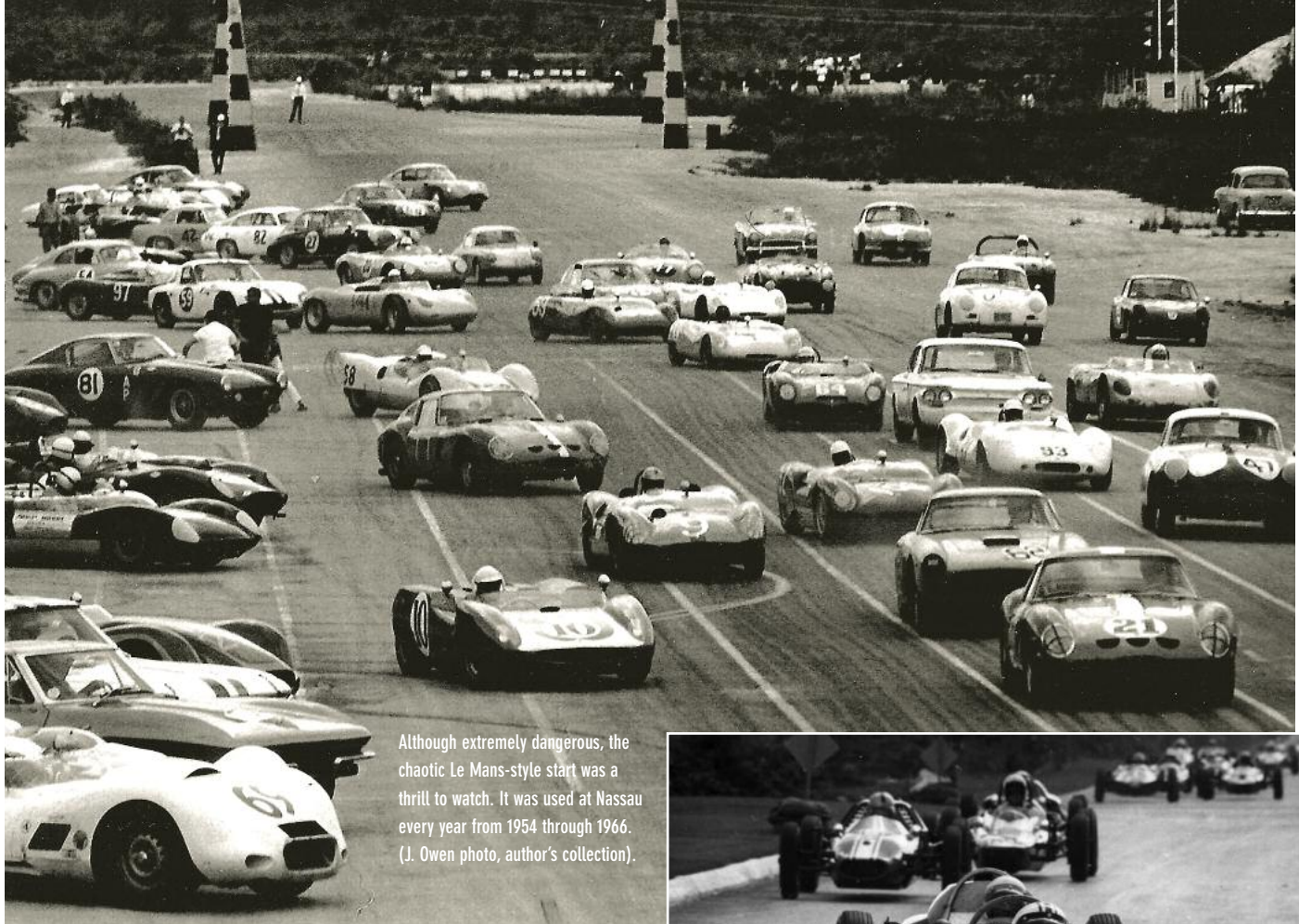
The year 1963 was more of the same but in 1964 Porsche had a new model available for competition. It was the very attractive Type 904 that the Porsche sales brochures called the Carrera GTS. It was powered by a 1,966 cc Type 587/3 derived from Furhman's original four-cam design. The 904's sleek fiberglass body was heavily influenced by Ferry's son Butzi and it was a harbinger of things to come. The original staff that had built Porsche into a premier GT car company were about to be replaced by the Porsche grandchildren. Out with the old, in with the new.

