



A Bocconi University graduate at the helm

Blending Italian and foreign manufacturing know-how, while promoting Italian style and prioritizing customer demands is **Piergiorgio Scarani's philosophy**. At the helm of Rio Yachts, Scarani's thoughts on the company's half-century-long success

Thoughts and words collected by Franco Michienzi

Rio Yachts' history is a passionate family saga, born on the idyllic shores of Lake Iseo. Now with branches worldwide, the still family-owned company has chosen to remain firmly rooted in its tradition of following customer demand step by step, rather than being tempted to increase production, cut costs and boost international sales relentlessly, at any price.

Rio's story is reflected in that of the family's second generation scion, Piergiorgio Scarani, born in Brescia in 1968, now at the company's helm.

Piergiorgio cut his teeth in the family business, working in the shipyard fresh out of high school. But it was after getting his degree in Business Administration from the prestigious Bocconi University in Milan that he began officially to work for the company, gaining experience in every department, even though he has always favored the design department.

How have you been dealing with this long period of crisis, which seems to have become a chronic feature of the current economic situation?

Over the last few years the world has undergone a total transformation, both on the general economic scene and in the nautical sector in particular, especially as far as the USA and Europe are concerned. It will surely be a while till the situation gets straightened out.

Our company has long history. We have been in the business for fifty years, and during this last decade, we have gradually risen to become one of the top manufacturers in our field, thanks to our emphasis on quality products and good customer relations. This policy has really paid off, as evidenced by the fact that we have weathered the crisis far

better than other Italian companies who perhaps gambled on greater sales volumes and vaster distribution systems. While we are invoicing less than in the past, we are, in any case, satisfied.

You have also been investing...

Yes, we've never lost faith in the market so we have taken a long-term approach, made possible also because we are part of a solid network of companies. This has allowed us to invest in the production of new models and to continue to provide assistance to boat owners.

Is being 50 an asset?

Absolutely, experience is our strong point. Today's yacht purchaser is more careful and prefers to rely on more established shipyards. In this sense, the market has already been culled.

Piergiorgio Scarani has been the managing director of Rio Yachts since 2003, replacing the firm's founder, his father Luigi, who passed away in 2011, the year of the company's 50th anniversary. Piergiorgio likes travelling, design and architecture.



Haven't you ever considered moving your production abroad?

There are surely a number of new markets beginning to emerge in the nautical sector. Some of them, Brazil for example, have the potential of developing to reach our own levels, while others, like China, will surely require more time to mature. If we in the west possess the know-how while it is elsewhere that markets are expanding, we will have to figure out a way to work together. Our choice has been to bet on those markets, Brazil chief among them, not so much as a target for exportation, as territories to be explored as potential secondary domestic markets. Although the primary phase coincides with exporting our products to these countries, to start getting our name known on their markets, our long-term goals go beyond exportation.

Do you believe that Brazil can actually become a mature and consistent market, despite the ramifications of the current crisis, such as the protectionist stance of the local government and their fluctuating regulations? Developing countries are tumultuous, which limits their structural capacities and therefore require great patience. Since we are a family-run company and thus cannot be present everywhere, we have chosen to focus on just a few parts of the world, becoming very visibly and actively present there. It is a long, hard process.

How important do you think Italian-made quality really is?

Very important, and for two distinct reasons. First of all because our expertise and craftsmanship is world famous. Secondly because our shipyards have a competitive edge in terms of prestige.

So what do we need to do to defend the "made-in-Italy" label?

I believe that first of all we need to integrate Italian entrepreneurship with that of other countries. There are thousands of ways to accomplish this, from Italian designers offering their services to foreign companies (as we have often seen successfully implemented in the automobile industry), to Italian companies who open foreign plants and those who merge with foreign firms. There isn't a single rule of thumb: we need to understand whether we are globalized and "globalizable".

It is the yacht owners themselves who have been providing feedback for new models and improvements...

At the moment, production logic has been turned around. The company has a number of projects in the works, but whereas in the past we would present our designs to the public, nowadays we contact our faithful clients, introduce them to the projects already underway, and take suggestions from them, perhaps adapting our design to their suggested modifications, or altering our project priorities.



Colorado 54 is a sporty but finely-furnished boat with an outstanding style. In addition to the light-filled master cabin, there are two guest cabins.



