

Freeport's Popular Pioneer

"If I have attained a measure of success, it is because I've received the help of some wonderful people."



DOUG SILVERA

Douglas Silvera is a soft-spoken, relaxed man who speaks modestly—if at all—about achievements and success. His presence is that of a man at ease; a man whose accomplishments are borne, not as laurels, but simply as natural by-products of hard work, the help and interest of friends, and a bit of luck. Needless to say, his life has been flavoured with a healthy seasoning of all three ingredients.

Born and trained in Jamaica as a civil engineer, Silvera received an early introduction to Grand Bahama through Consolidated Construction Company, an American firm contracted to build much of the U.S. missile base at the eastern end of the island. In 1951, as site engineer for Consolidated he directly supervised construction of the airfield, as well as miles of road from the military installation to Pelican Point.

(Continued on Page 28)

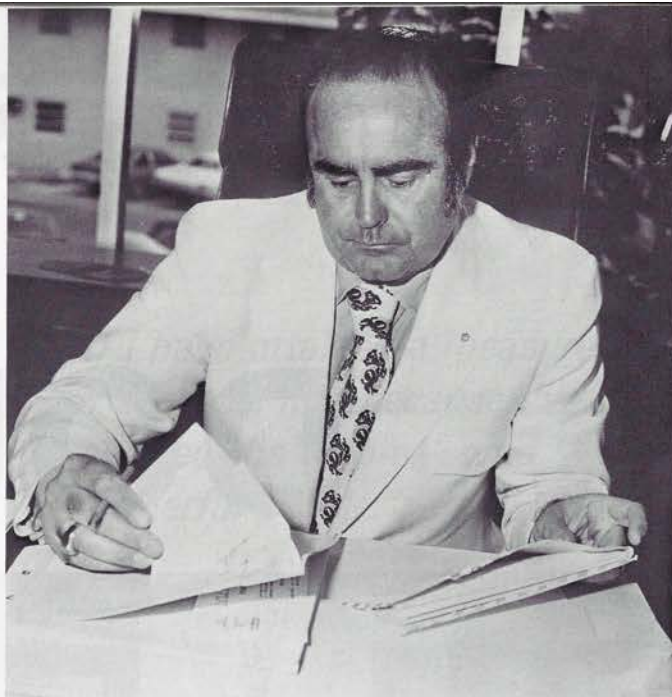
From Grand Bahama he moved on to Andros as site engineer for several development projects being conducted by Consolidated at Fresh Creek, and then on to Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera, the following year, as manager of the company's operations there. This was during the formative years of the Eleuthera Power Company and the Eleuthera Motor Company.

From the Bahamas, Silvera moved to several sites around the Caribbean, returning to Jamaica in 1955 as senior mine engineer for Kaiser Bauxite. The following year, months after wheels were set in motion for the development of Freeport, a close friend, a former manager for Consolidated, invited him to join in the upsurge of activity. He had been to the island before; he knew the people and he knew the operations. Resigning his post at the bauxite mines, he joined the new community as general superintendent of construction on June 2, 1956.

The position placed him squarely at the center of activity in the development of the young town. Looking back at what really took place, he marvels "When we started, we operated out of the logging area then known as Pine Ridge. You knew you were involved in something big, but you didn't really know where it was going. I think only Mr. Groves had the foresight to see where it was all heading. As a relatively junior man at the time, I was involved in the day-to-day creation, but not necessarily in the conception."

For Silvera, those day-to-day operations involved the construction of the first administration building (now the central police headquarters), dredging the harbour, erecting temporary housing, the Caravel Inn, the hospital, and seeing to many other projects so vital to the budding community.

But even as the General Superintendent responsible for construction



there was much to be learned about the profession, and life. The teacher was Jan Porel, chief engineer of the Port Authority (1955-'60) and a close friend. Silvera describes him as a quiet, unassuming but capable man. "He was a good teacher, a fantastic engineer, one of the finest people I ever met. His help and affect upon me was profound."

