

# In the Shadow of the Big Boys

## De Vecchi and other pioneers of the automobile in Milan

AISA  
Associazione Italiana per la Storia dell'Automobile

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# Foreword

*Lorenzo Boscarelli*

The final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of new and very different technologies, such as electricity, the telephone and the internal combustion engine, as well as many other which radically changed the quality of life for many people in a very short time, particularly for the upper classes. Moreover Europe, after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, enjoyed a period of relative peace, so much so that the period came to be known as “la belle époque”.

Not surprisingly, in the years and decades after the very first automobiles – made around 1890 in Germany and France – the new vehicle created very much interest and stimulated engineers, entrepreneurs and investors to dedicate their ingenuity, passion and financial resources to its development.

The numerous ventures of that period, dedicated to the production of automotive chassis and bodies, show the pioneers’ enthusiasm rather than their rational ability to analyse the challenges. Hence very many of those ventures had a very brief life. But the outcome is not so important, and they testify how the automobile has been able to attract so many different talents and to stimulate them to pursue their projects or their dreams.

Milan offered the ideal environment for the development of those artisanal enterprises – very seldom based on an industrial vision – thanks to its know-how, financial resources and dynamism, aided by the relative closeness of centres at the forefront of the new technologies north of the Alps. The great growth of manufacturing activities, which had no

comparison with any other Italian area, had a key role in the process and gave life to innumerable small companies dedicated to the new product.

Milan was the starting point of the automobile’s growth in Italy, but in a few years’ time Turin took its place. This was mainly due to Fiat, which – led by Giovanni Agnelli’s (and his management’s) industrial vision – put in place the technical, organisational and financial resources needed to develop rapid growth and dominance of the home market. This vision was completely different from the one most of the other motoring pioneers of the time had.

These differences of approach and goals taken into consideration, the consequences of which were soon clear, we have to admit that the potential of the motor car – the amplitude of which, at the beginning of the century, was grasped by very few due to its limited spread – was understood by the very few operators who decided to apply themselves as manufacturers, attracting great energies of work, passion and creativity.

Some of these pioneers were able to understand the sheer vastness of commitment needed for the companies’ development after the first artisanal phase. This was the case with De Vecchi, which started as a vehicle manufacturer and became a producer of components, reaching a high level of specialisation which allowed it to last for a long time, maintaining an archive rich enough to be turned into a Foundation.

Thus, from technical and entrepreneurial beginnings, a cultural initiative which keeps those far away early years alive has been developed.

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# The De Vecchi Foundation: creating a Company Archive

*Alberto De Vecchi*

The “Fondazione De Vecchi & C. – Milano” was born four years ago after an idea shared by me and Matteo Bravi, a fourth generation cousin. A “Founder” with me was Marco De Vecchi, senior member of the family and a direct player in the most recent phase of the family companies’ activities.

Matteo and I are the two links between the family’s third and fourth generations: I am the younger grandson of Giuseppe De Vecchi and Matteo is his eldest great grandson. Together, we steer and manage the Foundation.

At the beginning there were... a truck and a suitcase: the mythical 1914 truck, sole surviving De Vecchi vehicle, which has gone through many adventures (having been abandoned, restored, badly stored and then restored again), and an old suitcase which contained the family collection of documents, photographs and objects. From these artefacts a wider and serious research began.

We needed to define the ownership of the truck and also of a nice 1911 engine, another unique artefact from the automotive production, and grant them some future visibility.

This was the starting point, the spark that turned our attention towards the family’s entrepreneurial history into the start of a project that had lain dormant in the dusty drawers of our homes. This project could be described as: “A family, three companies in the industrial century”.

The story has in fact gone through three industrial phases. The first, that of the “De Vecchi motor car” lasted from 1904 to 1918. The second, from 1919 to 1972, was that of the “Mollacciaio De Vecchi”, centred on springs (*in Italian ‘molla’ = ‘spring’ and ‘acciaio’ – ‘steel’*). This component was developed to the highest level of quality: from small technical springs, ubiquitous in any mechanical application, to furniture springs (mainly for mattresses) up to big springs for heavy loads and railway vehicles. Finally the third phase, from the 1950s to the end of the 1980s, with the production of ‘spring pillows’ for the automotive industry. We have gone round in

a circle: from the automobile to the motor car via the humble spring. From small bespoke production to huge series; from personal contact with early colleagues to wider human relations with Mollacciaio employees or the multitude of workers for SICAM and its associated companies.

From these ideas we have created the Foundation, calling it “Fondazione De Vecchi & C. – Milano”. As we were keen to resurrect the name and logo of our family’s industrial origins.

We did this with two main objectives: to create a ‘virtual home’ – and possibly in the future a real one – where we could collect things and facts which represent our family’s history, and to develop new initiatives which may revive that history, transmitting to the future those qualities and values of our forebears such as curiosity, experimentation, the will to ‘make things properly’, and generosity.

We would like to pass this ‘values imprinting’ to new generations, whatever activity they will choose to pursue.

The Foundations Statute formally states these goals: *“The Foundation will promote, safeguard, support and diffuse the heritage of technical knowledge of the Italian mechanical industry from 1900 to the present day... in particular the Foundation will protect, promote and diffuse the historical, cultural and technical heritage of the companies of the De Vecchi family which were active in that period of time via all those documents, products and objects which represent this heritage, with projects and initiatives set to promote technical and scientific research and more generally business culture as part of the cultural heritage of the Country.”*

We therefore started by setting up an Archive, searching, collecting and professionally managing the documents.

From there we developed a co-operation with ‘Fondazione ISEC – Istituto per la Storia dell’Età Contemporanea’ where we have stored all the items in our Archive. There we are in good company, with the Archives of companies such as Breda, Ercole Marelli, Bastogi, Italtel, etc.

The formation of an Archive is the first and fundamental step towards saving the historical memory, but it is also the most difficult, as entrepreneurs are always focussed toward the future and never keep and cherish their own past. Our goal instead is that of looking backwards in order to launch ourselves into the future. Only if we succeed

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*Alberto De Vecchi, grandson of Giuseppe De Vecchi and President of the De Vecchi & C. Foundation, Milan.*

in putting some life into the Archive will it repay us and give back its energy.

Starting from here we would like to pursue some basic objectives: we want to be an 'open' Foundation, networking and exchanging with others (such as ISEC). Going back to our Statute:

*"The Foundation plans to identify and support cultural projects and initiatives of third parties, as long as they share coherent cultural qualities, promoting and organising seminars, training courses, workshops, meetings: favouring publication of the relevant minutes and documents and all those initiatives able to foster organic contact between the Foundation, the National and International organisations, their representatives and the public, also via the creation of prizes and scholarships..."*

Finally, there is a small commercial component that the latest 'Third Sector' law allows and encourages.

Again from the Statute:

*"The Foundation will actively organise, deposit and protect the Company Names, Brands, Patents, Commercial Names of parts and accessories for their possible exploitation, and to carry out, as an accessory and instrumental to the realisation of the Institutional Goals, commercial activities (for instance in Publishing) within the existing laws..."*

The Company Values and Entrepreneurship are the heart and soul of the activities of the Fondazione De Vecchi & C. This is because we come from the world of enterprises and the enterprise witnesses and lives by its values daily; it trains and enriches people by organising competences; it creates positive relations between people and it is still the only social elevator in a static country such as ours.

In a word enterprise makes culture. This is why we think that to cherish the past, if this is made by enterprises and entrepreneurs as in our case, is not dusty nostalgia but a powerful engine for innovation.

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# De Vecchi Automobili and the Milanese industry

*Donatella Biffignandi*

Little is known, and even less has been written, about the automotive company De Vecchi Strada & C., later De Vecchi & C., which was active in Milan between 1904 and 1918; some comments here and there, but nothing of any substance.

This notwithstanding, a full-page photograph of the De Vecchi showroom appears in the beautiful catalogue “L’Automobile Produzione e Design a Milano”, published for the 1990 exhibition, with contributions from some of the most respected automotive historians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (such as Duccio Bigazzi, Angelo Tito Anselmi, Griffith Borgeson). Fittingly, it illustrates the text headed “Milan and the automobile: stories of the industry”.

Here is a photo which transmits the image of a solid and well-organised company, with a production and commercial organisation and even a communication strategy. On the rear wall we can see advertising posters with female figures and good graphic composition, surely signed by one of the great poster designers of the time.

Clearly this is not one of the many ‘me too’ enterprises that came and went in the chaotic Italian automotive industry of the early 1900s, which saw growth which created an oversized sector: the limited companies, which in 1904 numbered around ten with a total capital under 18 million lira, in 1907 were already 61 with 100 million capital. In 1904 3,080 vehicles had been produced, while the following year the total was 8,870, a growth of 188% (unfortunately no data is available for the period between 1906 and 1910).

It was uncontrollable and unmanaged growth which very soon exhausted the possibilities of the limited Italian market and could not yet develop sizeable exports. With the first effects of the international financial crisis of 1907, most of this haphazardly-built industry collapsed, taking with it even companies which had more solid bases. What happened was a very hard selection, and many small Milanese artisanal manufacturers were forced out of the market.

In 1913 only four companies remained in Milan: Isot-

ta Fraschini with 533 workers, Bianchi with 443 in the motor car sector (and as many again in the bicycle and motorcycle sector, which are not part of this essay), Alfa with 191 and De Vecchi with 80. In all, around 1,250 workers, to whom we should add those in the coachbuilding industry, at least 750 people in the 13 body-making companies known.

Just four companies after the dozens of the previous years: De Vecchi is one of them, together with the other three, destined to make Italian automotive history.

Despite such a promising start, De Vecchi was to stop automotive production in just four years: this is the reason why we decided to go back and try to describe the essential lines of the Milanese industry’s history of that period, and the history of De Vecchi in particular.

During the end of the 1800s and the first years of the new century, Milan established itself as a most important centre for the mechanical and metallurgical industries. In 1881, when the Universal Exhibition was inaugurated, Milan was Italy’s main commercial and industrial city. In just ten years, from 1881 to 1891, industrial steam power trebled, rising from 12,000 to 36,000 HP (and in 1911 the figure was 73,000 of which 50,000 was produced by electric motors); and its population grew from 242,457 in 1861 to 602,236 in 1911.

The manufacturing industries were many: from coachbuilders (more than 2,000 workers), goldsmiths, fur specialists, hat makers, the vast sector of home workers in sewing, embroidery, tailoring, glove making... But the mechanical sector is where the seeds of big modern industry, based on capitalist factories, are to be found. Some of these workshops had a lasting future and an important role in Milanese industrial development, despite the reluctance of the capitalists of the time to invest in industry.

The push to modernise was fuelled by the enlargement and rationalisation of workshops and the introduction of modern machinery and tools. Notwithstanding this, they were still old-style and hybrid, as demonstrated by many factors: the employment of many artisanal workmen, the rudimentary division of work, the use of backward technologies, the excessive diversification of production...

As an example, Prinetti & Stucchi in 1891 used its 400

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*Donatella Biffignandi, trained historian, passionate professional and long-time AISA member, who has written numerous articles and several books on automotive history.*

workers for both their cork business and their sewing machine production. Even with its shortcomings, mechanical industry was still Milan's most important and could count on a much higher invested capital than any other business sector. The general image which therefore emerges is one in which the city's new industrialisation process was not only due to the growing number of big factories, but also to the diffusion of a small retail industry, with many small workshops and great numbers of people working from home. An "Industrial Milan" was developing with small and medium-sized factories managed by entrepreneurs who were often ex-workers themselves and who combined the technical, commercial and control management functions.

In the following period, from the 1890s up to WWI, the leading position of Milan's industry became stronger and stronger. This was due to a number of positive factors: ample availability of low-cost labour, customs protection, the growing availability of capital and energy due to advances in energy transmission (see the interesting story of Ettore Conti, a pioneer in the industrial use of electricity).

The Engineering Industry (*in this context meaning the metal-mechanical industry*) was developing a central role in the economy and this was also happening in the chemical and electricity sectors. Even the cultural industry was growing fast: in 1905 in Milan 310 magazines and 13 daily newspapers were printed.

The 1900 data collected by the Statistic Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce generally reports about the metal and mechanical workshops, producing steam boilers; steam, gas and hydraulic engines; machines for industry; production of iron in various shapes; locomotives, wagons for rail and tramways; lighting and heating; electrical apparatuses, optical, physics and calculation instruments.

The nationalisation of the Railways gave a strong push to that industry, incentivising the concentration of existing companies into bigger organisations such as Breda, Officine Meccaniche, Franco Tosi, AEG-Thomson Houston (later CGE), Ercole Marelli and others.

Motor car factories had to wait another decade to find space in the official statistics: in the 1911 Industry Census. A study published a few years ago ("Nascita e diffusione dell'industria automobilistica Milanese e del suo indotto", by Roberto C. Garberi, in "Storia in Lombardia" year XXVIII, no. 3/2008) counted 277 companies active in the automotive business between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 1930s. 13% were motor car manufacturers (37 companies), 18% accessory makers (50 companies), 45% importers/dealers (124), 6% coachbuilders (18) and 6% providing various services (48 companies).

Some of the ventures had their origins in foreign tech-

nologies and sometimes capital: the Anglo-French Darracq company decided to create a production facility in Naples (1906), later changing their mind and building a factory in the Portello area of North Milan. Part of that group was also Wolseley, which in 1907 tried to enter the Italian market with their Wolsit brand, destined to have more success with bicycles than with motor cars.

In other instances they started as a parallel arm of companies producing light mechanical items: such as Isotta Fraschini (1900), where the Fraschini brothers came from a company producing small metal parts; whilst Züst (1904) came from machine tools and Majocchi (1906) from the production of nuts and bolts. In four cases the new company was a spin-off from the cycle industry. This was one of the most modern industries of the period, using precision machining, careful assembly and the use of components such as roller bearings, transmission chains and pneumatic tyres (elements that identify the bicycle as the natural mother of the motor car), and also had strong roots in Milan. This exchange was particularly evident for Bianchi, Frera and Türkheimer.

In this milieu Giuseppe de Vecchi started his adventure, giving life to the eponymous company. Born in Milan in 1878, at a very young age he started working with the arms manufacturer Legnani, completing his apprenticeship at Prinetti & Stucchi, the company that in 1883 had introduced the production of sewing machines to Italy, later extending its activities to include bicycles and small automobiles.

He was an enterprising enthusiast of all things mechanical, curious about novelties. In 1903, at twenty-five years of age, he started a partnership with a twenty-three year old friend, Ettore Strada. Together, they opened a sort of garage which, in the "Garages e depositi benzina" section of the 1904 "Guida dell'Automobile Club di Milano", is described as De Vecchi e Strada, Via Bertani 16.

The following year ("Catalogo Automobile Club Milano") it is once more entered in both the "Garages e depositi benzina" category and in the one entitled "Elettricità", where also listed are Achille Fusi, Ghirardi & Giardini, Türkheimer and Ceirano. Isotta Fraschini was also there: as a matter of fact it started as a garage supporting a trading company, and only in 1904 was it transformed into a limited company and given one of the most modern factories of the time. 1903 was also the year of the birth of the Automobile Club Milano, and when Milan first had more cars on the road than any other Italian town, Turin included: 194 motor cars of the 1,440 registered in the whole of Italy (there were 178 in Turin, ACM data). Five factories of the 15 Italian ones were in Milan: (Bianchi, Isotta Fraschini, Prinetti & Stucchi, Luigi Figini and Camona Giussani e Turinelli, created in that year with

the merger of two companies from Sesto San Giovanni to make electric cars), plus two other companies producing engines (Società Italiana Motori Daimler and Alfredo Lazzati).