After the 904 debuted at Sebring in 1964 and suffered clutch trouble, it would go on to achieve a first overall in the Targa Florio and reliably take class wins at Le Mans. At Nassau in 1964, four 904 GTs were in attendance. Three of them announced their presence in the first warm-up race by finishing 1-2-3. The fourth car was a 904 owned by Peter Gregg who would become the owner of Porsche's BRUMOS distributorship and dealership. In the 1964 feature race Gregg took a third in class in his privately owned 904. The 904-043 driven by Jack Ryan was the class winner.



Top: Bruce Jennings chases Richard Toland's Alfa Giulietta in the 1960 TT race. **Above:** The Porsche-Abarth GTL was the race car used to fill the gap between the 718s and the 904s. Chuck Cassel brought this car to Nassau in 1962 and finished first in class every time – except for the 5 lap Porsche-Alfa race.

Right: In his day, Peter Gregg, the owner of Brumos (1965-1980) was a talented but controversial racer. He became a serious Porsche driver in 1964 with his own 904 where he finished 22nd overall and third in class at Nassau. In this 1965 photo he is driving his 904 in the Porsche Challenge race, now with a Brumos label. In the Nassau Trophy, the "big" race that year, he finished 11th overall and second in class. (J. Owen photos, author's collection)



Although extremely dangerous, the chaotic Le Mans-style start was a thrill to watch. It was used at Nassau every year from 1954 through 1966. (J. Owen photo, author's collection).

End of an Era

At Nassau in 1965 three 904 GT3s, a 904/6, and two 356 Carreras were in attendance. The 904/6 equipped with a derivative of the 911's engine took fourth overall and first in class during the main event ahead of two Shelby Cobras. The three 904s of Wetanson, Gregg and Ryan finished 10th through 12th, 1-2-3 in their class, during the same event.

But the Porsche-prepared cars that made headlines in 1966 were three Formula Vee cars sent by Austro Vau of Austria, a sideline of Porsche Salzburg. Because of rule abuses in earlier years, the scrutineers conducted a stringent strip-down procedure of the cars before the race. So when Jochen Rindt in an Austro Vau Vee was eight seconds faster than his competitors during practice, it raised some eyebrows. The exceptional performance however, turned out to be purely due to the credit of the Porsche engineers that had prepared his car. It comes as no surprise then that the three Austro Vau racers took the top three spots in the Formula Vee Heat. They did the same in the 23 lap Brundage Memorial race held to recognize BRUMOS founder Hubert Brundage, the originator of Formula Vee.

If the Speed Weeks entry lists of the early 1960s are examined, it can be seen that the big name teams were starting to skip the Nassau trip which was held at the end of the season and was not part of the World Sportscar Championship circuit. Racing had become increasingly complex and factories and race teams now needed to use the month of December to get their cars and drivers ready for the next season's events. This became quite evident in 1965 when the championship classes changed and cars had to be updated for the first World Sportscar Championship race at Daytona in February of 1966.

Nassau Speed Weeks was now in its death throes. Spectators had become few and far between. The media, motor company executives and top name drivers did not show up. *The Bahama Weekly* asked, "Where's the competition?" Adding to the dismal affair, the local political situation was unstable with threats of widespread strikes in the news. Perhaps the only upside if you chose to attend, was that there were still plenty of parties.



Formula Junior was conceived of as a means to reduce the cost of introducing new enthusiasts to racing. The rules were not tightly constrained so major builders started freely interpreting them and the cars became exotic and expensive. In 1963 Hubert Brundage began a new class of open-wheel cars called Formula Vee. The rules very strictly controlled the owner to using a limited set of production Volkswagen parts. (R. Rose photo, author's collection)

The balance sheet had also gotten considerably out of whack. Prize money had been reduced, no longer covering the cost of racing. General tourism had increased to the point where local hotels were no longer willing to make their accommodations available at a loss. And to really turn the bottom line red, the government decided to no longer subsidize Crise's races due to increased political pressure.

On December 4, 1966 the end of the Speed Weeks came. The event had been overtaken by outside influences, a lack of funding, politics, and the professionalism of motorsport in general. While the Speed Weeks was running, it served its purpose admirably, by encouraging people to visit the Bahamas. However it had become an expensive, obsolete marketing tool, unnecessary in the minds of many people.

It was not the end of motor racing in the Bahamas in general, however, or indeed at Oakes Field in particular, as the Bahamas Racing and Sports Car Club used the venue for some of its events up until 1973. Today, a Bahamas Speed Weeks Revival is also in place to commemorate and to some extent, re-live the magical times of the '50s and '60s. 🏎️