In the early Sixties, the Port Authority, with partners from the States, former Freeport Construction Company (FreCon) to keep abreast of rapid building demands in Freeport. Silvera was appointed Vice President and General Manager of the new company, basically representing the interests of the Port. He remained at FreCon until 1964, and was then transferred back to the Port as a Director and Vice President of Programming and Planning. With varying responsibilities, he has held these positions since. Basically

he remains in charge of the physical development, maintenance and engineering of Port concerns.

As a witness to the tremendous growth of Freeport, Silvera sees sharp parallels between those strides and the advent of independence for the whole country. As he puts it: "One of the factors that probably accounted for the tremendous growth of Freeport in the early years was that excitement, that will to get ahead, to make the whole thing work, and the pride and conviction in the fact that it could work. There must be a similar pride, conviction and determination in all quarters of Bahamian society, if independence is to become a working reality. I think we are beginning to see this happen."

Beyond the business side of Doug Silvera, there is flying, golfing, community service, and, of course, boat-



Continuing the pace they set when first introduced by former world champion Don Aronow's Miami plant last Fall, Cigarette hulls dominated the famed Bahamas 500 ocean powerboat race June 4th when Bahamian Doug Silvera won in record time.

ing. An amateur pilot for over 20 years, he took up flying as early as 1951 under Jimmie Sproule, one of the first pilots for the old Bahama Airways. He was an early member of the Nassau flying club. As a partner, he now owns a twin-engine Aztec.

About four years ago, Silvera tried his hand at race car driving. Immediately hitting the professional tracks, his first race was at Sebring; the second was at the Daytona Speedway. Although he had taken up the sport relatively late, he had planned to stick with it. However, during a practice session, the day before the Daytona race, there was an extremely bad crash. The crash was televised; his wife saw it; and in very definite terms, that was the end of a short-lived auto racing career.

Without the cars, he revived an earlier passion for boat racing. Back

in 1967, he had ridden, just for the heck of it, in the Gateway Marathon between West Palm Beach and Freeport. The boat in which he was a passenger, a Donzi inboard, driven by Allan Brown, won the race by 30 miles. The same year saw the opening of the first Bahamas 500, and as supporter of the Freeport promotion of the race, he followed the boats along the course from the air.

In 1970, there was an opportunity for a good buy on a 32-foot Bertram four-engine outboard. Silvera seized the opportunity, secured the boat, and immediately began equipping it for the big first race. A month later, as a warm-up for the 500, he ran the Sam Griffith Race off the Miami coast. He placed fifth overall and second in his class.

With the feel of the boat, he began intensive preparation for the June race. He flew the course at least six times, checking landmarks, getting acquainted with the track.

and arranging for strategic fueling stops. As it turned out, the preparations were well worth it. He scored an upset, first place victory for outboard boats, covering the 525 statute mile course, which runs counter-clockwise through the Bahama Islands, at an average speed of just over 54 miles an hour.

The dramatic feat was duplicated a second time in the 1971 Bahamas 500, this time from behind the wheel of "Starduster," a new 36-foot inboard Cigaretts hull powered by twin Mercruisers. Averaging 71.2 miles per hour, he covered the course in a record 7:23 hours and cut 61 minutes off the record set by American Don Aronow in 1969.

Asked about his chances of winning this year's Bahamas 500, he noted, "they are good, because I have the experience and I know the course. But believe me, it takes luck—physical endurance and a well-prepared boat."

But for Silvera, winning is not the thing. It's the excitement and the comradeship. He notes: "A primary reason why I enjoy powerboat racing is because it is one of the few sports where there is a minimum of animosity among competitors. The driving is done with respect and in good spirit. This captivates me."

As a founder-member and director of the Freeport Rotary Club, he has brought that spirit of comradeship to other areas. For the past two years he has also been a member of the Lucaya Rotary Club, chairing several fund-raising committees for the promotion of sports on the island.

With a family of five—his wife, Patricia, and three sons—Doug Silvera has grown up with Freeport. With a measure of success, he has sustained the pace of a rapidly developing and prosperous community, making his contributions and witnessing the contributions of others. Was there a formula? Not really, but:—

"If I have attained a measure of success, it is because I've received the help of some wonderful people. To make it in life, you have to be given a chance. I got that chance, and I am grateful for it. Beyond that, I've been lucky!" — that's Douglas Silvera.

Written by Barry J. Malcolm.