This reminds us that many Italian factories used proprietary engines: such as the Prinetti & Stucchi three-wheelers with De Dion engines, as well as the small four-wheeler made by Edoardo Bianchi.

It is therefore clear that, in the first years, 1903 and 1904, the two friends were testing the water and their possibilities by managing a garage with repair shop: an activity through which they could gain precious experience and hone their own ideas. At the end of 1905 they took the plunge and incorporated De Vecchi, Strada & C., with a capital of 300,000 lira (of which only 96,000 was actually deposited), and a clear goal: to build motor cars. The headquarters remained in Via Bertani 16, the address of the home of De Vecchi. The other shareholders were Giuseppe Borioli, Alberto Casalbore, Umberto De Benedetti, Adele Faina Sirtori, Paolo Mezzanotte, Carlo Rogorini, Carillo Rovere, Gian Giuseppe Taccani and Giovanni Tomasina. The headquarters were moved the following year to Via Melzi d'Eril 32 and then to Via Peschiera 2 (all these addresses were in the Corso Sempione area, historically the preferred area for automotive businesses<sup>1</sup>).

## The years of the Motor Shows

The car they wanted to put on the market, taking advantage of the many Shows that were organised in Turin and Milan in those days, was a 10/12 HP, with four separate vertical cylinders, three gears plus reverse, chain drive and bi-lateral valves.

De Vecchi's presence at the Second International Automobile Exhibition held in Turin in 1905 is confirmed by a nice participation diploma, signed by Goria Gatti, one of the outstanding Turin press and organisation personalities. The Shows continued in both cities for a few years, with great confusion: this is anyway a sign of the great dynamism of the two cities, which were very excited about this new industrial product involving so many skills and trades and giving the most far-sighted enormous possibilities.

In any case, De Vecchi was not partisan: they were at the Turin Show in 1905 on stand N.51, showing a car and a motorbike, as well as at the 1906 Milan Show, on stand N.56 showing their "DVS" chassis with a 4-cylinder 10 HP engine, described as being fitted with "twin ignition with magneto and batteries".

A wonderful double spread in the "L'Automobile" magazine Motor Show special issued in May 1906 enthusiastically describes the De Vecchi initiative, comparing it with modern American trends. As a matter of fact, whilst in Europe the emphasis was on powerful, fast and expensive cars, in the United States at-

ention was focussed on a wider public interested in light cars, a popular product easy to buy and keep. The 1908 launch of the Ford Model T, the paragon of utility cars, was not far away. The De Vecchi & Strada 10/12 HP shown seemed to head in exactly that direction: more than what Fiat, Itala or Aquila Italiana were doing.

An interesting note was made on the chassis, "*made in pressed steel, bent and narrower at the front, made by the same DVSC company that produces the chassis... which they already make for many of the best automobile factories*". This Milan Show of 1906 is particularly important: it was organised within the International Siplon Exhibition to celebrate the rail tunnel inaugurated the previous year and which had made the first rail link between Milan and Paris possible. De Vecchi was awarded a Diploma and Bronze Medal: not bad for a beginner.

In 1907 De Vecchi exhibited in both Turin and Milan. These Shows enjoyed great success too: in 1907 there were 166 exhibitors in Turin and 197 in Milan. By now the company had a General Sales Agent: Federico Momo, based in Foro Bonaparte. Momo was far from a newcomer in this field, already having the exclusive agency for Lombardy and Veneto for the Junior car from Turin (there is always a challenge between Turin and Milan), and he was a minority shareholder in Max Türkheimer's OTAV and finally the promoter of the merger of Otav and Junior.

Having said all this, we should not think about a gradual and powerful growth of the industry, or happy years of success... these were difficult and contradictory years, with dramatic consequences. As said, the car industry's growth was tumultuous and excessive. The growth went hand in hand with vertiginous speculation. And, as always happens in these cases, the bubble inevitably burst: in the second half of 1906 the first signs of recession could already be seen, and that became complete and dramatic in 1907<sup>2</sup>.

To show some examples: Fiat shares lost 95% in a few months; Itala lost 50%; those of Rapid lost four fifths. The International crisis (triggered by restric-

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1. In the north-western area called generically "Sempione", automobile manufacturers which would have operated with large factories in the 1920s and 1930s were based. It is the case with Alfa Romeo, Isotta Fraschini (already established there in the 1910s), the carburettor maker Memini, the coachbuilder Touring and other industries needing large areas of land, which were not available in the urban areas of the city, to run their businesses.

2. To give an idea, *Motori Cicli & Sports* of May 1<sup>st</sup> 1908 wrote that "*in Turin, Aquila is in bankruptcy, in Naples Hermes have summoned the creditors, in Piacenza Marchand have closed down, in Genoa Zena and Flag are bankrupt, in Milan Serpollet Italiana is in the hands of administrators, Türkheimer has reduced its capital, as have Fiat in Turin and Florentia in Florence...*"

tions to the American market which limited exports) played a part, but Italy paid the price for the artificial and unregulated growth. The home market could not absorb the production of so many factories, more than forty between Milan and Turin. Some of them were even created without a proper production facility, others when bust after spending too much on racing, one of the best means of advertising, but also one of the most expensive; others were not able to move on from the pioneering and artisanal phase and were crushed by those competitors who managed to develop standardised and organised production, with technical investments.

De Vecchi was shaken, but resisted, betting on its future. In order to increase its capital, the two partners decided to go through a complicated process that changed the form of the company from that of a public limited company to a limited partnership type (a sort of company which has two kinds of shareholders, the “accomandanti” who were responsible only up to the amount invested, and the “accomandatari”, who were totally responsible). The new company had the same activity but more capital: 225,000 lira, of which 215,000 was deposited. On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1908 the Notary, Mr Ponzani, created the new company: Società De Vecchi & C. Accomandita per Automobili. The main (accomandatari) shareholders were Giuseppe De Vecchi and Umberto De Benedetti; out went Carillo Rovere and Giovanni Tomasina and in came the new shareholders Alessandro Maggi, Alfred Ormond Edwards<sup>3</sup> (co-founder of Milan Cricket and Football Club in 1899, now AC Milan) and Luigi Stabbi. Strada remained, but as a second-class (accomandante) partner, and his name disappeared from the company’s heading.

The 12HP remained in production, but a new car was launched: the 16HP, with a bibloc four, four gears plus reverse and shaft transmission: a much more modern model. Both cars were shown in Turin (with 80 exhibitors), together with the 14HP and 18HP models and even a truck: or at least so we are led to believe by an advertisement published for the Motor Show just before the company change (and it in fact still used the De Vecchi Strada & C. name). In another ad published a few days later in the *Stampa Sportiva* the 12HP and 16HP models were described as “perfection in today’s conception of the automobile”.

## The first races

A good communication activity was needed to support the company: consequently, a few weeks later, De Vecchi decided to enter two motor cars in the speed trials planned for April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1908 on the straight between Padua and Bovolenta.

This was not their racing debut: that had taken place two years previously, in April 1906, when Giulio Sir-

tori drove a D.V.S.C. (according to the way the car was registered) in the first category of the Milano-San Remo, the one for chassis costing between 4,000 and 8,000 lira. This had not been a great success, as Sirtori’s name is shown on the list of starters but not on that of winners (a Taurinia advertisement, published in many issues of *Stampa Sportiva*, boasts of the fact that the brand had beaten Otav, Rapid and De Vecchi). The second De Vecchi, driven by Federico Moro, presumably did not finish.

Sirtori himself was not unknown: in 1908 he drove a Züst in the New York to Paris raid, crossing the whole American continent up to the Bering Strait then driving across Siberia and Europe to Paris. An epic adventure.

He was probably the son of Mrs Faina, Sirtori’s father’s widow, who sat on the De Vecchi Board.

After that first racing experience, many things changed in 1908. Both De Vecchis entered were in the 1<sup>st</sup> Category, which was based on a maximum weight of 650 kg and a bore of no more than 80 mm (in the 6<sup>th</sup> Category they were up to 1,100 kg and 130 mm). One car was driven by De Vecchi himself, and the second by a Mr La Manna. The pre-race checks were so strict that they had to dismantle the cylinders in front of the marshals, allowing them to watch and measure. De Vecchi obtained a very positive result, as the car driven by the Founder won its category, at the average speed of 63.683 km/h (39.80 mph), driving the 10 kilometres in 9 minutes 25.3 seconds and winning the Silver Plate.

The car was most probably a 10/12 HP, with a bibloc four-cylinder engine and chain drive: a revamped version of the first 10/12 HP which was mentioned in the 1904/5 catalogue. But it had some details worth considering. The gearbox was not mounted along the longitudinal axis of the chassis and the engine had a light fanned flywheel (under licence from Daimler Benz); it therefore did not have a separate fan with its transmission and power absorption problems. The lightened masses enabled 1,800 rpm, while other chassis managed just 1,200 to 1,500. Hence more power, even with a small bore, and brilliant performance. The rear axle was a small

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3. Why a British sports manager should be interested in the Italian automotive industry is a not a mystery. It is indirectly explained by Ettore Conti in his diary (*“Dal Taccuino di un Borghese”*), when he described the managerial class in Milan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century as a composite group, led by strong characters, cohesive and at the same time ready to mix with other classes of the city’s elite. He writes how they were used to meeting for breakfast at the Caffè Cova in Via Montenapoleone in Milan in a way reminiscent of the famous Caffè Burello in Turin. And when he says that Edwards was a close friend of Pirelli... everything is clear.

design and execution masterpiece having the tubes between the differential and the chain-wheels with a conical shape, forged and drilled then bored in pairs to guarantee alignment, in order to minimise the risk of shaft failure, which was quite common in those days. This axle layout was patented and the patent was given to Daimler Benz in exchange for that of the fanned flywheel.

## News from the Press

So 1908 brought new capital, good racing results (therefore publicity) and positive press. De Vecchi decided to print a catalogue, described in a detailed way in the *Motori Cicli & Sports* magazine of June 15<sup>th</sup>. *“The catalogue is described as provisional but deals with well-defined types. We can find the whole series of 4-cylinder engined automobiles: 12 HP, 14 HP, 16 HP, 18/24 HP and the 28/35 HP model for omnibus or lorry use. There is therefore a wide selection of models in particular for city and medium touring use. As can be seen from the drawings and photos the De Vecchi Strada & C. chassis are masterfully built, are endowed with all the latest enhancements and are perfect for any type of city or touring bodywork”.*

Even more detailed was the manual compiled by Garibaldi Pedretti (*“Guida del meccanico chauffeur conduttore di automobili”*, Hoepli, 1908), a very well-known automotive writer and author of a kind of Bignami (*a condensed manual on a specific theme*) aimed at mechanics, chauffeurs and owners and published in many editions (from 1899 to 1925). It underlined the good construction quality of De Vecchi motor cars. A fastidious analysis of a specimen allows a very detailed technical data description to be compiled.

*“Automobili De Vecchi Strada & C. This company produces in particular four cylinder 12 HP motor cars. The chassis is of the pressed steel type and is able to receive any kind of bodywork (a fact already stated in the catalogue, evidently this quality allowing the fitment of bespoke bodies). Springs are very long and made of the best steel (a prophetic statement, considering the future industrial development of De Vecchi...), the rear ones being mounted laterally, outboard of the chassis.*

*The wheels have steel hubs with spherical bearings, tyre sizes are 810 x 90 mm at the front and 815 x 105 at the rear. The engine has four separate cylinders with driven valves, with a governor which allows the speed to vary between 150 and 1,400 rpm. This governor has a hand control on the steering wheel together with the ignition timing. The accelerator pedal works very smoothly, proving its perfect construction. The ignition works with a high tension Bosch magneto with normal spark plugs devoid of any complication as found on more normal systems. The special constant-level carburettor has an additional automatic air intake and gives the engine a perfect and constant mix allowing a silent and regular drive with minimum consumption (which is not quantified though). Cooling is ensured by a*

*centrifugal pump and a honeycomb radiator of large surface; in any case the fan built into the flywheel helps to enhance engine cooling. Thanks to this system the engine can work very slowly with the car stationary without the risk of overheating. The gearbox is of the train balladeur type, with three speeds and reverse; top gear is direct drive built on roller bearings; the differential is mounted in unit. The gears are machined in the best Krupp nickel steel; they operate in grease and are managed with a single lever. Brakes give plenty of peace of mind in terms of readiness and safe, smooth working. There are two: a transmission brake on the differential, working constantly in grease and an expansion one on the gears, operating on the rear wheels. The first is managed by a pedal and the second by a hand lever by the driver's side. Final transmission is by chain, with everything working with roller bearings.*

*The steering is completely irreversible, of the worm and roller type. On the wheel there are two levers: one for the accelerator and one for the ignition. Lubrication of the chassis components is particularly accurate, as the good behaviour and reliability of the motor car depends on it. Particular mention is due to the engine and gearbox lubrication, which takes place thanks to a simple and precise automatic distributor. This is mounted on the front firewall and works by pressure from the engine exhaust. Delivery of petrol is also automatic and pressurised”.* This Milanese manufacturer entered 1909 with good omens. From June 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, coinciding with the inauguration of the Automobile Club's new building, an Automobile Exhibition was held. The young company decided to take part (stand N. 52, where a special testimonial was present: the racing driver Beppe Tamagni), adding to the 10/12 HP model the new 2.8-litre Tipo A 16/20 HP, already shown at the previous year's Turin Show.

In its June 1<sup>st</sup> issue *Motori Cicli & Sports* carried a complete report. On both models the chassis was pressed steel with a narrower front, the engine bloc four-cylinder with symmetric driven valves, automatic carburettor and high tension magneto ignition. The great breakthrough was the 16/20's cardan shaft transmission. The nice advertisement reproduced on page 17 underlined this dualism: under the company's logo (two hands on the steering wheel within a circle), the two chassis, with chain and cardan shaft final transmission, were shown and well-described with their fiscal power rating.

The habit of describing models according to their HP was important, as the amount of road tax depended on power output. Power was therefore more important than swept volume... for fiscal reasons. In May 1909 *Motori Cicli & Sports* magazine published the imminent new annual taxes: up to 6 HP the tax was 90 lira; up to 12 HP 140 lira; up to 16 HP 180 lira; up to 24 HP 220 lira, up to 40 HP 300 lira; up to 60 HP 400 lira; over 60 HP was 500 lira. The law was in force from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1910. A new model, the 4.1-litre 20/30 HP with shaft drive, was launched at

the 1910 Turin Show, which was one of the period's most important, with 10,000 square metres of covered space and up to 206 exhibitors. The new model still had a bibloc engine: the first monobloc engine was to come the following year, on the new 16/20 and 20/30 HP versions. It was probably one of these to be shown at the "Esposizione Internazionale delle Industrie e del Lavoro", held in Turin in 1911 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italy's union, where Giuseppe De Vecchi was awarded the diploma and gold medal "for co-operation". De Vecchi was awarded the prize with the 11<sup>th</sup> Group, Class 60 (motor cars, motor bikes, motor boats), for showing the petrol-powered 16/20 HP chassis and the steam lorry and bus chassis with coke combustion built on a Purrey-Exshaw licence. It was a patent originally filed by a Valentin Purrey of Bordeaux (France) on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1905 ("Générateur multitubulaire de vapeur surchauffée", and later taken over by John Henry Exshaw of Arcachon (F) in May 1911 and registered in Turin on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1911, no. 24739, as stated by the Italian Kingdom's Official Gazette of December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1911.

