

A family business that has survived for over 80 years in one of the toughest industries around and is still a leader in its segment of the world's footwear industry is something of a rarity. The fact that it is still family-controlled and still an innovator makes it even rarer. Such a company has a rich history and one that is well worth looking at

Torielli S.p.a.

The Torielli company was founded in 1924 by Pietro Torielli, father of Pietro Torielli, the present chairman. Pietro senior was highly experienced in the practicalities of shoemaking and, at a time when almost all of the Italian footwear industry still mainly relied on manual skills, set out to introduce mechanisation. This started a revolution in his home town of Vigevano, just outside Milan in northern Italy, which was to turn it into the foremost integrated shoe machinery centre in the world and a major factor in Italy's extraordinary shoemaking success during the second half of the 20th century.

In 1941, he set up the Simacc company to produce machines for welted shoe construction and this company in the 1960s changed its name to the better known Ormac. During World War II, shoe machines were imported from Germany as Pietro senior was the agent in Italy for the Atlas Werke company. He also began to make various minor types of machines in Italy itself. These were initially sold locally and then further afield as the industry in Italy expanded during the 1950s.

Moving forward

The key move actually came after the end of the war in Italy. Pietro realised that no one company could produce all the complex machines that footwear manufacture required. Even the massive USM of America could not do this. In addition, he realised that the fledgling Italian industry needed simple and cost effective machines that all could afford. The answer was to act as the marketing force for small specialist machinery producers who could sell their products under his name and without the expense of their own sales team.

Like all good ideas, it was simple in its overall concept. It also proved highly successful and the business went from strength to strength, providing an example for many others to follow. This was the beginning of the fully-integrated infrastructure that was to become the Italian footwear industry's great strength for the next 50 years. But this was not enough for Pietro, who now had a son who wanted to enter the business and for whom he had to create new opportunities.

The younger Pietro received a thorough grounding in all aspects of shoemaking at the renowned Northampton College



Pietro Torielli with an early machine



of Technology in England. At that time, the town of Northampton was a major producer of high quality footwear and was able to provide much practical as well as theoretical experience for students. It was also there that Pietro mastered his excellent command of English that was to stand him in such good stead in the future.

He duly joined his father in the company in 1956 and this is when the Torielli company began to spread its wings in export markets. It was also the time when the marketing concept of 'Made in Italy' first came about. From that point on, exports became the driving force behind the company's continued expansion and almost every year saw a new branch office opened somewhere in the world.

The third generation

1985 saw Pietro's son Giovanni join the company. After spending two years working in branch offices around the world to gain all-important marketing experience he was made responsible for the Hi-Tech division and, later on, managing director of the main company in Vigevano. The next few years were marked with some significant events.

In 1986, Pietro Torielli won the 'Export Prize' awarded by the Italian government to the 100 Italian companies that had distinguished themselves through exports under the 'Made in Italy' banner. In 1989, the company joined with the English company C&J Clark in the Shoemaster project to develop CadCam software specifically designed for footwear manufacture. This would ultimately lead to the forming of CSM3D International Ltd.

This experience, and a policy of research and investment in new technologies, led to the introduction of the first Nestor die-less system for cutting leather and synthetics. In 1997, the company joined the government-financed SPI project for developing a fully-integrated factory system for footwear manufacture. This was taken a stage further in 2001, when Torielli became a partner in the Euroshoe project to design and produce customised shoes at affordable prices. In 2004, the company acquired all of the shareholding in CSM3D to strengthen its position in the vital CadCam technology field.



*Nestor Mod ZLC
cutting table*

More changes

This move has resulted in some fundamental changes in the management structure. CSM3D was headed by Ian Paris, an Englishman who had run the Shoemaster operation for Clarks. When it was taken outside the company, he went with it. With their close involvement with Shoemaster over the years, the Toriellis had come to know and respect Paris so, when they bought the business, they asked him to become a director and CEO of Torielli S.p.a., with responsibility for all operational activities of the business.

This meant changes all round but, as Pietro says, “The introduction of a new manager and enhancement of the managerial resources that have operated in the company for many years, means a significant step to improving our skills. It is very important today to have the capacity to deal with continuous changes in the market and to seize the opportunities they bring with them.”

However, this does not mean that the Toriellis have stepped aside. They still own the company and Pietro remains chairman, representing the company at an institutional level as well as dealing with selected markets. Giovanni is vice-president and, besides representing the company, has operational duties that allow him to focus on key specific projects. Other long-standing members of the management team were also given new board functions. Paolo Andreoni, who has been with the company for 40 years, remains a director and advises the management team as well as taking direct responsibility for a number of sales markets. Carlo Katic, who was previously the sales manager, has joined the board as commercial director.

What of the future?

The company sees no reason not to be optimistic about the future. Pietro Torielli says, “Even in a rapidly changing situation and with the Italian shoe industry reducing in size, I am convinced that the shoe industry will always remain in Italy and companies will be obliged to use the latest technologies to survive and remain competitive. We are continuing to invest heavily in these new technologies and have the will and capability to support them, not only in Italy but also in other countries where high quality shoes will be produced. Countries where big volumes of shoes are and will be produced, will also receive our maximum attention. We will modify the approach

we have historically taken to be present in many countries and concentrate instead on fewer in number but that will be extremely important in the next five to ten years.”

His son Giovanni Torielli adds further comment by saying, “The shoe industry is undergoing big changes and our company sees this as an opportunity. We are moving along in two directions: internationalisation and innovation. Torielli is a company that relies on service as a winning factor. Now that the shoemaking industry is even more delocalised and focused in a few major markets, Torielli is working to be closer to these through having a more dynamic and autonomous local sales and support organisation. This in turn means investment in people and resources.”

As far as innovation is concerned, he points out that, “Innovation has been Torielli’s strength for many years. We are sure that, in the future, technology will play an important role both for shoemaking companies that decide to produce in western countries as well as those which decided to delocalise. The demand for Integrated Design and Production Systems and technologies that increase flexibility and cost reduction is growing. We are concentrating on CadCam, PDM systems, Automatic Cutting, Production Planning and Control systems. We are also expanding our consultancy services as we see customers need to be supported during these times of great change.”



Presentation to the Press: l-r Carlo Katic, Ian Paris, Pietro Torielli, Giovanni Torielli

Ian Paris, the new CEO, also has a positive viewpoint, “Torielli has always been a company that has been able to react to changes within the industry and to turn them into opportunities. Collectively marketing traditional shoe machinery for many small companies, leading the way in exporting Italian machinery and introducing high tech solutions to the industry are some good examples of those that have taken place since the company was formed in 1924.”

He accepts that the old industry has gone and that this is a new era. “It is also clear that the demand for shoes is not decreasing and this is an opportunity for us all. The Torielli brand has substance behind it and its core values are—as Giovanni has said—quality of service and innovation. These form the basis for the future of the business and will allow us to adapt to the new challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.” 