

CORRENTI DELLA STORIA

FERRUCCIO LAMBORGHINI (1916–1993)

N.B. After last month's Correnti della Storia essay on Guglielmo Marconi was published, Cenacolista Tony Kilgallin contacted me and informed me that Marconi had been a speaker at an early luncheon of Il Cenacolo and had signed the guest book (now in our archives) on October 24, 1933. Thank you, Tony, for this helpful information.

Cenacolista Alex Kugushev likes to point out that Italy in the 20th and 21st Centuries has been a world leader in fashion and design. That includes not only clothing, but also automobiles. Italian cars are known world-wide to be some of the finest cars in both performance and design. January's Correnti della Storia looks at the founder of one of the classic Italian automakers and his impact on the development of the automobile.



Ferruccio Elio Arturo Lamborghini was born on April 28, 1916 to grape farmers Antonio and Evelina Lamborghini in Renazzo di Cento, in the Province of Ferrara, in the Emilia-Romagna region of Northern Italy. As a young man, Lamborghini began working on his father's tractor out of interest. He was drawn more to farming machinery than to the farming lifestyle itself. Further pursuing this interest in mechanics, Lamborghini studied at the Fratelli Taddia technical institute near Bologna. In 1940 he was drafted into the Italian Royal Air Force. He served as a mechanic at the Italian garrison on the island of Rhodes (which was a territory of the Kingdom of Italy since 1911, following the Italo-Turkish War), becoming the supervisor of the vehicle maintenance unit. Lamborghini was taken prisoner by the British when they captured the island in 1945. They put him to work in their motoring department, and Ferruccio got firsthand experience keeping cars on the road, even with limited part supplies. Returning home in 1946, he married almost immediately, but his wife died in 1947 while giving birth to his first child, a boy named Tonino.

After the war, Lamborghini opened a garage in Pieve di Cento. In his spare time, he modified an old Fiat Topolino he had purchased, the first of many that he would own over the years. He made use of his mechanical abilities to transform the homely city car into a roaring 750cc open-top two-seater, and entered the car in the 1948 Mille Miglia. His participation ended after 700 miles when he ran the car into the side of a restaurant in Fiano, in Turin. As a result, Lamborghini lost his enthusiasm for motor racing, a sentiment that would endure for many years to come.

In 1947 Lamborghini recognized an emerging market in post-War Italy devoted to agricultural and industrial revitalization. Using parts from military vehicle surplus engines and differentials from ARAR centers (Azienda Recupero Alienazione Residuati), Lamborghini built the first of his "Carioca" tractors (*right*), which were based on the six-cylinder gasoline engines of Morris trucks. As gasoline in Italy was prohibitively priced, Lamborghini augmented the Morris engines with a fuel atomizer of his own creation, which allowed the tractors to be started with gasoline, then switch to cheaper diesel fuel.



By 1949 he was able to start building tractors from scratch, without using surplus military parts. Based on the initial success of the Carioca, Lamborghini founded Lamborghini Trattori in his garage and began full manufacturing of tractors. Soon, production grew so large that he was forced to move to new quarters. The Lamborghini tractors became known as the best in Italy and Lamborghini started organizing tractor-pulls in his hometown just to show the superiority of his machines.

His tremendous success in the tractor business made him a very wealthy man, and he started another enterprise (Lamborghini Calor) building air-conditioning and central heating equipment that made him even wealthier. Soon he became one of the richest men in post-war Italy. But he never lost his love for fast cars and his acquisitions became legendary. He owned multiple exotic cars including a Mercedes SL300, a Jaguar, and a Ferrari, in addition to others. At one point, he had enough cars to use a different one every day of the week. Eventually, he owned several more Ferraris over the years. Lamborghini thought Ferrari's cars were good, but they were too noisy and rough to be proper road cars; he considered them repurposed racetrack cars with poorly built interiors.



*Enzo Ferrari
1898-1988*

He also found that Ferrari's cars were equipped with inferior clutches, and this problem required him to make continuous trips to the factory in Maranello for repairs. When he would arrive, the technicians would take the car to a private section of the factory for several hours to perform the work, much to Lamborghini's annoyance. He had previously expressed dissatisfaction with Ferrari's after-sales service, which he considered to be substandard. He brought his concerns to Enzo Ferrari's attention, but was dismissed by the notoriously proud Ferrari, who refused to meet with him.



*Ferrari 250GT
c. 1950*

He noticed the clutch that fit his personally-owned Ferrari 250GT wasn't any different than the ones that were mounted in the Lamborghini tractors. So he drove the Ferrari to his Cento tractor factory and had a Borg & Beck clutch installed straight from the parts list of one of the tractor models; with that, the clutch problem was solved and never returned again.

This experience gave Lamborghini the motivation to pursue his own automobile manufacturing venture, with the goal of creating the perfect touring car that he felt no one could build for him. He believed that a grand touring car should have attributes that were lacking in Ferrari's offerings; namely, high performance that would not compromise controllability, ride quality, or interior amenities. Since he was a clever businessman always looking for profits, he also knew that he could make triple the profit if the components used in his tractors were installed in a high-performance exotic car instead.

He started working on this project in late 1962, and in May 1963 he founded "Automobili Ferruccio Lamborghini." He bought a large plot of land in Sant'Agata Bolognese, about 16 miles from Bologna, and built a large, ultramodern factory. Because of the experience of the manufacturing process that he had gained with his other companies, he was in a position to set up the best facilities solely dedicated to building the best GT cars of that time. He wasn't interested in highly tuned exotics back then, just a smooth running V12 GT was what he wanted to produce. The enormous and well-lit central production building was adjacent to the office building, so that management could constantly monitor the production process. This was ideal for

Lamborghini, who would often roll up his sleeves and personally go to work on the cars when he saw something wasn't being done the way he wanted.