## The great races

That year became crucial in the history of De Vecchi for other, more important reasons, even if, at the time, this was not evident. In 1908 a young man from Veneto started work in the workshop. His name was Antonio Ascari and he had just arrived in Milan with his family of small tradesmen. He had some mechanical experience, gained in a village bicycle repair shop: but at De Vecchi he developed fast. He did not stay long though: after being advised by someone from his original village he emigrated to Brazil with his brother Amedeo, looking for a better future, presumably in 1909. It is not clear if he just left the company or if he had an agreement to sell De Vecchis in Brazil, but it is somehow unlikely that he could think of selling cars in that country's North East (Belem). In 1911, after his brother's death from yellow fever, he decided to return to Italy. We don't know if he returned to De Vecchi officially or, more probably, if he started a business of general automobile trade and service, working with De Vecchis too. Anyway, at the beginning of WW1 he founded an aeroplane repair workshop (Falco), which curiously had the same address as De Vecchi in Via Peschiera.

Among these hypotheses, one thing is certain: he drove a De Vecchi in the Modena Regularity Criterium of 1911, albeit without spectacular results. This was his racing debut, his very first race, and a not so good photograph shows him in the car with two Marshals, Castoldi and Gioncada. Here is therefore one of the greatest automotive champions of the first quarter of the century (he was to die in 1925), in turn the father of a champion, Alberto Ascari, having a non-marginal

experience at De Vecchi. The "Criterium di Regolarità di Modena" (23-29 April 1911) was a "six days" with very complicated rules with tests on different routes, over a total of 1,500 km, to be driven at a speed under 50 km/h. There were five legs, starting and finishing in Modena (1<sup>st</sup> of 339 km; 2<sup>nd</sup> 247; 3<sup>rd</sup> 280, 4<sup>th</sup> 404 and 5<sup>th</sup> 230).

The second car entered by De Vecchi was driven by Ugo Sivocci, who joined the company as a chauffeur, mechanic and road tester and remained until 1920, before moving to CMN. The drivers had a 16/20 HP four cylinder monobloc 90x110 for Ascari and a 20/30 HP four cylinder monobloc 80x130 for Sivocci. Ascari had the race number 13... which on this occasion did not prove to be unlucky: in the 3<sup>rd</sup> leg he was disqualified due to "irregular driving", i.e. not allowing another driver to pass him.

The Royal Cup was won by a SPA driven by Augusto Spadoni; the Chamber of Commerce Cup by a Lancia driven by Count Isolani; Sandonnino with a Scat won the Automobile Club d'Italia gold medal; Ernesto Ceirano, in another Scat, the Touring Club medal. As a matter of fact, all were Turinese cars.

## New models and new names

Meanwhile, De Vecchi was updating its production. At the end of 1910, as reported by *Motori, Cicli & Sports* (28.11-4.12.1910), there were four models, all with four cylinders 100x140 mm: the 20/30 HP in two versions, one with bibloc engine and chain drive, and the other with monobloc and shaft drive, and a difference of 100 rpm for the bibloc (from 1,200 to 1,300). The others were two versions of the 16/20 HP, both shaft-driven and powered by a bibloc 90x110 engine or a monobloc 80x130, both with a 1,350 rpm range. Then, the industrial vehicles: a three ton 20/30 HP 110x140 lorry and a five ton 28/40 HP, 120x140.

Finally there was road sweeper powered by the 20/30 HP 110x140 engine. This product was strategic for De Vecchi and used the Guerrini patents for the sweeping system (the licences were owned by the road maintenance company Gola, Conelli & C.). The vehicle was much liked by the Milan authorities: its brush was spinning at a constant rate whatever the vehicle's speed, even when stationary or reversing it maintained the same speed and direction. The dirt was collected and "launched into the container". An area one and half metres wide was swept and, at a speed of 12 km/h, a surface of 18,000 square metres was cleaned. Enough to enthuse any city manager.

Between 1911 and 1912 a new denomination system was adopted with the Type A, B, C, D and EW. The first was the usual 16/20 HP 90x110 bibloc; the second was the 20/30 HP 100x130 bibloc; the others were the 25/35 HP 4-cylinder monobloc 110x150

(Type C<sup>4</sup>), the 15/20 HP 4-cylinder long stroke 80x130 monobloc (Type D) and the 20/25 HP 4-cylinder 90x130 monobloc (Type E). All had cardan shaft and a four speed plus reverse transmission (as described by *Motori Cicli & Sports* in the 22-30.12.1912 issue). It is also very interesting to read about their prices, as reported in the magazine's tables. They seem to be quoted for the complete motor car, even if at the time the manufacturer was only selling the chassis and the customer then decided what kind of body to have fitted. The price range went from 9,500 lira for the Type D to 13,000 for the Type C; in between there were the Type A (10,000 lira) B (12,500 lira) and E (11,500). Was it a lot or was it in line with market conditions? As a comparison, Bianchi sold its shaft-driven touring 25/35 HP four cylinder monobloc 100x140 for 14,000 lira; Scat its shaft-driven 25/35 HP, 100x150 cc, for 12,000 lira and SPA its shaft-driven 25/35 HP 100x140 for 15,000 lira.

These prices were very similar to that of the Type C (monobloc 25/35 HP 110x150): they were thus in line with the market.

On June 13<sup>th</sup> of the same year (1912) Ettore Strada, 'accomandante' partner with Giuseppe De Vecchi, sold his shares for 5,500 lira to Umberto De Benedetti, who was already a shareholder since the beginning. Giuseppe De Vecchi's original partner thus left the scene: that of the Via Bertani workshop, of the first motorcycle, and of the first light car; meanwhile Mr De Benedetti's (a civil engineer and landowner) holding grew stronger and became the most important: from 100,000 lira to 105,500, compared with Giuseppe Borioli's 8,500 lira, the 7,500 of the Notary Casalbore, De Vecchi's own 11,500, 5,000 owned by Sirtori's widow Mrs Adele Farina, Alessandro Maggi's 8,000, Paolo Mezzanotte's 20,500, Alfred Ormond Edwards's 10,000, Carlo Rogorini's 13,000, Luigi Stabbia's 5,000 and Giovanni Taccani's 20,500.

After one year (*MC&S* 31.12.1913), only three models were in production, each offered with normal or extended wheelbase. All had a monobloc four cylinder engine and shaft drive, the normal wheelbase of 2.95 m and were fitted with steel wheels. Type D was a 15/20 HP 80x130; Type E a 20/25 HP 90x130; and Type F a 25/30 HP 90x140. The prices varied from 9,500 lira for the normal Type D up to 12,750 for the long wheelbase Type F. As a comparison, the Feroldi motor car, a four cylinder 90x130 of very similar swept volume, power and dimensions, was 9,000 lira; the 20/40 HP 100x140 Bianchi was 14,000 lira; and the Nazzaro 20/30 HP 100x140 12,000 lira. Once again, De Vecchi's offering was nicely tuned for the market.

And talking about the market: "A new grand showroom for the exhibition of their motor cars has just been opened in Corso Sempione 8, Milan by the De Vecchi & C. Company.

There, new model chassis as well as complete cars are shown and destined for Italian and foreign representatives and local customers." This was reported by *MC&S* on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1913. This was not a normal year: the grand showroom was prepared and opened during De Vecchi's most successful year, finally supported by some sporting results which had previously not materialised. An important feat was gaining third and sixth places in one of Europe's toughest and most difficult races: the 8<sup>th</sup> Targa Florio, run on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> May over 1,050 km.

## The years of the Great Races

Stating that it was a very hard race is not a journalistic exaggeration! First leg: Palermo – Messina – Acireale – Catania – Siracusa – Modica – Terranova – Girgenti. Second: Girgenti – Castelvetro – Marsala – Trapani – Alcamo – Partinico – Palermo. The roads: "very narrow and in poor condition", as described by *Stampa Sportiva* on May 11<sup>th</sup>, with plenty of "dangerous hairpins and ravines, deep holes..." 37 cars were registered, 33 started, only 15 finished the first leg and 12 managed to finish the race. "The Nazzaro, Aquila, Lancia and De Vecchi worked perfectly and the added drivers' ability granted them the first places in the general ranking; and De Vecchi is the company with more representatives among the first to arrive" (S.S. 18.05.1913). 'Gloria' (nom de course of Alberto Marani, De Vecchi's Padua agent between 1912 and 1914, a very good chauffeur, future military driver in the First World War, for various Generals), placed third, took a total of 20 hours 48 mins 20 sec (while the time of the winner, Nazzaro, was 19h 18m 20s). The second De Vecchi driver, Sivocci, came home sixth in 22h 47m 31s (while 12<sup>th</sup> and last took more than 26 hours).

Both had a 15/20 HP, Type D: and the press underlined that, paradoxically, all 12 cars to reach the finish were series production motors, while all the cars specially created for the Sicilian race were forced to retire with serious failures or bad accidents. And, we should add, the De Vecchis had the smallest displacement of all the cars participating, and could count on much lower resources in comparison to the Fiat, Mercedes or Ford competitors. A very good photograph, owned by the De Vecchi family, shows Sivocci and Giuseppe De Vecchi on board their respective automobiles in the Parco Sempione in Milan, before leaving for Palermo.

Even more extraordinary is the photograph in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (AS archive): it shows the gathering of the drivers for weighing and scrutineering. Among the many motor cars, partly obscured by a crowd of sportsmen in bowler hats,

4. Originally the Tipo C had a twin-block 100x140 mm engine; it had already been modified in late 1912.

we can see Snipe's no. 7 Scat, Giordano's no. 12 car, Tangazzi's no. 5 Fiat, Beria's no. 2 Aquila, 'Gloria's' no. 36 De Vecchi, Marsaglia's no. 8 Aquila and Baldoni's no. 18 Lancia.

On the same day the Targa Florio started (May 11<sup>th</sup>), the Turin Motor Show (IX Esposizione Internazionale di Automobili 26 aprile-11 maggio 1913) closed its doors for the last time before the Great War. It had been a great success, as testified by its 130 exhibitors and 50,000 visitors, underlined by the launch of an important new car, the 8,000 lira Fiat Zero. Was De Vecchi there? It must have been difficult to manage two simultaneous events so far apart, and we do not have positive confirmation: but presumably they would not have wanted to skip such a show.

In September De Vecchi achieved the second important result of the season: a very good placing in the Parma – Poggio di Berceto, organised by Pro Parma as a side event to the Verdi celebrations on the 28<sup>th</sup> (SS. 5<sup>th</sup> October 1913). The race had 29 registered participants, divided into four displacement categories, and was organised over a 53 km route. Sivocci came home 2<sup>nd</sup> in the second category (2500 cc, with the same 15/20 HP used on the Targa Florio), 5<sup>th</sup> overall and Gold Medal, with a time of 47m 1.2s.

Once again we find Ugo Sivocci's name: constant for his presence, his results and his loyalty to the company. Sivocci was not one of those legendary drivers whose name was shouted by the excited crowds. He was one of those precious but obscure gentlemen, more testers than racing drivers, irreplaceable men who knew no fatigue and who carried out hard and long development work behind their more extrovert colleagues. Born in 1885, he joined De Vecchi aged around 20 and remained until C.M.N. acquired the Via Vallazze plant, as we shall see. At C.M.N. he continued his racing activities, making a fundamental acquaintance with Enzo Ferrari, with whom he developed a friendship that the Commendatore would remember all his life. Sivocci's own life was unfortunately cut short in 1923 when, by then an Alfa Romeo driver, he perished during testing for the 1<sup>st</sup> European Grand Prix.

Let's go back to 1914, that fateful year not only for De Vecchi, but for millions of people. On May 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> the ninth Targa Florio was held, nobody suspecting those were the last days of peace before a terrible conflict would engulf Europe. The rules, like the previous year, were based on two legs; the first, on May 24<sup>th</sup>, from Palermo to Termini, Patti, Messina, Catania and Siracusa; the second, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, from Siracusa to Noto, Modica, Terranova, Girgenti, Marsala, Trapani and Palermo.

De Vecchi entered two 20/25 HP cars (one for Sivocci, one for 'Gloria'); their 35 competitors were driving Scat, Aquila Italiana, Alfa, Beccaria, Nazzaro, Caesar,

Fiat, Diatto, Isotta-Fraschini, De Dietrich, Martini, Ford, Renault and De Dion. Not bad... automotive Gotha.

Here is another wonderful image of the parc fermé, also held by BNF (AS archive). In the foreground, the white no. 1 De Vecchi driven by 'Gloria' and Campari's Alfa no. 5.

Oddly, *Stampa Sportiva*, one of the most authoritative magazines of the time for any sporting event, describing the first part of the race mixed it up, citing the 'Gloria' motor car driven by De Vecchi. "*The fight becomes hard once more between the four mentioned makes: Aquila... Nazzaro... Gloria... Scat...*" (SS, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1914). In the final classification report, on the other hand, "Gloria" the driver was correctly mentioned aboard his De Vecchi, having been classified second with a time of 18h 41m 53s, an average speed of 56 km/h, behind Scat's Ernesto Ceirano, winner with 16h 51m 31s, on a route the same length as the 1913 edition's (1,050 km).

And it could have been even better, as Sivocci had been leading for practically the whole race before losing control and the victory; at that point 'Gloria' pushed hard and, despite a few technical problems delaying him, managed a spectacular comeback, taking second place.

A few days later, three more important races for De Vecchi, which was enjoying the success of their reliable and competitive light car. The first was the Coppa Florio, run on 31<sup>st</sup> May, a week after the Targa, over a 450 km route. Not the best result, with Sivocci sixth and 'Gloria' retired.

More interesting was the 1<sup>st</sup> Circuito Automobilistico Toscano, run in June over a 65 km route from San Piero a Sieve to Scarperia, Firenzuola, Passo della Futa and back to San Piero a Sieve, to be driven four times for a total distance of 260 km. A good client of De Vecchi's, Mr Pierattini, finished in third place in the second category (displacement up to 3,500 cc), covering the route in 6h 0m 11s, driving a 25/35 HP. He was awarded the Silver Medal of the Agriculture Ministry and that of the Province (SS no. 26, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1914). Finally, in July, the Parma – Poggio di Berceto. The three De Vecchi drivers were classified as follows: Sivocci second in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Class (44'39"); Castoldi fourth in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Class in 46 minutes; 'Gloria' sixth in the second Class with 57'1" (SS no. 27, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1914). The *Stampa Sportiva* issue reporting the race was published on the same day as the Sarajevo shooting, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914. It was the end of the game, not just for De Vecchi. Europe was about to be engulfed in the horror of a world war, and very little space was left for civilian peacetime production.

In 1915 De Vecchi continued production of its Type F (20/30 HP, 4-cylinder monobloc, 90x140), H (25/35 HP, 4-cylinder monobloc, 90x150), used for

light trucks and ambulances, and the Type D (15/20 HP, 4-cylinder monobloc, 80x130); in 1916 only the Type H remained, of which a batch was supposed to be acquired by the Russian government. These are the last vehicles built by the De Vecchi company, which was changing fundamentally.

