The Last Playboy

By Bill Dougherty

Though he stood at only 5'10" inches, Porfirio Rubirosa was destined to be the last playboy. Born into a wealthy Dominican Republic family in 1909, he quickly caught the eye of the island's notorious dictator, Rafael Trujillo, at a country club dance one evening. The next day, the dictator gave him the title of lieutenant of the presidential guard. This would cultivate into a lifelong relationship between the two men. While their relationship could often be rocky, Rubi's charm and grace always won the dictator over. With his eye on the prize, Rubirosa quickly proposed to Trujillo's daughter Flor in 1932. After this, the two would canvas the globe.

By this time, Rubirosa was now a diplomat in the Dominican Republic's upper echelon and held prominent positions throughout the world. They included Paris, Buenos Aires, Havana, Rome, Berlin, and Brussels. The socialite/playboy could not remain faithful to his beautiful wife, though they would continue to see one another well after their divorce in 1938.

From this point, Rubi wasted no time and went on to marry French actress Danielle Darrieux in 1942. Despite his breakup with Rafael Trujillo's daughter, the two men remained close. Trujillo referred to him as one of his country's greatest assets and an excellent diplomat "because women like him and he is a wonderful liar."

LOVED IN SEVEN LANGUAGES

Actress and 1950s pinup model Jeanne Carmen once said of Frank Sinatra, "Frank had great equipment, he just didn't know how to use it." This was not the case with Porfirio Rubirosa. Although small in stature, he was said to be enormously well-endowed, leaving a bevy of Hollywood A-list actresses begging for his return. He spoke seven languages and could charm a cobra out of its basket.



Porfirio Rubirosa and Zsa Zsa Gabor, 1947

A MAN AMONG MEN

Porfirio Rubirosa was a rare breed. He was an accomplished polo player, race car driver, rumored assassin, jewel thief and undercover agent all wrapped up in a huge package. He knew that even though he had a healthy secret salary from General Trujillo, the French actress he had married could not keep him in the style to which he had become accustomed. In 1947, he married tobacco heiress Doris Duke. During their brief but happy nuptials, he was showered with airplanes, polo ponies, sports cars, maids, and personal staff in homes around the world. All gifted to him by Duke. Yet, with all these trappings, the playboy and international man of mystery could not stay faithful to one of the wealthiest women in the world.

They parted in 1951. Rubi retained all the lavish gifts bestowed on him, plus an annual alimony payment of $25,000 – around $280,000 in today's world. Doris Duke often said he was the love of her life. The two remained more than friends for the rest of their lives.

I'M BETWEEN HEIRESSES

Between his relationships with Doris Duke and the much-troubled Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton – collectively known as "The Gold Dust Twins" – Rubi started an affair with Hungarian media zealot Zsa Zsa Gabor. When the actress refused to leave her then-husband, George Sanders, Rubirosa became so outraged he gave her a black eye! Zsa Zsa had a field day and went to all media outlets to not only profess her love for the playboy, but also to condone his act. It left the world



A wedding gift from Barbara Hutton



Barbara Hutton and Rubi, 1953



Doris Duke, 1946



His plane, wedding gift from Doris Duke, 1951

speechless. The two never married, despite their reckless and toxic relationship. During this time, Rubi received a phone call from his long-time friend, Cary Grant. Evidently, the actor had invited the Dominican playboy to London, where Grant was appearing in a theater production. Rubi responded that he could not make the trip to England because he was "between heiresses."

Enter Barbara Hutton, the terminally chic and terminally ill heiress to the largest fortune in the world. Their relationship was doomed from the start. At the suggestion of her frenemy Doris Duke, she took the walk down the aisle with the suave playboy. Only Barbara wore black, clutched a cigarette, and sipped on a scotch and soda. The marriage lasted 53 days. However, during this time she lavished more than double what Doris Duke had given the diplomat. Rubi felt that her moods were too dark and her reclusive behavior off-putting. After all, he liked to have a good time. He left the marriage with more than $2.5 million. Barbara Hutton would later say on her deathbed that, of her seven marriages, all the men were fortune-seeking scoundrels except for Cary Grant, who departed with nothing.

SETTLING DOWN

By 1956, Porfirio Rubirosa had settled down. While there was still the ever-present cloud of espionage and mystery surrounding him, he married another French actress, Odile Rodin. The couple settled outside of Paris. In 1961, Rafael Trujillo was overthrown and assassinated. Rubi was remarkably at the side of President Kennedy to help restore diplomatic integrity to the Dominican Republic. Despite his best efforts, the country never really recovered. Trujillo's successor, his son Ramfis Trujillo, whose hedonistic life mirrored that of the playboy, was likewise overthrown. Rubirosa lost his title, diplomatic immunity, and his monthly salary. After losing his diplomatic immunity, he was interrogated by the U.S. District Attorney regarding the disappearance of several top Trujillo loyalists, but he was never charged.

THE GARAGE SALE

Like his fourth wife Barbara Hutton, Rubi was quickly running out of money by the mid-1960s. He began selling off aircraft, real estate, priceless art, jewelry, and antiques. His excessive live, love, and play lifestyle was quickly coming to an abrupt end. And like Barbara Hutton, he had never been taught how to manage money. This was in sharp contrast to his third wife Doris Duke, who held a degree in finance. She had tripled her family fortune before her death.

THE END

In 1965, Rubirosa entered an international polo match and won the Coupe de France tournament, taking along with it a large sum of money and a sterling silver trophy. After



Rubi and Flor Trujillo, 1932



Champion Polo Player, Monte Carlo, 1962

a long night of celebrating at the famed Jimmy's nightclub just outside of Paris, things took a tragic turn. Early the next morning, he crashed his cherished Ferrari 250 GT into a tree and died in an ambulance on the way to the hospital. The last playboy was dead.

IN POPULAR CULTURE

Many say that Ian Fleming based his James Bond character on Porfirio Rubirosa. Evidently, the writer had been introduced to the Dominican playboy at a cocktail party in Jamaica in the early 1950s. Others in the James Bond camp claim rubbish. We do know that Rubirosa was a central character in the 1963 Terence Rattigan film *The V.I.P.s.* The film coined the term "very important people." The character of Marc Champselle, played brilliantly by Louis Jourdan, was the spitting image of Porfirio Rubirosa. Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton headlined the film and were good friends of Rubirosa. Both agreed that the performance of Jourdan as the playboy was spot-on. The playboy was also a frequent guest at Maxim's. In the 1950s, the famed French eatery began to refer to their large wooden pepper mills simply as "Rubirosas".

You get the picture…