Lamborghini officially introduced his company "Automobili Ferruccio Lamborghini" to the automotive world at the Turin Motor Show, unveiling a mind-blowing vehicle: the 350 GTV (*below*), soon to be acknowledged as a true 12-cylinder masterpiece. In the following year, 1964, the prototype spawned a production vehicle, the 350 GT, followed by the 400 GT that was limited in production to 120 cars. Lamborghini's contagious enthusiasm led his mechanics and engineers to conceive increasingly cutting-edge sports cars such as the Miura, the Islero, the Espada, and the Jarama (*see below for the origin of these model names*). Each model stunned the auto world at its release.



During the 1970s, Lamborghini's companies began to run into financial difficulties. In 1971, Lamborghini Trattori, which exported around half of its production of tractors, ran into trouble when its South African importer cancelled all its orders. In Bolivia, the new military government, which had recently staged a successful coup d'état, cancelled a large order of tractors that was being prepared for shipment through Genoa. Trattori's unionized employees could not be laid off, putting immense strain on the company. In 1972, Lamborghini sold his entire holding in the company to rival tractor builder SAME (Società Accomandita Motori Endotermici).



Lamborghini's estate, "La Fiorita" at Lake Trasimeno.

Soon, the entire Lamborghini group found itself in financial trouble. Development at the automaker slowed as prices of the vehicles were cut. Lamborghini began courting buyers for Automobili and Trattori, entering negotiations with Georges-Henri Rossetti, a wealthy Swiss businessman and friend. He sold Rossetti 51% of the Automobili company for \$600,000, thus relinquishing control of the automaker he had founded. He continued to work at the Sant'Agata factory; Rossetti rarely involved himself in Automobili's affairs.

The situation did not improve. The 1973 oil crisis plagued sales of high performance cars of manufacturers from around the world. Consumers flocked to smaller, more practical modes of transportation with better fuel economy. By 1974, Lamborghini had become disenchanted with his car business. He severed all connections with the cars that bore his name, selling his remaining 49% stake in the auto company to René Leimer, a friend of Georges-Henri Rossetti.

After leaving the automobile manufacturing business, Lamborghini continued his interest in his other businesses, including his heating and air conditioning company (Lamborghini Calor), but he withdrew from direct management of these companies. He "retired" to a 740-acre estate named "La Fiorita" on the shores of Lake Trasimeno, in Castiglione del Lago, a town in the Umbria region of central Italy. Returning to his farming roots, he delighted in hunting and producing his own wines, known as "The Blood of the Miura". (He even designed his own golf course on the estate). At La Fiorita, he built a state of the art winemaking facility

which produced over 800,000 bottles of wine each year. The estate also housed a small, private museum of Lamborghini cars that he owned. The vineyard, golf course, and museum were open to visitors, but only by appointment. (<http://www.tenutalamborghini.it/>)

LAMBORGHINI'S INTEREST IN BULLFIGHTING

The world of bullfighting is a key part of Lamborghini's identity. In 1962, Ferruccio Lamborghini visited the Seville ranch of Don Eduardo Miura, a renowned breeder of Spanish fighting bulls. Lamborghini, a Taurus himself, was so impressed by the majestic Miura animals that he decided to adopt a raging bull as the emblem for the auto company he would soon found.

After producing two cars with alphanumeric designations, he once again turned to the bull breeder for inspiration. Don Eduardo was filled with pride when he learned that Lamborghini had named a car for his family and their line of bulls (Miura). (The fourth Miura to be produced was given to him at his ranch in Seville).

Lamborghini would continue to draw upon the bullfighting connection in future years. The Islero was named for the Miura bull that killed the famed bullfighter Manolete in 1947. Espada is the Spanish word for "sword", sometimes used to refer to the bullfighter himself. The Jarama's name carried a special double meaning. He intended it to refer only to the historic bullfighting region in Spain, but he was concerned that the public might confuse it with the famous Jarama motor racing track.

After christening the "Urraco" after a bull breed (*left*), in 1974 Lamborghini broke from tradition, naming the Countach not for a bull, but for *countach!* ("listen!"), an exclamation of astonishment used by Piedmontese



men upon sighting a beautiful woman. Legend has it that stylist Nuccio Bertone uttered the word in surprise when he first laid eyes on the Countach prototype, the "Project 112". (Both the LM002 sport utility vehicle and the Silhouette were other exceptions to the tradition of naming a Lamborghini model after some aspect of bullfighting).

Lamborghini died at the age of 76 on February 20, 1993, only two months before his 77th birthday. He had suffered a heart attack fifteen days earlier, and he died at Silvestrini Hospital in Perugia. He is buried at the Monumental Cemetery of the Certosa di Bologna monastery.

LEGACY

All of Ferruccio Lamborghini's companies continue to operate today in one form or another. His son, Tonino, designs a collection of clothing and accessories under the Tonino Lamborghini brand, as well as designing the Town Life, an electric microcar which was unveiled at the Bologna Motor Show in 1999. Ferruccio's daughter, Patrizia Lamborghini, whom he fathered at age 58 by his third wife, Maria-Teresa Cane (his second marriage to Annita Borgatti had ended in divorce) runs the Lamborghini winery on his Umbria estate. In 1995 Tonino opened a museum that honors Lamborghini's legacy, the "Centro Studi e Ricerche Ferruccio Lamborghini" in Dosso (Ferrara), which was moved to Argelato (Bologna) in 2014 with the new name "[Ferruccio Lamborghini Museum](#)."

Adapted by James J. Boitano, PhD from: History.com website; Lambocars.com website; Lamborghini.com website; Wikipedia.