In October of that year, De Vecchi remained as sole main (accomandatario) shareholder, De Benedetti became a partner (accomandante) and a new group of investors, the shipping entrepreneur brothers Gino, Pietro and Antonio Verni from Cattolica entered as 'accomandante' partners, whilst Enea Malaguti<sup>5</sup> was a new 'accomandatario' shareholder. Capital was now 625,000 lira.

The following year, more radical changes came in October 1917: the capital was reduced to 500,000 after De Benedetti left the company, and at the same time it was raised to two and a half million by the Verni brothers. A week later the Limited Partnership ('Accomandita') form was abandoned and the company became S.A. Officine Meccaniche De Vecchi "*with the aim of manufacturing and trading aero engines, motor vehicles, cars and motor launches and any of their components*" as stated in its Statute.

Production was transferred from the original Via Peschiera to a new and modern plant in Via Vallazze 108: the plan was to continue making trucks and cars, but mainly aero engines (more or less 300 units of the Type D designed by Luigi Colombo).

The first Board saw Gino Verni as Chairman and Piero Pogliani<sup>6</sup>, Antonio Verni, Giuseppe De Vecchi and Enea Malaguti. The last two were named as Managing Directors for the first two years.

The founder did not stay long though. In September 1918 he resigned as MD and the company changed its name to Costruzioni Meccaniche Nazionali. It was to cease all activities in 1922, moving to Pontedera and creating the first nucleus of the local aeronautical factory, later to become Piaggio.

In 1919 Giuseppe De Vecchi created an 'individual company' by the name of Società Italiana Molle Acciaio De Vecchi, with a capital of 4 million lira and himself and Enea Malaguti as MDs.

A link between these two very different moments is a page of *Motori Aero Cicli & Sports*, in the same issue as the report on the 1919 Parma – Poggio di Berceto, the first Italian post-war race. Antonio Ascari took part with an old Fiat S57/14B and won, beating Bugatti and Alfa Romeo cars. The magazine published a letter written by Ascari to the new De Vecchi spring factory, in which the driver acknowledged that the valve springs worked perfectly and the role they had in his victory ("*I am pleased to inform you that the valve springs that you urgently produced for me and that I fitted in the engine of my Fiat, despite the effort of the Parma-Berceto race, worked perfectly, without suffering any kind of damage*"). The

letter was followed by a De Vecchi advertisement in that candid way of publicity habits in the old days. Ascari lent his name as a testimonial of De Vecchi's move from motor car to component manufacturer.

Thus the De Vecchi automotive company disappeared, contributing to that very high casualty list in the industry that we described earlier. Of the 37 manufacturers active in Milan from the late 1800s to the 1930s, only three, the 8%, reached their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Bianchi, Isotta-Fraschini and Alfa Romeo). Just six (16%) lasted between 15 and 30 years and 28 lasted for less than 15 years: no less than 75%.

54% of them did not reach their 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Why did De Vecchi leave motor car production to create a spring company? Surely there must have been more than just one reason. Perhaps the incredible growth of the industry and the development of motorisation in wider and wider parts of society, as the war had demonstrated, had persuaded him that he could not reach the very high capital needed to develop his company into a big industrial organisation, and that survival of the small factories would become more and more difficult. The standardisation of production demanded an organisation of work which was far from his culture and habit, and perhaps from his skill and ability too. Very smartly, he identified a promising sector, probably having experienced, as a user, the low quality of the available springs. This way he could go back to the automotive industry, not as a manufacturer but as a component supplier. From the mid 1920s, Molle Acciaio supplied its products not only to bicycle and motorcycle (Giuseppe De Vecchi's first love) manufacturers and gym equipment, but also to the car, rail and ship industries.

What is then the role of De Vecchi in the general automobile history of Milan and Italy? Certainly it was an important and solid enterprise, able to produce a motor car that was light, reliable and compact, whose construction was smart, solid and elegant and able to sell Daimler the licence for its rear axle.

It was a symbol of the Milanese industry of the time: founded and strongly managed by a single man through its entire life, so much so that he decided when it was time for it to die. At the same time, a

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5. Enea Malaguti: president of the Board of Directors of S.A. Officine Maiocchi (1918) and Vice-President of Milano-Films (1917); founder of Enea Malaguti & C., a public limited company for the import and distribution of coffee and colonial products (1915), auditor of the S.A. di Navigazione Automotrice for domestic routes (1910).

6. Piero Pogliani, member of the Board of Directors of the Banca Italiana fra Appaltatori Costruttori Fornitori e Rappresentanti (1910), liquidator of S.A. Italiana Ernesto Comi (1920), member of the Board of Directors of Titano-S.A.Fabbrica Lombarda Accumulatori Elettrici (1939).

‘crossroads company’ which saw some of the most important names of Italian automotive history, like Antonio Ascari and Ugo Sivocci.

Moreover, a company which did not waste its competences and excellence, destined to continue with an important product for the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century... in the end it has been one of the Milanese mechanical companies with the longest life.

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# ECLA

## History of a Brand

*Donatella Biffignandi*

Among the pages of the beautiful catalogue reproduced in the preceding pages, we have noted a curious image, showing a commercial vehicle built by De Vecchi for Ecla... what was Ecla?

It was a very well-known shoe polish, even cited by Leonardo Sciascia in his book “Occhio di capra” (1984), in which he told how this Brand name came to be an eponymous name for the product, long after the brand became extinct: “ECLA. *The brand that gives the shine to your shoes. The name is that of a vanished brand: and it must have been the first one which people living in Racalmuto came to know. Even when I was a kid, the ECLA brand was no more, the common brands being Brill and Marga. But they were called ‘ecla’, as are those which are still on the market today: not a brand anymore, but a product. Similarly, in the nearby village of Favara, the bus is called ‘pintaiota’, from the Greek letters penta and iota, which were in the logo of the first company which managed the bus service between the village and the town (and here Sciascia was possibly wrong: it is more likely that “pintaiota” came from the Lancia “Pentajota” chassis produced between 1924 and 1929, often used for buses; Author’s Note.) Before the arrival of Ecla the black goat’s leather shoes were shone with*

*tallow and black carbon; for those of any other colour there was only tallow”.*

Many images were used for Ecla advertisements around the 1910s, when they frequently featured camels and Bedouins – perhaps due to the Libyan war? From them we can also learn that it was produced in the factory in Milan’s Bovisa neighbourhood, and that it was owned by Società Italiana Parma Landriani, headquartered at Via Cagnola 10, Milan. The two drawings reproduced here tell us that “*without mentioning the acid-based products, known for their bad smell, those based on essences (turpentine), which you can immediately tell as they catch fire easily, have the action of taking the fat away from the leather, and consequently its suppleness too, thus generating wrinkles and cuts. This does not happen with Ecla, which explains its incredible success*”, As a matter of fact, we can see on the left a burning shoeshine tin, and an Ecla on the right.

The image of the very elegant gentleman, with shining shoes and gaiters, is constant in all the communications of the brand. And anyway, in 1921 Ecla was still active, as witnessed by the advertisement in the *Stampa Sportiva* of September 25<sup>th</sup>; it is the last advertisement we know of.

# Giuseppe Ricordi: he was the first

*from unpublished research by Gianni Cancellieri*

When Giuseppe Ricordi (1853-1902), third of the nine sons of Tito I (1811-1888) and grandson of Giovanni Ricordi (1785-1853) who in 1808 founded the eponymous music publishing company, met his untimely death, *La Stampa Sportiva* wrote: *A man who represented one of the most important forces in his drive to conquer the future has left us. With the soul of an artist and a gentleman, Giuseppe Ricordi felt that fever of the new and the better, which is a founding factor of our modern age. The latest discoveries of human genius, and all the directions in which the sporting activities were developing in Italy, had in him an admirer and apostle. The first iron bicycles with their wooden wheels found him perched on their high saddles during the first races run on the Milan 'bastioni' (the elevated avenues west of the city centre -NdT) or the first trips between Milan and Monza.*

*Ricordi accompanied the bicycle up to its latest transformation: the automobile, passing through other passions such as the photo-camera and the steam-boat. He became a photography entrepreneur even before an automotive one, and the name of the Pagliano & Ricordi Company, founded by him, remains one of the most respected of its time.*

*Automobilism had in Ricordi one of its pioneers, and in 1893 Milan saw the first noisy and shaky steam coach built by him. From 1895 he was the general distributor for Benz, and later he introduced to Italy the new names of the foreign industry: Décauville, De Dion, De Dietrich, Stanley, Rochet, Panhard, Cottureau, all the foreign makes which were successful in Italy passed through the Ricordi Garage in Milano. Even the first and main exhibitions and meetings of the new sport had in Ricordi a powerful leader and co-operator.*

*Of small build and impeccable sporting attire, always with a cigarette between his lips, his figure was well-known to those taking part in the first motor car events, of which the late Ricordi was a confirmed advocate, with both his words and his work.*

*He was now preparing a new and grand garage in Porta Tenaglia, better adapted to the needs of successful motor sport and its industry, when the disease hit him and after many months of pitiful illness took him, leaving his loving family and the Italian automotive world bereft.*

*For his sons, whom he wanted as colleagues in his venture, in the sorrow a ray of light remains: the example of his life and the goal of completing his project."*

From an early age, Giuseppe Ricordi's interest was far from his family's business (the publishing house), which saw his brother Giulio's (1840-1912) dedication. Giuseppe was fascinated by mechanics and by the motor car, whose potential he soon foresaw, starting an import activity as early as 1895. We can read in Milleruote (Editoriale Domus-Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1973, vol. IX, pag. 113) that he was *"the most illustrious among those dealers who, at the beginning of the century, co-ordinated with the local coachbuilders to manage the fitting of imported French or German chassis in order to offer clients a complete motor car and reduce the impact of customs duties, which were very high when importing a finished vehicle. There were quite a few Benz-Ricordi, a denomination behind which was a normal Benz chassis with rear horizontal engine and belt drive, carrying a body by Belloni or Sala. The Ricordi stand at the 1901 Esposizione Internazionale dell'Automobile di Milano showed, in addition to the Benzes, also cars built by Rochet-Petit, Panhard & Levassor and De Dietrich: in total no less than 15 vehicles. Also there was the first four cylinder car designed by Ettore Bugatti, shown as a gesture of generous patronage. Ricordi created, in his garage of Porta Tenaglia where in the meantime Coutterau and Clément automobiles had become available, areas for meetings and catering for passing automobilists, as well as an office offering tourist information and services, run with the co-operation of the Automobile Club de France.*

*Giuseppe Ricordi died suddenly on April 21<sup>st</sup> 1902, but the company continued its activities, while Ricordi & Molinari - a separate company founded in 1905 by his son Max - was also active."*

It is interesting to note that "died suddenly" differs from the description in *Stampa Sportiva*, which reported "many months of pitiful illness"; and also that the Porta Tenaglia garage seems to be a working and proved reality for Milleruote, while for the sporting weekly it was still under development.

In any case, Giuseppe Ricordi was remembered by all as one of the driving forces of the birth of the Italian automotive industry, with the great responsibility of having introduced to the country motor cars with internal combustion engines. His headquarters were in Milan, Via Quintino Sella 5, near Piazza Castello

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where he, as general agent for Italy of the Maison Parisienne de Voitures Automobiles, as well as for the patent Benz vehicles with two to twelve places, had major growth between 1898 and 1900: so much so that the cars were regularly registered in the sporting events as “Ricordi-Benz”. Here is what a Ricordi advertisement said:

*Giuseppe Ricordi - Milano - Via Quintino Sella, 5, angolo Piazza Castello – automotive cars of every shape, 2 to 12 passenger, Benz Patent – car engines from ½ to 9 HP – Prizes won: Paris-Bordeaux race – Paris-Marseille race, 4 cars, 3 prizes – Marseille-Nice race, 3 cars, 3 prizes – Italian Agent for Maison Parisienne de Voitures Automobiles – Illustrated catalogues for 20 cents in stamps – Storing and selling the famous De Dion & Bouton motor tricycles – Spare parts and accessories – Repair shop.*

His activities in the period are confirmed by a complete feature in the bi-weekly “L’Automobile”, the official magazine of the Club Automobilisti d’Italia (III year, n. 20, 15 October 1900, pp. 1-4). *Around ten years ago, Cav. Giuseppe Ricordi brought the first automotive coach to Italy and God only knows how noisy and ugly this machine was. But thanks to Ricordi’s intelligent and active obstinacy, Italian automobilism came to life and soon developed, despite the numerous obstacles that his natural conservatism created. He founded the Veloce-Club of Milan and he organised many races and motoring parties, promoting the public’s passion for our sport. Surely, if the region’s conditions and the co-operation of his fellow members had helped him, this industry’s development would have been much greater and much faster than it was. After having practised automobilism for his own pleasure, Cav. G. Ricordi took the Agency for many of the best foreign manufacturers, such as Rochet, Décauville, Dietrich and Benz. Indeed a Benz carried out the long trip, with test and publicity purpose, from Milan to Naples and back in 1894. But back then the vehicles were accused of being too clumsy and heavy, and Mr. Cav. Ricordi, helped by the well-known Belloni coach factory in Milan, dedicated himself to changing the form of these vehicles and making sure that their look left nothing to be desired.*

*That was the beginning. Then the machine was changed and modified. Thanks to his mechanical aptitude, Mr. Cav. Ricordi did not miss any opportunity to enhance this new and so interesting contraption.*

*He began importing the raw chassis, and all he needed then were the ash frames for the bodies. Finally only the engines were brought from abroad, and a good number of vehicles were assembled and built in these Milanese workshops. The “Dos-à-dos” owned by Mr. Ferrante from Brescia, as the “Vittoria” of ing. Cobianchi from Omegna (with 9 HP), are two perfect motor cars, due to their elegance as well as their solidity of build and functioning quality [...]*

A very detailed analysis of the Benz-Ricordi follows, with three illustrations. In addition to the detailed technical features and performance, we learn that “the Ricordi company only brings the chassis from Benz, while

*the body is made by the famous concern Cesare Sala of Milan, with their customary luxury and elegance. In winter, when work slows down, Ricordi builds the chassis too, importing only engines from Benz, and these chassis come out perfect in every sense, well-finished and detailed, thus providing comfort and very good results. Every Ricordi motor car is fitted with Continental tyres, as only these have given better results than any other coming from all the best tyre producers.”*

The Benz chassis is described as *adaptable to any form of coachwork and five types are available for it from Ricordi: 2 place Duc with dickey seat (this is the car for regular use, especially fit for those who buy a motor car for its constant service rather than for touring), Dos-à-dos (a very well-conceived motor car, as it is aesthetic, compact, takes 4 people comfortably, and with just two passengers the two empty rear places don’t look bad), racing car, able to reach 65 km/h (which besides can be used, without any change, as a very good touring car), 3 HP Comfortable (good for new drivers being of unusual simplicity) and, finally the 5 HP Comfortable, identical to the previous one but more powerful (it drove for 115 km in 2 hours 55’ 26”, which represent an average of 39,300 km to the hour, an extraordinary if not unique feat for a small car).”*

Giuseppe Ricordi has a place in automotive history also for the initiative he pursued with Baron Alberto Franchetti: the constitution of the Club Automobilisti di Milano, (16 March 1897), the first of its type in Italy, which – even if it came to an end due to a number of local crises (see Giovanni Canestrini in 50 Anni Auto e Sport, A.C.I., Roma, 1948, p. 9) – anticipated by more than one year the foundation of the Automobile Club Subalpino (Turin, November 15<sup>th</sup> 1898), later Club Automobilisti d’Italia (1899), precursor of the later Royal Automobile Club of Italy. At the time, the young Ettore Bugatti (still not 21) was already a good friend of the Ricordi household, so much so that - as Steinhauser<sup>1</sup> discovered - a special membership category was created for him in the Club Automobilisti, that of “visiting member”. This allowed him membership despite not having yet reached the necessary 21 years of age, which happened on September 1902.