The range

Rio Colorado 54



Rio 36 Art



Rio 46 Air



Rio Espera 34



Rio 42 Air



Rio Espera TA



Rio 36 Air



Rio Blu 40



Rio 46 Art



Rio 32 Blu



Rio 42 Art



Rio 28 Blu

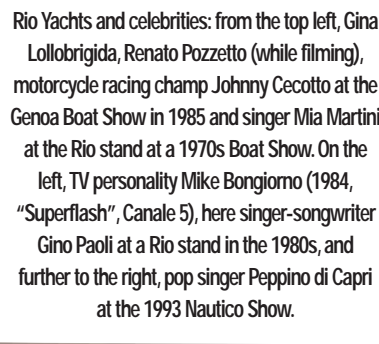


Below, a historic photo of an Espera (the first boat to bear this name was built in 1961). On the right, a more recent model, the Espera 34, a 9.9-meter open vessel designed by Marino Alfani. In the center of the page, the Colorado 54 (at sea, and below, the helm station with its wide lateral windows and retractable sunroof).





From left to right, Piergiorgio Scarani with his father Luigi, Italian actor Diego Abatantuono aboard a Rio yacht while filming the 1982 movie *Violentemente mia* and here on the right, comedian Massimo Boldi, another fan of Rio Yachts.



Rio Yachts and celebrities: from the top left, Gina Lollobrigida, Renato Pozzetto (while filming), motorcycle racing champ Johnny Cecotto at the Genoa Boat Show in 1985 and singer Mia Martini at the Rio stand at a 1970s Boat Show. On the left, TV personality Mike Bongiorno (1984, "Superflash", Canale 5), here singer-songwriter Gino Paoli at a Rio stand in the 1980s, and further to the right, pop singer Peppino di Capri at the 1993 Nautico Show.

We are a part of history

In the wake of the economic boom and the "Italian miracle" of the early 60s, Luigi Scarani and Anna Maria Ziliani decided to start a boat and glider manufacturing company called Avionautica Rio on Lake Iseo. A few years later Luigi's brother, Carlo joined the company. Thus begins the story of Rio Yachts, a boat yard known for its long-range vision, as evinced in particular at the end of the "dolce vita" era. In that period, when production was beginning to decline, Rio set off to launch an "everyman's boat." In addition to traditional models, Rio of hulls the period came in a range of innovative materials, shapes and sizes. ABS thermoplastic plates were used, which led to collaboration with ANIC, part of the ENI Group, using their product, Ravikral. This allowed Rio to offer boats requiring very little maintenance, easy to construct because they are mold-produced. Furthermore, the polyurethane foam injected between the inner and outer shells made the craft virtually unsinkable. Obviously, these smaller boats bore a more reasonable price tag. Emblematic of this period is the Rio 310 (3.10 overall length and using an outboard motor of up to 4HP). Fifteen of these vessels were produced between 1971 and 1974.

This line distinguished the 1970s which ushered in a period of continuous growth for Rio. Opening building facilities and branch offices in Spain and France, Rio's boom culminated with the production of a line of "work boats" in the 1980s that supplied more than 200 motorboats to the Italian Carabinieri Police Force. The range was still in expansion when Luigi Scarani passed the baton to his son Piergiorgio in the year 2000. The elder s Scarani passed away in 2011 at the age of 77.



Have you considered producing small-to-medium sized flydeck models designed for family trips?

This is a point that has been hotly debated at the boatyard. We need to decide whether to shift our production to respond to market demands or remain true to our reputation in terms of image, performance and innovation. Ours has always been a niche market, calling for a limited production line, and this has always been a conscious choice on our part. We'll see...

From a manufacturing point of view, what kind of production processes do you favor?

Our resins are made of vinylester, especially for the "little boat" that is only kept in the water a few months a year. For the next size up, we use infusion techniques, although not for the entire hull, whose frame is made up of an assemblage of traditionally laminated and infusion-generated components.

Is there room for a technological revolution in this sense?

«I believe our success in dealing with the current crisis comes from maintaining a close relationship with our customers, a relationship which continues even post-sale».

There is a kind of performance boat that needs to be a certain size - the typical 10,000 HP "speedboat" that can be as much as 20 meters long. A boat like this designed for speed and excitement can certainly benefit from being made lighter and more efficient. But there are other types of craft that are designed to be a bit slower, allowing a different approach to life at sea which provide a different sort of autonomy. We are focusing on completing the range of the former, so at the moment can only look on while these new types appear on the market. I think that this segment could spur on the market, as far as medium/large craft (starting from 20 meters) are concerned.

How far do you think your range will go?

We are oriented between 10 and 20 meter range and plan to remain there, although we have received requests to produce smaller vessels. Many other boat yards have shifted the focus of their production to making 8-9 meter boats but need to figure out whether they can guarantee the quality of such small craft. I can't rule out Rio producing boats like this, too, in the future.



Rio 42 Art.