



Un Giorno a Torino

Geoffrey Goldberg

The day in Turin started early, 9 AM at Cavalitto's, the noted Lancia parts supplier. I was traveling with Joachim Griesse, a Swiss *lancista* I had met the year before when the Lancia66 crowd came to the US and journeyed from Chicago to the west coast. He was driving his Aurelia B20 then, but now we were in a Golf carrying a fuel tank for his Appia.

By 10 AM we were on our way to the Lancia factory, or what remains of it. We had been invited by Dr. Masala and Luigi de Virgilio, whose father designed the Aurelia V6 some sixty years ago. We were to meet up at the factory and look at the cars. Simple enough.

Walking up to the old Aurelia production line near the Lancia tower, we met an understated but dignified man of moderate height. I said we hadn't met, and introduced myself to Manfredi Lancia, Vincenzo's nephew, who had chosen to join us that morning. The tower, which the Torinese call the skyscraper, had been designed by the father of Guido Rosani, maker of the replica D24 and D50. Some years ago it had been sold off by Fiat to an internet company and in its renovation, had



photographs by Geoffrey Goldberg



Opposite, top: Corner entry to the old plant (note the Lancia shields flanking the large central opening). The collection and the 1950s Lancia tower are just two blocks away.

Opposite, below: 1913 Theta, ex-Rockefeller family in New York.

Above: Experimental fuel injected Aprilia motor.

Above right: WW2 Lynx.

Right: Large hall where Aurelias were once assembled.

Below, right: D25 (note horizontal grille).



lost much of its charm. Still, it is an imposing structure.

Into the hall we went, to be immediately greeted by some 70 cars on display—the entire history of Lancia, there for the viewing. It was overwhelming—there was a sharp disjunction between the scale and extent of the cars on the one hand (massive) and the understated and modest presentation of these treasures (minimal). A red carpet ran between the aisles of cars, but apart from a placard explaining each one, nothing more. No literature, no attendants, no lighting, no special exhibits. Just very special stuff, and a lot of it.

So where to start, what to do? Joachim, Manfredi, Dr. Masala and Luigi De Virgilio were having a fine conversation, mostly in Italian (not my native language), so I went off to photograph. First one starts with the group of race cars—right by the entry, with pride of place. The D50, the rarely seen D25, a Fulvia HF, Stratos, and more. Pretty soon I was lost. Does one go to look at the experimental or the production cars? The one-offs or the cars of historical import? What was clear was that everything was here. Everything you had heard of, thought





of, knew of... Somewhere it was here. There were things I had heard of, but never knew still existed. The Appia berlina of the 100,000 miles with *Quattroruote* was here. The Loraymo Flaminia, courtesy of the American Lancia Club. The Trikappa with the first Lancia V engine, the rarely seen V8 that preceded the Lambda. Yes, of course, there was the Aprilia, the Ardea, Augusta, Dilambdas, Artenas, Asturas... and the Alpha, and the series1 B20. The other Aurelias were away on show at the Bonfanti museum, so this was not to be their day, to be sure.

Off on the sides were the rarely seen and rarely known special items—the stuff that makes the heart of a *lancista* go faster yet. There were the two V12 prototype engines—one from 1917, a 24 liter, the other 6 liters from 1919—both rumored, but never seen in modern photos. And truly there they were! And the Lynx, Lancia's contribution to WW2, with 4-wheel independent suspension, similar to Macpherson struts. And the fuel injected Aprilia engine!

There were details to be seen—the Trikappa had a cast aluminum firewall buttressing the entire chassis, à la OM.



Manfredi Lancia pointed out the aluminum cast sump for the early V12 engine—a massive casting, remarkable in any era, totally amazing for 1917 (Vincenzo Lancia built the first aluminum foundry in Turin). Dr. Masala proudly showed me the Theta belonging to the Rockefeller family, with the family crest on the doors. I couldn't think of anything that wasn't there, and couldn't take in what there was.

We spent some time visiting the vast concrete hall, with its large industrial skylights. It's hard to know if only Aurelias were built there, although there were tracks in the floor for moving dollies around. But for now, it was a space of stillness, even then an oddity in the larger scheme of the factory. The soft light of mid-day played with us, as we stood there talking for several hours that day. The content of our conversations I do not recall, but the memory of the day is very clear. There were many impressions being shared—from Joachim with his Lambda and Aurelia, Dr. Masala's many years of service and direction to treasure the history of Lancia, Manfredi's family, and Luigi's father's role. The American (myself) was evidence that their

Opposite, top: Dr. Masala, Luigi De Virgilio, Joachim Griesse, and Manfredi Lancia in conversation.

Opposite, bottom: Valve train from 1917 24-liter V12 engine, 350 HP.

Above: D50.

Below: Vintage lineup, including Astura and Dilambda.





Above: Tri-Kappa chassis, with cast aluminum firewall for structural rigidity. The Tri-Kappa was the first Lancia with a V engine.

Right: Beta line-up in the Aurelia assembly hall.

Opposite, top: The group with the racing 1908 Alpha sport & D50.

Opposite, bottom: Compact 1919 6-liter V12 prototype, with massive sump in a single casting.



passions and interests still were important to people from far away.

There was a lengthy conversation, a delicate one, about the events of the 1950s. The loss of the factory from the family left a mark to be sure. It was hard to discuss—was Gianni right or wrong? Were there options? How does one feel about this now? When asked if there were regrets for the loss—the answer came back that Gianni did the right thing—that the notion of production that Lancia represented at the time was one that just couldn't work, and couldn't be made to work. Pesenti, it was then said, put so much money into modernizing Lancia production and increasing efficiency, but even after the Fulvia, the Flavia and Chivasso, he too couldn't make it work. There it was—clearly stated. The facts were the facts.

And in that moment, I saw the character of the Lancia family. Modest, yet strong willed, clear headed, understated, and not afraid of the realities of difficult situations. These cars were products of that conviction.

We saw the courtyard and some other parts of the factory—some places still being used, some small portion being torn down.



Luigi pointed to some distant parts of the factory being demolished even that day—but I paid little mind, as there is only so much one can absorb. Sadly now, the museum is closed. There remains within Fiat little institutional memory of Lancia. Ironically so, as now Fiat management is beginning to see the value in having a design-centric brand with such a long history. Perhaps Lancia's heritage will be recovered. Perhaps it will be treasured before it is lost. It is hard to know what will happen to the collection—will it be housed in a new museum, or scattered to the hands of private collectors? On that day we knew we were in a quiet interlude, but with no real knowledge of what that meant. As the door shut, we left this wonderful room behind, not with sadness, but with a recognition of the strength of those achievements, and were grateful for time with them.



Editor's note:

Fiat has announced plans to open a new museum at the Mirafiori plant which is to include Fiat, Alfa Romeo and Lancia. This venue is not scheduled to open before 2009 at the earliest and at the time of writing, it is not clear what will happen to the Lancia collection as the old factory site has been sold to developers. It is most likely that the cars will remain in storage until the new facility is open and when it does, it will probably not contain the number and range of exhibits that Geoff viewed on his visit.