In the Mauto archive in Turin there are two illustrated reports, relative to patents obtained by Giuseppe Ricordi on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1898 and February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1899. The first is about a *petrol engine with two pistons in a single cylinder with balanced movement*: practically an air-cooled engine with opposed cylinders and two pistons working on a common chamber. The second patent relates to a *modification of the first, consisting in the coupling of two units of the aforementioned engine, in such a way that 4 pistons work on a single crankshaft* (from the description of the patents).

The Ricordis (Giuseppe and at least one of his sons, Max) took part in some of the first motor races,

obtaining more than one honourable placement. As far as we know they debuted in the second “official” Italian race, the Arona-Stresa-Arona (35 km) of September 12<sup>th</sup> 1897. There are some irregularities about the finishing order of this race (perhaps a first, second and third place for Giuseppe and his sons Massimiliano and Alfredo: but we don’t know for sure the position of each of them).

Giuseppe Ricordi in a De Dion Bouton was second in the “Single-seater tricycles” category in the “Dirigibility Race” (a sort of gymkhana) which took place in the Verona Roman Amphitheatre on March 13<sup>th</sup> 1899, while Max, in an unidentified car, was eleventh among the “2 or more places Tricycles”. In the Verona-Brescia-Mantova-Verona (161 km) run the next day and won by Ettore Bugatti in a Prinetti & Stucchi 3 HP, Giuseppe Ricordi, driving a De Dion Bouton 1 3/4 HP, was fourth, still in the “Single-seater tricycles” category, while Massimiliano, in a Benz 4/5 HP (“2 or more places Tricycles”) is shown as a dnf.

Torino-Pinerolo-Avigliana-Torino (km 90) of 30 April 1899, category «2 place light cars, up to kg 400»: a Ricordi (probably Max) was third in an Aigle 4HP, while Giuseppe, in a 8HP Benz, gave up somewhere between Pinerolo and Avigliana.

Padova-Vicenza-Bassano-Treviso-Padova (220 km) on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1900: Giuseppe Ricordi was placed third in a 4 ½ HP Benz-Ricordi, preceding Massimiliano in a 14HP Benz.

Sadly, Giuseppe Ricordi died at just 51 years of age, in April 1902. Married to Briton Paula Barrett, he had three sons: Massimiliano aka Max in 1876, Alfredo in 1878 and Ugo in 1883.

His death did not mean the end of the Ricordi name in this field. The motoring passion, as we have seen, was already strong for all three of his sons, the youngest, Ugo, in particular. Despite his very young age (he was just 19 when his father passed) he was well-versed in his multifaceted activity, and he had inherited his entrepreneurship, ability and courage. He in turn had an active and rich life, with a crucial position in many a moment in this Country’s motoring history. We know he had one of Milan’s very first driving licences - probably no. 2 - (Milan’s first licences were issued in 1912, but Ugo Ricordi had certainly been driving since the beginning of the century). In 1903 he had moved to Berlin, a choice that was to be fundamental for his life. But here we leave him, waiting for the opportunity to tell, another time, his story.

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1. According to Norbert Steinhauser – important historian and the most highly regarded expert on the early period, up to 1918 – Bugatti most probably built that first motor car with a friend named Bosisio, in the Porta Tenaglia Ricordi workshop.

# Register of the minor automotive manufacturers active in the Milan area from the origins to 1925

*compiled by Donatella Biffignandi and Lorenzo Boscarelli*

The information listed here is mainly taken from the catalogue of “L’Automobile Produzione e design a Milano”, Fabbri 1990, with a few additions. The volume “*Marche Italiane Scomparse*” (nel seguito del testo, MIS), Torino, Museo dell’Automobile, 1972, has also been consulted.

## **ALMA**

**Busto Arsizio, 1906-1908**

Founded by Gaspare Monaco as Accomandita Lombarda per Motori e Automobili, in via Magenta, Busto Arsizio in 1906. Only one prototype was made and shown at the Turin Show of 1907. The company was shut down in May 1908.

## **ANZANI**

**Milano, 1922-1924**

Founded in 1922 by Alessandro Anzani, designer and builder of the aero engine used by Blériot on the first flight over the English Channel in 1909. The company built a few Anzani engined (twin cylinder, 750 cc, overhead valves, air-cooled) cyclecars which took part in many competitions. No other information is known.

## **ASTER ITALIANA**

**Milano, 1906-1908**

Engineer Silvio Schiff incorporated SIMA, Società Italiana Motori Aster, in 1906, headquartered in Milan at via Monte di Pietà 16/A, to sell engines produced by the French Aster company, and possibly manufacture them under licence in Italy. A six cylinder 2300 cc with overhead valves is also known.

## **BLANC & TREZZA**

**Milano, 1922-1924**

Founded in 1922 in via Pietro Verri 10 (later via Archimede 49) and initially active selling Hensemberger batteries. In 1923 and 1924 some electric cars were built for use as taxis.

## **BRIXIA ZÜST**

**Milano - Brescia, 1906-1912**

Founded in 1906 in Brescia (via Palazzo Vecchio 36) as a sister company to “Züst ing. Roberto Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Milano”, which produced big motor cars, in order to prepare and produce a car

of small size and moderate performance. Despite its very good features, further enhanced in the following years, it was not successful. In 1910 it was put into liquidation and in 1912 merged with the Milanese Züst; the Brescia factory was used by this company until 1917 when it was in turn merged into Officine Meccaniche già Miani Silvestri & C., which led to the birth of OM.

## **CAMONA GIUSSANI TURRINELLI**

**Milano, 1903-1919**

Incorporated in 1903 in Milan, at via Spontini 5, it had a factory in Sesto San Giovanni. At the centre of its production were the Ausonia electric vehicles: cars, vans and small buses for hotel use. They enjoyed good success and growth in their early years: between 1906 and 1907, for example, most of the postal delivery in Milan was made using Ausonia vans. The following years were not so easy: the company changed form and added the French Silencieuse electric car in 1909, but the following year, due to the unstoppable growth of the internal combustion engine, production was stopped. For many more years, until well after WW1, many Ausonia vehicles just carried on and on, as they were practically indestructible.

## **C.A.R.**

**Costruzioni Automobilistiche Riunite**

**Milano, 1924-1929**

With reference to the years covered by this essay, Alceo Verza, the founder of this company, which was based in viale Regina Margherita 32, Milan, built French GAR cars under licence. From 1927 he also built a model under the CAR brand (up to 1929).

## **CARCANO**

**Milano, 1898-1901**

Michele Alessandro Carcano, together with his son Cesare, owner of a company producing engines for bicycles, made an “automotive coach” in 1899, and the following year a small two-seater car, with a 3 HP engine, shown at the 1901 Salone dell’Automobile di Milano and offered at a price of 2.000 lira. Even if this remained a prototype (the company did not follow up with production), this venture is worth noting because a certain Carlo Maserati, the elder of the five brothers from Voghera, took part in the car’s design.

## **CMN**

### **Costruzioni Meccaniche Nazionali S.A. Milano, 1919-1923**

This company made history for being the one with which Enzo Ferrari had his racing debut, in the 1919 Targa Florio (he retired on the third lap). It had been incorporated in the same year by taking over the Officine Meccaniche De Vecchi and purchasing their factory in via Vallazze 108. The new company continued to produce De Vecchi models; in 1922 they launched two new models, with four and six cylinders. It was wound up in 1923.

## **COLOMBO**

### **Torino - Milano, 1918-1935**

Officine Colombo was founded in Turin in 1918 by a group of partners, among them ing. Luigi Colombo from Milan, who invested by putting his Milanese factory into the company. They were producing aero and truck engines. Their first motor car, Modello 9, was shown in 1923 in the Automobile Hall of the Fiera Campionaria di Milano. It was a modern vehicle, with ample use of light alloys, an overhead camshaft and inclined valves. Meanwhile the company moved to Milan and raised its capital: but the following year they ceased their automotive activities. (According to MIS they showed a three wheel light truck at the Milan Show of 1922).

## **DARRACQ ITALIANA**

### **Napoli - Milano, 1906-1910**

A direct branch of the company based in Suresnes, France. It was established in 1906 to minimise the impact of customs duties. The Managing Director was to be ing. Alexandre Darracq, part owner and manager of the Suresnes plant. The headquarters and factory were planned to be in Naples, but very soon the distance from the industrial districts of the North and the difficulties of linking Paris and Naples by sea transport led to them finding a 36.000 sq.m. area in Strada al Portello, 95, Milan, where a new plant was constructed. This was to be an historic address for the Milanese and Italian automotive industry because in 1910 the Portello plant was passed on to a group of investors from Lombardy, who were acting on behalf of the soon to be created A.L.F.A., from which Alfa Romeo was later derived.

## **DE VECCHI 1903-1919**

See the essay above.

## **DUAL & TURCONI**

### **Milano, 1899-1901**

This was a small artisanal enterprise, based in Via Mascheroni 12, Milan. In 1899 they put some light cars on sale with an interesting name: "Ideale". They

could reach a speed of 30 km/h. Allegedly one of these cars managed to drive from Milan to Paris and back: a great success for the time. Following their presence at the 1901 Milan Motor Show, no further information is known.

## **FADIN**

### **Milano, 1922-1924**

This is the brand with which the Fabbrica Automobili Officine Troubetzkoy of Milan started its motor car production in 1924, building the Derby French voitures under licence. The following year a second model was added, fitted with the French Chapuis-Dornier engine. Few units were made, and the initiative ended in 1926.

(According to MIS: Troubetzkoy directly built some models powered by Chapuis-Dornier engines and sold under the Fadin brand; previously the company had built the Derby voitures under licence).

## **F.I.A.L.**

### **Legnano, 1906-1909**

Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Legnano was founded in August, 1906 with great ambitions and capital. A single type was put on the market, designed by Guglielmo Ghioldi, the A 6/8 HP, with its typical round radiator – which had little success. The company was liquidated already in 1908 and revived in 1909 with no additional luck. Four years later it was taken over by Guglielmo Ghioldi (see dedicated entry).

## **FIGARI**

### **Milano, 1923-1925**

This was the name of an experimental motor car, designed in 1923 and built in 1925 by ing. Gian Vittorio Figari, grandson of the Figari who had managed Itala. His father, Cesare, met an early death in a motoring accident in a valveless Itala in 1914, when Gian Vittorio was just 14. The automobile, designed with ing. Francesco Bonavoglia, teacher at the Milano Politecnico, remained at the prototype stage, even though ing. Figari had completed the design of its production plant. The main reason was lack of funds, but this confirms the attraction motoring had on the Figari family.

## **FIGINI**

### **Milano, 1898-?**

"Luigi Figini" was a small concern building bicycles, opening in 1881. Many years after, at the beginning of the new century, the same Luigi Figini started a new company, in Via Vivaio 14, Milan, to continue production of his 1900 motor cycle and start building light cars (in the Via Volta workshops). The 1921 Milan Motor Show still registered a Figini voiturette. (There are some discrepancies in MIS, which reports

the address as Via Moscova 7, and a Milan-Rome trip without stating the date, and finally does not mention the 1921 Milan Show.)

## **FRANCO**

### **Milano - Sesto San Giovanni, 1910-1912**

This is an example of the many companies which were born after their product. In 1908 ingegnere Attilio Franco designed and built a prototype, which was shown at the Turin Motor Show of the same year. As this was successful, the engineer was convinced to incorporate in Milan, in early 1910, the Franco Automobili S.A., with workshops in Sesto San Giovanni. A Franco, driven by Tullio Cariolato, won the 1910 Targa Florio. Two years later the company ceased all activities.

## **FRERA**

### **Tradate - Milano, 1899-1935**

This company also started with bicycle and motorbike production in 1899 in Tradate. Six years later, in 1905, Corrado Frera opened a company in Via Carlo Alberto 33, Milan (and a plant in Tradate) to build motor cars, bicycles and motorbikes. Only very few units of a model called "Il Piccolo" were built, with no success, and production was quickly stopped. Meanwhile, Frera obtained the agency for the Züst and Zedel brands, but this activity also had a short life, ending in 1913. In 1932 the company was liquidated and in 1933 Leonardo, son of Corrado, started a new activity producing bicycles and motorcycles, which was to continue until 1946.

## **FRIGERIO**

### **Milano, 1904-1909**

In 1904 ing. Carlo Frigerio founded in Milan, at via Berchet 2, an accomandita company with the goal of producing electrically driven coaches. The name of the company was soon changed to STE (Società per la Trazione Elettrica), and the following year it moved to new headquarters at via Gorani 5, where the production of electric vehicles with trolley poles continued until 1909.

## **GALLANZI**

### **Milano, 1916-1920**

Ing. Alfredo Gallanzi bought a showroom in 1916 in via Gustavo Modena 4, Milan, to sell motor cars. In 1908 he extended his activities to car manufacture and repairs, in a nearby workshop (via Gustavo Modena 10). He had obtained from Antonio Chiribiri the licence and a stock of parts for the Siva light car, which the Torinese manufacturer had been unable to put into production. The Gallanzi car was named Ardita. It was noteworthy for its gearbox separated from the engine and in unit with the propshaft. The venture was not successful, but the name was, being used by Fiat in the '30s.

## **GARANZINI**

### **Milano, 1913-1930**

Another personal venture, based in Via Giambellino 2 in 1913. Oreste Garanzini made bicycles and motorbikes, but in 1925 created a light car prototype with a patented steering mechanism and swivelling headlamps. The venture did not have a future.

## **GHIOLDI**

### **Milano, 1913-1918**

Guglielmo Ghioldi had designed the F.I.A.L. motor car and had a well-known factory producing engines. In 1913, with his two brothers and two other partners, who were also brothers (Giovanni and Giulio Ferrari), took F.I.A.L. over and continued its activities. During the war he launched a motorcycle and a light car branded FIAL (with no full stops). This was an economy model, for which the Italian market was not yet ready, and had no success. In 1922 Ghioldi had to abandon the large Legnano headquarters, and someone said his bad luck was due to the thirteen big round windows of the building. Ghioldi was later a key figure in other automotive ventures (such as Vaghi, SAM and San Giusto).

## **GNESUTTA**

### **Milano, 1899-1900**

In 1899 ing. Adolfo Schlegel, Director of Officina Meccanica E. Gnesutta of Milan, built a light car, possibly fitted with a Welleyes engine (designed by Aristide Faccioli for Ceirano, then Fiat), or at least inspired by it. There was a curious coincidence in the company's address: Via Dante: the first Fiat plant, where the 4 HP cars with the lightly modified Welleyes engine were built, was in Corso Dante, Turin. This venture did not continue.

## **GRIMALDI**

### **Milano, 1906**

A Milanese company which specialised in the production of automotive electric motors, and showed a car in the 1906 Milan Motor Show. Nothing else is known, and this mention is only present in MIS.

## **IENA**

### **Lodi, 1922-1925**

A branch of Officine Meccaniche Tommasi & Rizzi, IENA was a small company based in Lodi which built no fewer than 150 chassis fitted with Chapuis-Dornier and CIME engines in only four years. In practice it was a cyclecar, but there also was a more sporting one-litre model. The Fiat 509 launch, with a very aggressive price (between 7500 and 8000 lira) made the sale of these little cars all but impossible, due to their price of between 13.500 and 14.500 for the chassis only.

## LENZ

**Milano, 1906-1908**

This company was set up in 1906, in Via Manzoni 41, Milan, with the aim of producing cars with the ORIA brand. At the 1907 Milan Motor Show, Lenz had two cars, designed by Giuseppe Merosi, future important Alfa Romeo engineer. Unfortunately, the company closed in 1908 even before production started.

## MAJOCCHI

**Milano, 1898-1919**

In 1900 the workshop of the Majocchi brothers built a strange three-wheel light car called Aquila, with a 1 ½ HP engine fitted over the front wheel. Despite the decision to constitute the S.A. Officine Majocchi (in via Balbo, Milan), the Aquila remained unique and production never started.

## MARCHAND

**Milano, 1895-1909**

Created in 1895 to build Orio & Marchand bicycles, it was based first in Milan then later in Piacenza. Moving on from bicycles to motor cycles and motor cars was fast, especially thanks to Giuseppe Merosi, who had been hired as chief engineer. Marchand motorcycles gained fame with their numerous victories. The first car was made in 1899, and was followed by a range of models with increasing power, of which the 1902 10 HP was built in around 100 units. Later Merosi left for Fiat (later to go to Bianchi and finally Alfa Romeo), which was very bad for the company. In 1905 it was transformed into S.A. Marchand, based in Genoa and two years later it merged with Dufaux Frère of Geneva, which was not enough to save it.

## MENTASCHI

**Milano, 1924**

This was the name of a tandem two-seater light electric car shown at the 1924 Milan Show, but which never evolved from its prototype form.

## ODETTI

**Milano, 1922-1925**

This company was founded by Fausto Odetti in via Bernina 36, Milan in 1922. "22" was the name he gave to his light car, which was powered by a two-stroke twin. Years later a 22 Sport was added, with a more powerful engine and dihedral radiator. Despite some success and production of around 20 units, the company closed in 1925. If only they had managed to build 22!

## OTAV

**Milano, 1905-1911**

Max Türkheimer was a German businessman who

came to Lombardy in the mid-1800s and in 1888 started a business trading in bicycles and associated components. Early in the new century he designed a single cylinder voiturette, planning its industrial production, and opened S.A. Officine Türkheimer per Automobili e Velocipedi (O.T.A.V.), in via Lambro 4, Milan in 1905. The car was light and economic, with two seats. A 18/24 HP with bloc 4-cylinder engine was also created, and both cars were shown at the 1906 Milan Show. Also in this case, the cheapness was not appreciated as a positive quality of the product, and in 1907 it was abandoned.

A Torinese dealer, Federico Momo, came onto the scene. He had just taken over Junior from Turin and also became a shareholder of OTAV, proposing a change of policy (he also had a role in the De Vecchi story). In his vision, OTAV would deal with light cars and Junior with more powerful models. The deal also planned the constitution of Junior & OTAV Cars Ltd in London, which was to deal mainly with the single cylinder model.

The 1907-1908 crisis weakened this venture too and in 1911 the company was liquidated. This did not stop Max Türkheimer's activities. With a brand of his own he specialised in the production of stationary engines, and his activity was to be continued by his son and grandson.

## OTTOLINI

**Milano, 1900-1901**

This venture was started by Ignazio Ottolini in 1900, in via Vivaio 12, Milan. The idea was to produce a small single cylinder motor car with a tonneau body, but it never materialised.

## PERFETTI

**Milano, 1922-1923**

Officina Meccanica Perfetti, founded in Milan in 1922, had an original project: to produce a car with central and horizontal driving position, based on a box section platform, to which a second structure holding the engine and gearbox was fixed. Unfortunately it did not come to fruition.

## PRINETTI & STUCCHI

**Milano, 1874-1902**

This was a company of fundamental importance for the car industry, not only in Milan. It was created in 1874 to produce bicycles and sewing machines, with an intriguing mix of design excellence and old-fashioned technology. As an example, in 1891 its 400 workers applied themselves and their tools either to bicycle production or cork machining. In 1898 they started production of motor tricycles, and from 1899 also twin engined ones, quadricycles and light cars with De Dion engines. This was one of the many

companies that moved from bicycles to automobiles. In those years the Prinetti & Stucchi tricycles and voiturettes won accolades in sporting events, like the Padova-Bovolenta, where they were victorious in 1901. Their most interesting vehicle was a three wheeler, possibly designed by Ettore Bugatti, who at the time was employed there. Bugatti drove it in the 1899 Brescia-Verona-Brescia, winning it.

## **RESTELLI**

**Milano, 1920-1923**

Restelli was incorporated in Milan in 1909 to build aero engines (under the Rebus brand), and during the Great War also designed an economy four cylinder motor car, of which probably just one unit was made. This started the production of a 1 ½ litre car which had some sporting successes, driven by its designer and builder, Enrico Restelli. For its production, Restelli relied on the Milanese “Officine Meccaniche Isolabella”: unfortunately, when that closed down in 1923, Restelli production stopped as well.

## **RICORDI & MOLINARI**

**Società Italiana Costruzioni Automobili SIC  
Milano, 1905-1906**

Another case where the product was born before the manufacturing company. Max Ricordi, the son of Giuseppe Ricordi (of whom we talk in another part of this publication for his fundamental role in the growth of the automobile in Italy), had a first period in which he worked for his father’s company. In 1905 he built his first car, probably created in his father’s Porta Tenaglia garage, and showed it at the Mostra del Ciclo e dell’Automobile in May. The car was also launched with the name of Rag. Gino Molinari, partner and then General Manager of Ricordi & Molinari, which was founded the following September.

The aim of the company was to produce a single cylinder 8 HP machine, a motor car based on the French tradition and dedicated to economy and urban users. Among the Ricordi & Molinari’s features the cylinder cooling wall made with a detachable bronze part, the tubular radiator and the steering box are worth mentioning.

Unfortunately the 8HP was completely unsuccessful, and in March 1906, just six months after its foundation, the company was wound up, its activities and toolings being bought by Serpollet Italiana.

## **ROGNINI E BALBO**

**Milano, 1910s-1920s**

Rognini & Balbo was a firm active in the production of electric apparati and products for the railroads. Around the WW1 years they started producing “electromobiles”, i.e. electric lorries, mainly used for public services. Some buses are known, as well as hearses, which

were reasonably successful due to the absence of exhaust gases during use.

## **SALVA**

**Società Anonima Lombarda Vetture Automobili  
Milano, 1906-1907**

This company, created in December 1906 and liquidated in October 1907, despite its very short life managed to produce and sell a four cylinder light car, shown at the Turin Show, and called 16/25 HP. Two others, a 28/45 HP and a 60/75 HP were prepared, but it was not possible to start their production.

## **SAM Società Automobili Motori**

**Milano - Legnano, 1924-1928**

This company, with a plant in Legnano, was founded in 1924. It started with a light car in whose design Guglielmo Ghioldi had a part, and in fact it can be considered an evolution of the Vaghi three-wheeler. SAM had no fewer than seven models in production, which mixed small size and economy features with some luxury details, such as electric starting and lighting, wire wheels and semi-elliptical leaf springs.

## **SAN GIUSTO**

**Trieste - Milano, 1924-1928**

This company started in 1924 with headquarters in Trieste, but its plant and management was in Milan, at via Bersaglio 28. A few well known Milanese personalities were part of it, such as engineers Cesare Beltrami and Guido Ucelli di Nemi, who later founded the Museo della Scienza e della Tecnica.

This company also had a very short life (being liquidated in 1926), but in 1924 it showed, at the Milan Show, a motor car with very modern and innovative solutions, such as a chassis with a single central spar, in pressed steel with lightening holes, independent suspension with transverse leaf springs, four wheel brakes, rear-central engine (mounted in front of the rear axle). The Milanese workshop was managed by Guglielmo Ghioldi, mentioned many times in these notes. The problem with this car was that it was launched at the same time as the Fiat 509. This, and other problems, made the development of the venture impossible, and everything was wound up 1928.

## **SCIREA**

**Milano, 1910-1927**

This company, founded by ing. Arturo Scirea in Milan in 1910, suffered competition from the Fiat 509 too. Initially it specialised in the production of aero engines for the War Ministry. At the end of the war it revived its project of a voiturette which was originally made in 1914 and later enhanced, and in 1924 showed the Scirea Tipo Unico at the Milan Show. It was a light car able to reach 90 km/h (around 56 mph), which had a

few interesting features, such as the engine suspended on rubber blocks or the automatic switching-off of the engine in case of low oil level. They were hoping to find an agreement with Max Türkheimer for marketing the car, but this did not work out and after very few units its production was halted in 1927, along with the whole company's activities.

## **SERPOLLET ITALIANA**

**Milano, 1906-1908**

When, in 1906, Ricordi & Molinari was closed, its activities were taken over by Serpollet Italiana, which had been created on February 10<sup>th</sup> 1906, with a capital of 1,650,000 lira and offices in Via Bernina, Milan. The idea was to continue the plan of Ricordi & Molinari to exploit the Sgarbi patents and build a 8 HP light car with single cylinder and cardan shaft transmission and three-gear change. To this, the production of steam vehicles under Serpollet licence was to be added. The company started very well but it all ended with the 1907 crisis: the following year it had to be closed.

## **SIAM**

**Società Italiana Automobili Milano**

**Milano, 1921-1923**

The ambitious car designed by this company, founded by Olivo Pellegatti at Via Porpora 73, Milan, was a sporting two litre six cylinder. It was shown at the Fiera Campionaria in 1921, the same year as its foundation. During that same year it took part in the Alpine Cup, but did not finish. In 1923 the company had financial problems and had to close.

## **SILVANI & BOTTA**

**Milano, 1920-1929**

This company was founded in 1920 by the well-known sportsman Eugenio Silvani and a Mr. Botta. It became very famous for its special cylinder head which could be fitted to various cars, such as the Fiat 501 and 501S, 502 and 520. In 1921 one car with this head (with the SB logo, from the two partners' surnames), took part in the Voiturette Grand Prix of Brescia, at the Coppa della Consuma and also took many world and International speed records in Class F (up to 1500 cc.). In 1922 Silvani & Botta designed an eight cylinder Grand Prix car, about which, alas, no more information is known.

## **SIVA**

**Società Italiana Vetture Automobili**

**Milano, 1907**

The founder of this company in 1907 was Silvio Barison, who graduated in Engineering in Germany. An inventor (he took out the patent for rotating cone distribution), in 1922 he founded a company in Leg-

horn (Livorno): Fabbrica Automobili Barison & C. Barison was an unlucky but very gifted engineer. The first company apparently never built a single automobile; the second was liquidated one year after its foundation, but still managed to build around twenty units.

## **SIVE**

**Società Italiana Vetture Elettriche**

**Milano, 1899-1903**

Founded in Milan in 1899 by ing. Gino Turrinelli for the production of urban service vehicles, SIVE was the progenitor of Camona Giussani Turrinelli & C. In 1903, when the company took the new name, the vehicles were called Ausonia.

## **SMIM**

**Società Milanese Industrie Meccaniche**

**Milano, 1903-1909**

Of this company, founded in 1903, we only knew that it had been working on the project of a four cylinder car.

Today, thanks to the research ability of AISA member Giovanni Bossi, we have been able to study a detailed brochure showing a traditional chassis with a bibloc four cylinder engine of 20 HP, followed by a double phaeton body and then a "double-expansion engine with water injection". This is the description of this engine, of which we have no other information:

"Società Milanese di Industrie Meccaniche began production of the new patented type of engine for motor cars and motor boats with three cylinders which, due to its principles, can be called "Double expansion engine with water injection". The main goal of this company in making this engine was its fuel economy, in order to reduce by half the petrol consumption of today's automobile engines".

It is worth noting that the injection of vaporised water in the cylinder chambers is something recently tried to enhance the efficiency of racing engines... Unfortunately nothing more is known about the production of these engines.

## **STIGLER S.A. Officine Meccaniche**

**Milano, 1859-1947**

A very well-known brand today for its elevators (currently part of the OTIS group). Between 1922 and 1925 the company started production of an electric car called V4, with a 100 km range at a speed around 30 – 35 km/h.

## **STUCCHI**

**Milano, 1902-1906**

New denomination of Prinetti & Stucchi, after Giulio (MIS: Ludovico) Prinetti left the company in 1902. It continued to build motor cars until 1906, with two-

and four-cylinder engines; after that date it went back to bicycles only.

## **TODESCHINI**

**Milano, 1899**

Before concentrating on motoring accessories, the company founded in 1899 by Giovanni Todeschini and Giancarlo Pelatti made a few light cars equipped with two coupled air-cooled De Dion Bouton engines. Only a few units were made, branded 'Lecas'.

## **TONELLO**

**Automobili di Guido Meregalli**

**Milano, 1921-1923**

Guido Meregalli, after winning the 1920 Targa Florio driving a Nazzaro and before starting a successful sporting career at Diatto with Alfieri Maserati between 1922 and 1924, built a few racing cars in his Milanese workshop. The design was due to his foreman Tonello, and he devoted most of 1921 to the project. Tonello had spent some time working for Bugatti and Bianchi, for which he made a prototype of a two litre road car.

For the race car, Meregalli and Tonello decided to use that engine, creating the car with the shortest name ever: "M". The story of this car is in our Member Sandro Silva's AISA essay no. 106.

## **VAGHI Motovetturette**

**Milano, 1922-1924**

Here we once more find the name of Guglielmo Ghidoli, who designed this three wheel motor car, fitted with an air-cooled V2 engine of motorcycle ancestry. Despite being more similar to an invalid carriage than a car, when shown at the Esposizione Motociclistica di Milano of 1920 it immediately met with success, convincing Attilio Vaghi to create the company in 1922, in Piazza Castello. It was active for two years, and was then taken over by SAM, which was producing their car anyway.

## **VOLPI**

**Milano, 1901**

Volpi & C., an "accomandita" company incorporated in Milan in 1901 by Giovanni Volpi Bassani, built a few chassis with French engines, possibly Aster or De Dion & Bouton. They were used to create fire-fighting vehicles.

## **WOLSELEY ITALIANA - WOLSIT**

**Legnano, 1907-1909**

S.A. Wolseley Italiana, with its headquarters and factory in Legnano, was created to produce some of the British company's models under licence for the Italian market. The brand chosen was the simplified name Wolsit. For two years, from 1907 to 1909, cars with 2, 4 and even 6 cylinders were built. But the 1907 crisis hit Wolsit too, and in 1909 they stopped production to concentrate on bicycles, which were to have great prestige up to the 1930s and even later.

## **ZÜST**

**Intra (VB) - Milano, 1893-1917**

"Züst Ing. Roberto Fabbrica Italiana di Automobili" was founded in Intra in 1904 and then, in 1905, it moved to Milan, via Bergognone, where the plant was built. It was a branch of "Fonderie e Officine Meccaniche Roberto Züst", a successful company created in the 1890s, then managed by the sons of Roberto (who died in 1897), who were early automobilists. Up to 1906 the cars were designed by none other than Giustino Cattaneo. In 1910 Brixia Züst (see entry) was put into liquidation because of a severe financial crisis, and two years later it merged with the Milanese Züst. The new name was "Züst Fabbrica Automobili Brescia-Milano". It concentrated on trucks, and during the Great War it stopped making cars. This was not enough to save Züst, which was wound up in 1917 and finally closed in 1918, when activities were taken over by OM.

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# The Milanese Coachbuilders, from coaches to motor cars

*Alessandro Sannia*

It may seem strange to our modern eyes but, at the beginning of the automobile, the body was its least innovative part. Some critics<sup>1</sup> think that the coachbuilding industry, with its long history, and its habits and styles, has been a practical obstacle for the development of the new motor vehicle. Surely it was the part showing the least creativity: with a completely new vehicle to invent, for the bodies the pioneers went directly to the established experts, just asking them to integrate the mechanical parts into the pre-existing coach as much as possible.

Milan, being the economic capital of the country, had a very wide choice to offer: a 1881 statistic study states that there were twenty 'main' bodywork factories, and five hundred 'minor' ones. The motor car started its cavalcade in Milan because the town was the most important market for foreign chassis, which at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were predominant. Turin would later be named "the coachbuilders' town", but that had to wait for the development of the national motor industry. The Milanese coachbuilders, more than any other, had the hard task of managing the transition from early motor-coaches to motor cars.

This was not a simple transition, and many could not keep up. Many an important company with century-old experience had to admit defeat, such as Carrozzerie Belloni and Sala. On the other hand, many new companies were created: some with a great destiny, others with a only short life ahead of them. Some of these stories are interesting, some very brief, some successful: I have tried to collect them in a book and here you will find the part related to the first period and the Milan area.

What follows is from *The Encyclopaedia of the Italian Coachbuilders*", published by Società Editrice Il Cammello in Turin in 2017, and only lists companies which bodied motor cars in Milan and its province up to the Great War.

## **Carrozzeria Lombarda Automobili Vetture Belloni Milano, 1811-1910**

The origins of Carrozzeria Belloni date back to the establishment of the company in 1811 by Giovanni Belloni, to coach-build carriages and coaches. When he died in 1836 the company passed into his son Francesco's hands, supported by his brother Luigi. Their partnership lasted until 1859, when Luigi decided to leave the company, whilst Francesco was able to extend the business by merging with the coachworks of his father-in-law Giovanni Boschetti.

In 1883, when Francesco died, his two sons split up again. Luigi opened his own coachworks factory whilst Giovanni brought on the family company. He also began coach-building the earliest motor vehicles already in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, at the request of Giovanni Ricordi, the importer of German Benz cars. In the factory located at Via Solferino 56 in Milan some of the very first Italian car bodies were manufactured and the Bellonis can indeed be considered to have been some of the originators of the transition from horse-drawn to motor-powered vehicles.

In the early 1900s Carrozzeria Belloni also became a supplier to the newly-born Isotta-Fraschini and in 1906 he strengthened the business by re-organising into the SA Carrozzeria Lombarda Automobili Vetture Belloni (CLAVB), moving soon after into a new factory at Via Ponte Seveso 39.

They took part in the 1907 Turin Show with a triple phaeton and a coupé limousine on a Renault chassis. Later, however, the speculative bubble that hit the automotive sector at that time created a gradual crisis from which Carrozzeria Belloni tried to escape by being acquired by Macchi (suffering by being based in Varese, so far away from the capital city) in 1909. Already in 1911, however, the company was sold again and merged into Carrozzeria Italo-Argentina.

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1. Domenico Jappelli, in the foreword to the second edition of the book "Carrozzeri di ieri e di oggi" by Carlo Biscazzetti di Ruffia: "The perfection of the horse-drawn carriage didn't contribute towards the transformation since it happened in transitional phases, but was even a reason for the delay in the definition of the automotive vehicle."

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## **Fabbrica Milanese di Carrozzeria Luigi Belloni & C.**

**Milano, 1883-1906**

When their father Francesco died in 1883, Luigi Belloni split from his brother Giovanni and opened his own coachworks factory at Via Giuseppe Sirtori 1. To begin with he only manufactured, of course, horse-drawn carriages, but later he too got involved in automobile development. Less-known and with a smaller workshop than his brother, he was in any case a good competitor for him in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1904 he re-organised the company into a Limited Partnership, but soon became a victim of the 1906 financial crisis which hit the automotive sector. He was forced to close in that year, despite still manufacturing excellent products, which had been awarded the silver medal at the 1906 Milan Universal Exposition.

## **Carrozzeria Industriale per Automobili G. Bollani**

**Milano, 1912-~1925**

Giovanni Bollani, after a short career at various different Milan coach-builders, the last as general manager of Schieppati, established his own factory in 1912 at Via Castelvetro 36. Very soon, however, he was forced by the outbreak of WWI to leave the automotive coach-building sector to focus on fitting out military vehicles. Once the war was over, he returned to cars, coach-building sports and touring bodies, but faced a deep crisis due to the strikes of the 1919-20 “red years”, to which he actually reacted with great effort, even increasing the size of his factory as soon as things stabilised. This step, however, was probably too hasty and after a very promising phase – during which he coach-built Alfa Romeo, Isotta Fraschini, Bianchi and Lancia cars – Bollani was forced to operate just as a car repairer and finally ceased his activities around the mid-1920s.

## **Bucci**

**Milano, ?-1912**

Giuseppe and Vincenzo Bucci managed an automotive coach-building workshop at Via Cenisio 12 in Milan. Very little is known about their activities, which ended in bankruptcy in 1912.

## **Carrozzeria Bulli**

**Milano, 1852-1933**

Bulli was on old and renowned horse-drawn coach factory based in Milan, whose activities began in 1852, when the city was still part of the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, under the Austro-Hungarian Empire (however it was later officially registered in the commercial registries of the new Kingdom of Italy only in 1865). Cesare Bulli, who succeeded his

father in 1904, began working on motor vehicles in his workshop at Via Olmetto 12, coach-building both petrol and electric cars until WWI. Post-war re-conversions, however, proved to be very difficult and led the company into a deep crisis. In 1920 the company was re-organised into a limited liability company, owned by Gaetano Bulli, but he passed away in 1922. The company was then acquired by Gaetano Borsani, who proceeded with an important re-launch. Developments came fast. In two years they moved into a bigger factory at Via Anguissola 50 and in 1926 they began attending Motor Shows, the first time displaying a coupé based on a Bianchi chassis. In 1932 they won an important order from CEVA to coach-build the last Ansaldo Tipo 22 chassis (after the company's bankruptcy), displaying a model of it coach-built according to the Silentbloc patent at the Milan Show. It was the last public sight of the Bulli brand, because in 1933 Gaetano Borsani decided to change the company's identity to Carrozzeria Borsani.

## **Carrozzeria Castagna**

**Milano, 1901-1954**

Carrozzeria Castagna was one of the few in Italian history to successfully manage the transition from horse-drawn coaches to automobiles. In fact, its origins date back to 1849, when Paolo Mainetti – who opened his factory in Contrada San Celso (nowadays Corso Italia) in Milan in 1835 – hired Carlo Castagna as an apprentice at only 9 years of age. Castagna rose through the whole company, becoming first a director then a partner, also acquiring some competitors: Carrozzeria Fratelli Albini, Enrico Orsaniga and Eugenio Ferrari. Finally, in 1894, Castagna managed to acquire Ferrari, Mainetti & Orsaniga, resulting from the merger of the four former companies.

In 1901 the company was re-organised into a limited partnership with the financial support of some illustrious members of the Milan aristocracy, and was named Fabbriche Riunite di Carrozze già Mainetti, Ferrari e Orsaniga di C. Castagna (United Coach Factories, former Mainetti, Ferrari and Orsaniga, of C. Castagna), consolidating his business in a workshop at Via Montevideo 19. The good reputation he already had as a coach-builder helped him to become supplier of automotive coachworks to the most illustrious of Italian aristocracy, including the Royal House. For them, he coach-built in 1906, among several others, the Fiat 24/40 HP “Sparviero” for the Queen Mother, Margherita di Savoia.

Always very focussed on innovation, an approach quite unusual for the time, Castagna was amongst the pioneers of double-phaeton coach-work with side doors (previously it was normal to get in through the rear) and in 1913 he surprised the automotive world with the futuristic ALFA 40/60 HP, designed

by Count Ricotti with an incredible teardrop-shaped body.

In 1914 Carlo Castagna passed away and the company leadership was taken over by his son Ercole. He moved the activities into a new factory at Via Montevideo 19. The following year, however, Italy entered WWI and Carrozzeria Castagna quit coach-building luxury cars to work on ambulances, trucks and trailers. In 1917 he also got an order from Caproni for aeroplane fuselages and wings, further proof of their high level of specialisation.

Once the war was over, work on passenger cars restarted. Ercole Castagna won the support of his younger brother Emilio, who provided a significant contribution from the styling point of view and carefully followed all technological trends and innovations. They acquired the licences for the French Baeher patent for dismountable transformable bodies and the Clairalpax patent for light-alloy structures (whose licensee for Italy on behalf of Paul Audineau was Carrozzeria Viotto & Tolfo) and later tried, but with rather poor results, an American system for woody-wagons in 1929.

The success of Castagna creations was huge and international. They even attended the 1927 New York Motor Show, something very unusual for an Italian coach-builder at that time. Orders, however, came in from all over the world: kings and tycoons from every country liked being driven in an Alfa Romeo, a Fiat, a Lancia, an Isotta-Fraschini, a Mercedes-Benz or a Duesenberg coach-built by Italian artist Castagna.

Once the tough obstacle of the 1929 crisis, which hit the luxury automotive sector hard, had been overcome, Carrozzeria Castagna successfully recovered and during the thirties was one of the undisputed masters of Italian style, as well as being an anticipator and supporter of aerodynamic shapes. They also provided a significant contribution towards the continuous development of the art of coach-building, with both tireless research in innovation and with the school for young coach-builders, established and directed in Milan by Ercole Castagna himself.

In 1937 they introduced to Italy the patent that would later most identify their brand and would make them famous in future years: the Vistotal (i.e. the French Labourdette's Vuototal) for a pillarless windscreen, ensuring an uninterrupted panoramic view.

When WWII broke out, however, production had to be immediately switched to military supplies. Then in 1942 the Milan factory was completely destroyed by bombing and all vehicles under construction were lost along with the entire stock of materials. The financial damage was massive, but Ercole Castagna, supported by his sons Carlo, Cipriano and Savino, built a new factory in Venegono Superiore (Varese) and started all over again.

Fame alone was, however, not enough, and re-launching proved very difficult. Castagna coach-built some fuoriserie based on Alfa Romeo, Fiat and Lancia chassis, often using the Vistotal windscreen over very new, modern and unusual shapes. Financial trouble, however, prevented full recovery of the business and Carrozzeria Castagna was finally forced to close in 1954.

### **Carrozzeria Citterio** **Milano, ~1914-1925**

Carlo Citterio began his activities just before the First World War with a garage, initially just trading and repairing cars. Once the war was over, he extended his activities in 1918, establishing a workshop at Via Archimede 53 to coach-build passenger cars and commercial vehicles, initially re-building those damaged in the war.

He closed in 1925, never achieving much fame.

### **Carrozzeria Carlo Colombo** **Milano, 1906-anni Venti**

In 1906 Carlo Colombo established a small automotive coach-building workshop at Via Antonio Bordononi 18 in Milan. No details are known about his activities and he never achieved any fame, but the company was still mentioned in some commercial guides until the late 1920s. The business most likely closed around that time.

### **Carrozzeria L. Corbellini** **Milano, 1910s-1920s**

Luigi Corbellini established, probably in the early 1910s, a small coach-building workshop at Via Crocefisso 25 in Milan, on the corner of Via della Chiusa. He attended the 1911 Turin International Exhibition with "4-wheeled mylord and brougham carriages" on unknown chassis. His activities continued until the late 1920s.

### **Carrozzeria Crespi** **Milano, 1910-1913**

In 1910 Gino and Franco Crespi, two of the heirs of Giuseppe of Carrozzeria Pavesi & Crespi, which had already converted into an important public limited company, established a new workshop. The factory remained at Via Vettabbia 5, which had once been owned by their father and uncle before the re-organisation of the company, probably in an attempt to exploit the maximum from the name paired with the old address. However, soon after, they moved into Ripa Ticinese, but the business struggled to make progress and they were forced to close in 1913.

### **Ghezzi, Bolla & C.** **Milano - 1914-?1919**

In 1914 Ernesto Ghezzi and Luciano Bolla established

a coach-building workshop at Via Federico Antonio Ozanam 8 in Milan. No details are known about their production, however. The rules for founding companies allow for a period of five years, and it was not renewed after that period.

### **Carrozzeria Italiana** **Milano, 1905**

Established by an illustrious group of members of the Milan aristocracy as a factory for making coaches and motor car coachworks, Carrozzeria Italiana was led by Duke Uberto Visconti di Modrone. Probably backed more by enthusiasm than a real business plan, it very soon merged with Fabbrica Carrozze Cesare Sala, creating Carrozzeria Italiana e Cesare Sala SA.

### **Carrozzeria Italo-Argentina** **Milano, 1911-1923**

Carrozzeria Italo-Argentina was created by the acquisition of the former Carrozzeria Belloni by the company Ferraguti, Viaud & C., maintaining activities in the workshop at Via Ponte Seveso 39. The shareholders, financiers, had (or at least pretended to have) the right contacts to ensure profitable exports to South America, hence the choice of new name.

The company specialised in luxury coachworks and between 1913 and 1914 was the official supplier of bodies to Isotta-Fraschini. However, the automobile business came to a sudden end in 1915 after the First World War broke out.

In May 1918 the company was acquired by a new investment group, led by Giuseppe Gaetano Zanetti, who moved operations into the newly-established A.L.C.I.A. (Anonima Lombarda Costruzioni e Imprese Aeronautiche – Lombard Public Limited Company for Aeronautical Manufacturing and Business), which wanted to exploit for promotional purposes the great popularity achieved by aviation during the war thanks to the mythical “ace” fighter pilots. However, the initiative did not actually develop and the company returned to the original title of Carrozzeria Italo-Argentina in a late but unsuccessful attempt to revive automobile coach-building. All activities ended during 1921 and the company went bankrupt two years later.

### **Carrozzeria La Milano** **Milano, anni Dieci**

Very little is known about Carrozzeria La Milano. It was described as a coach-building workshop in some newspaper articles about strikes held in 1913, but no details about their actual production are known.

### **Lavezzari** **Gorla, 1907-1970**

Guido Lavezzari established a workshop specialising in

the manufacture of industrial machinery and tooling in the early 1900s. It was located at Via Risorgimento 1 in Villanuova, a small hamlet of the village of Gorla (nowadays Via Dracone in the Milan metropolitan area). His business was very wide and spanned from making boilers to ladder-wagons, and as a minor activity he also worked on motor vehicles, making special versions and body-fitting. Occasionally, during the 1920s, he also coach-built a few passenger cars, amongst which was a nice Alfa Romeo RL torpedo sport in 1924.

Guido Lavezzari's workshops were active, managed by his sons Enrico and Mario and later by his grandson Guido, until 1970.

### **Carrozzeria Lombarda** **Milano, 1913-1930**

In 1913 Antonio Puccini (son of the famous composer Giacomo) and Augusto Messi established a coach-building workshop at Corso Sempione 39, Milan. In 1916 Puccini purchased his partner's share and became the sole owner. Details of production in the early years are not known, but it was most probably quite limited due to the tough financial environment. During the 1920s, however, Carrozzeria Lombarda developed rapidly. They attended the Milan Motor Show from 1921 to 1926, displaying a wide variety of saloons, cabriolets and coupés on Fiat 501, 502, 503 and 507 chassis.

In 1927, however, Puccini sold the company to Giovanni Raboni. They attended the 1928 Milan Show once more with a saloon and a landaulet on Fiat 520 chassis, but Raboni died suddenly in 1929. His widow was forced to close the company the following year due to the insurmountable huge debts incurred by her husband in trying to re-launch it.

### **Luterma Italiana** **Lissone, 1907-anni '50**

In 1907 Luterma (an abbreviation of A.M. Luther Woodworking Company), a major British woodworking company, established a factory in Lissone, close to Milan. It quickly became one of the biggest Italian companies in the woodworking sector and was a pioneer in plywood manufacturing. To promote its application in the promising automotive and aviation fields, they displayed a torpedo with coachwork made entirely out of 6mm thick plywood at the 1913 Turin Motor Show.

### **Carrozzeria O. Marini & c.** **Milano, 1909-1912**

Oreste Marini, a skilled craftsman with previous experience at coach factories, established a coach-building workshop in early 1909, in partnership with Giovanni Raboni and Enrico Bondena. It was located at Via Domenico Cirillo 16 in Milan. In 1910 they were al-

ready amongst those in attendance at the Turin Motor Show, where they displayed an extra-long saloon on a De Vecchi 20-30 HP chassis.

In 1912 Marini established a new company in partnership with Armando Viganotti, but it is not clear if it was simply a continuation of the former business or if it was a totally new company, as the address was different.

### **Carrozzeria Marini, Viganotti & C. Milano, 1912-1915**

In 1912 Oreste Marini created a company with Armando Viganotti. Their coach-building workshop was active at Via Francesco Guicciardini 5, Milan during the 1910s. They displayed their coachwork at the 1913 Turin Motor Show and became quite well-known thanks to their creations, mainly on Bianchi chassis. Activities came to an end in 1915 due to the crisis caused by the outbreak of WWI.

### **Carrozzeria Muzzio e Rossinelli Milano, anni Dieci**

Carrozzeria Muzzio e Rossinelli was active in Milan in the early 1910s. In 1911 they coach-built an ambulance for the Assistenza Pubblica Milanese, based on a De Vecchi 20-30 HP chassis. No further information is known, however.

### **Carrozzeria Automobili Nazionale Milano, 1905-?**

Carrozzeria Nazionale of Milan was a co-operative company established in 1905 to coach-build motor cars. There are no details of production or how long the company lasted, however.

### **Carrozzeria Automobilistica Nazionale G. Oliva Milano, 1905-1910**

In 1905, with the help of his brother Domenico, Turin coach-builder Giuseppe Oliva established a company to manufacture and trade automobile bodies and cycle components in Milan, mainly supplying Fabbre & Gagliardi, a well-known bicycle factory and dealer in car marques such as Itala and Diatto. Their workshop was located at Via Savona 2.

In 1906 the company became a public limited company with the involvement of some financiers, amongst them the Weiss Bank and the direct involvement of Fabbre & Gagliardi. Pietro Fabbre himself was actually appointed President, with oil tycoon Ernesto Reinach and Achille Basevi on the board. The future looked promising, especially considering the illustrious names involved, but Carrozzeria Oliva was only active until 1909 then was liquidated in 1910.

Giuseppe Oliva tried to re-launch the business the following year with Carrozzeria Oliva e Fassina, but without success.

### **Oliva e Fassina Milano, 1911-1914**

In 1911 Giuseppe Oliva established a new company based at Via Gaetano Filangieri 21, Milan, with Licurgo Fassina. This attempted re-launch of his coach-building business was not, however, successful, and the company closed after only three years.

### **Carrozzeria Pavesi & Crespi Milano, 1868-1928**

Pavesi & Crespi was established as a coach factory by Luigi Pavesi and Luigi Crespi in 1868 and, despite the former resigning from the company in 1877, he authorised his partner – who was also his son-in-law – to retain the name, which was already quite well-known. Crespi passed away a few months later, however, and left the company to his wife, Giovannina, and his sons. The new managers were, of course, the two men, Francesco and Giuseppe.

Carrozzeria Pavesi & Crespi was amongst the first companies in Italy to work on motor cars, in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They were very successful and built on the strong reputation they had already built with their horse-drawn coaches, hence in 1906 the company converted into a public limited company to take advantage of the funding of backing partners. They moved from their original premises at Via Vettabba 5 to a new factory at Ripa Ticinese 85. From the 1910s the core business became the manufacture of bodies for Isotta-Fraschini, with world-wide acclaim, as is shown by a Certificate of Honour awarded at the 1910 International Exposition of Brussels.

They overcame WWI with some difficulty and activities dramatically reduced afterwards, but Pavesi & Crespi carried on coach-building a few cars until the end of the 1920s. They still attended the 1926 Milan Motor Show with a transformable OM built according to the Viola patent, two Fiat 519 limousines and an Isotta-Fraschini 8A cabriolet, but were finally forced to close in 1928.

### **Fabbrica di Carrozze Cesare Sala Carrozzeria Italiana e Cesare Sala Milano, 1903-1932**

Established in 1903, this illustrious manufacturer of luxury coaches in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had only the name and reputation of Cesare Sala. After his death, in 1890, the business was actually carried on by Taramella & C. – in which some Milanese nobles and Sala's daughter were partners – but that most likely closed in 1902.

In 1903 some of the shareholders in the former company – amongst them Amerigo and Ettore Ponti, Marquis Emanuele d'Adda and Prince Luigi Alberico Trivulzio – attempted to re-launch the famous name of Cesare Sala to exploit the awareness it still had in

the coach-building world. In actual fact, the only remaining link to the original company was Federico Mailland, who had been hired in 1886 as an apprentice and quickly climbed the hierarchy to become Manager of the factory located at Corso Sempione 45, along with Vittorio Bianchi.

In 1905 Fabbrica di Carrozze Cesare Sala merged with Carrozzeria Italiana, another company which had recently been established by a group of nobles led by Duke Uberto Visconti di Modrone and of which the shareholders were other illustrious names such as Marquis Camillo Meli-Lupi di Soragna-Tarasconi and the tycoon Aldo Weill Schott (a major shareholder in Fiat). The result was an even bigger company, with huge financial viability: Carrozzeria Italiana e Cesare Sala. It soon became supplier of automobile coachworks to the Italian Royal House, as Sala had been for horse-drawn coaches.

In 1907 they made an agreement with Società Torinese Automobili Elettrici (who built electric cars under licence from Krieger) to coach-build and manage the sales and service network in Milan for their vehicles. The following year they coach-built the “Ambulance Hospital Pompeo Confalonieri”, based on an Isotta-Fraschini chassis, for the Milan Green Cross, one of the earliest examples of a self-propelled medical vehicle in history.

From the 1910s they became the primary coachwork supplier to Isotta-Fraschini, creating a strong link with this company.

Following WWI the reputation of Sala’s coachworks continued to grow, thanks especially to the creative skill of Oliviero Bergomi who, going beyond his role as technical manager, also worked as an excellent stylist. In those years Carrozzeria Sala was outstandingly successful, also at international level, regularly attending Motor Shows in Paris, London and Brussels, as well as becoming supplier to many Royal Houses throughout Europe. Their creations were amongst the most appreciated and best-known in the first 30 years of automotive history, as is shown by several prizes and acknowledgements, such as winning the first Golden Trophy of Villa d’Este, the famous concours d’élégance for automobiles, in 1929, but also for being chosen by customers such as Pope Pio XI or the Empress Zauditù of Ethiopia.

The partnership with Isotta-Fraschini actually became almost exclusive, with two of its managers joining the board of directors: Oreste Fraschini himself and Paolo Meda.

The financial crash of 1929, which dramatically weakened Isotta-Fraschini – whose main export market was the USA – had an even stronger effect on Carrozzeria Italiana e Cesare Sala, however, as they had never diversified their business and always focussed on highly luxurious coachworks, complete-

ly ignoring the mid-range and sports cars. Hence Carrozzeria Italiana e Cesare Sala was forced to close in 1932.

It still survived under the name SA Immobiliare Sala, managing the estate of the former factory, which was partly rented out to other companies (including some coach-builders, such as SA Auto and Ci-Ma) until the late 1930s.

### **Ditta Pio Sansoni Milano, 1910s**

Pio Sansoni managed a coach-building workshop at Via Sant’Eufemia 2 in Milan during the 1910s. No details of his production are known, however.

### **Carrozzeria Schieppati Milano, 1898-1951**

Augusto Schieppati began work as an apprentice at a very young age – he was only 9 – at Carrozzeria Cavallotti, moving one year later to Carrozzeria Taramella (formerly Cesare Sala), where he learned the job of coach-building. When he was 20, in 1898, he established his own workshop in Via Pietro Borsieri. Very little is known about this first company, but he most probably only built horse-drawn vehicles and made wooden wheels. The quality of his work enabled him to get enough money together to move, in 1900, to a new workshop in Via Marco d’Oggiono, and attract some financial backers who helped him to develop further and establish Carrozzeria Schieppati & C. in 1902. The business grew with increasing success and in 1907 raised its social capital and moved into a big new factory at Via Lazzaro Papi 14/16.

During the First World War Carrozzeria Schieppati became a supplier to the Army and grew further. After the war he also tried to bring to automobiles some of the concepts derived from the aeronautical business, such as the use of the light and robust ash tree or duralumin pipes for body structures. Always an acute observer of technological progress, in 1920 Schieppati was amongst the first in Italy to use the airbrush to paint bodies.

In the early 1920s he also became sales representative for Diatto in Lombardy, leading to a close relationship with the Turin-based company and to coach-build several chassis for them, including the 1925 racing Tipo 20 Sport, converted the following year into the Maserati Tipo 26, the first car from the house of the Trident.

In 1927 Schieppati acquired the “Toimovile” patent for the installation of a sliding-roof on saloons, from the firm Ansari & Teisseire. Also in the late 1920s he reached an agreement with Citroën Italiana, for whom he practically became the official body manufacturer, coach-building several of their cars, mainly using the Weymann system. The co-operation was not, howev-

er, exclusive and Schieppati also coach-built Bianchi, Fiat, Amilcar, Bugatti and Lancia chassis.

Activities proceeded successfully into the 1930s, when Carrozzeria Schieppati became a sales representative for OM.

As soon as WWII broke out, military production re-appeared, but the factory was badly damaged by bombing in 1942-43. Once the war was over, Schieppati tried to re-start, mainly coach-building ambulances and advertising vehicles, which in those tough years looked like being the most promising sectors. However, he passed away in 1950 and his heirs decided to liquidate the Carrozzeria.

## **Seregni**

**Milano, 1907-1936**

Carlo Seregni established an automotive coach-building workshop at Via Augusto Anfoschi 13, Milan in 1907. He was soon supported by his son Aldo, but the business failed to develop as expected and they faced bankruptcy already in 1910. That year was the only time they attended the Turin Motor Show, but there are no details of their production. Somehow activities re-started and they were mentioned in news reports of the 1913 strikes. The business carried on, leaving no further information, until it went bankrupt again in 1936.

## **Fabbrica Carrozzerie Automobili Splendor**

**Milano, 1914-?**

Established by Guglielmo Ghisetti in 1914, Splendor was an automobile coach-building workshop. Very little information about its production is available however, and it is not even known when activities ceased.

## **Taramella**

**Milano, 1891-1902**

Just after Cesare Sala's death in 1890, his right-hand man, Teogene Taramella, acquired the business and established a new company, in which the founder's daughter retained a major shareholding and which was supported by several financial backers among the most important names in the Milanese aristocracy. The aim was to keep a business which was amongst the most famous in the coach manufacturing sector, with customers like the Italian Royal House, alive.

When the first motor cars arrived in Milan, Giuseppe Ricordi, who had imported early Benz models since 1897, gave up some of Sala's former factory in order for Taramella to build the bodies there.

The company, whose results did not seem to be as good as expected, however, was probably not renewed when it expired in 1902, as had been planned in its certificate of incorporation.

## **Officina G. Todeschini**

**Milano, fine Ottocento**

A manufacturer of bicycle accessories from Milan, Giovanni Todeschini also did some coachwork in 1899 for Lecas, a small car maker in which he was a shareholder along with Giancarlo Pelatti, who built cyclecars fitted with De Dion-Bouton engines.

## **Carrozzeria e Martelleria F.lli Torretta**

**Torino e Milano, 1911-1913**

In late 1911, Carrozzeria Locati & Torretta, which by then had become a big industrial company but was suffering in difficult financial circumstances, was liquidated by a Board of Directors made up almost completely of investors. Massimiliano Torretta (son of Giovanni, who had passed away in 1910), decided to leave and establish, with his brothers Alberto and Remigio, the Carrozzeria e Martelleria F.lli Torretta, a small workshop at Via Emanuele Thesaurò 1. A second company – Martelleria Industriale F.lli Torretta – was established at the same time by Alberto and Remigio at Via Savona 91, Milan, and the latter moved there to manage the workshop. Both companies rarely manufactured complete bodies, but worked mainly as suppliers to other coach-builders. The business was, however, short-lived and the Torretta brothers were forced to liquidate both companies already in early 1913.

## **Carrozzeria Trayter**

**Milano, 1913-1916**

The two Trayter brothers, both skilled coach makers, established a workshop to build car coachworks at Via Giuseppe Meda 11 bis, Milan, in 1913. They quickly became well-known in the city, making an amazing child's car, a perfect working model with 4 seats, which was displayed in a shop window in Via Dante, attracting wide public interest.

The Trayter brothers also coach-built buses, but were not able to access Army supply business and were therefore forced to close already in 1916 due to the war.

## **Valvassori**

**Milano, ?1903-1907**

Enrico Valvassori was mentioned for the first time in a tax register in 1903, as a coach-builder and upholsterer for motor cars. In early 1907, along with some financial partners, he incorporated a company for manufacturing car bodies and dealing in car sales. This initiative was, however, very short-lived and ended already the same year.

## **Carrozzeria Ventura**

**Milano, 1914-1915**

In 1914 Prospero Ventura established a car coach-

building workshop at Via Lodovico Castelvetro 18, Milan. He was, however, called up to serve in the Army on the outbreak of the First World War so was forced to stop his activities already in 1915.

### **Carrozzeria Vittoria Milano, 1910s**

Very little is known about Carrozzeria Vittoria of Milan. It was mentioned in some newspaper articles about the 1913 strikes as a coach-building workshop, but there are no details known about their production.

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