

The **BIREL** Story



Gianluca Beggio's World Formula C Championship victory at Ugento last September was the Italian's third consecutive such victory, but it also marked another significant event, the first World title for the Birel Motorsport team created in 1995 and its chief Ronni Sala, grandson of Umberto Sala, the founder of Birel some 38 years earlier.

When Italy began to 'import' the sport of karting in the late 1950's it immediately attracted the attention of Umberto Sala, the owner of a light carpentry firm in Lissone called Birel. Umberto was a great lover of motor engines and had taken part in many motorcycle competitions with success. He foresaw a promising future for this new type of racing vehicle, and for this reason in 1959 he made the first Birel kart chassis, which was powered by a McCulloch engine. Over the next few years carpentry remained the principal activity of the company, but at the same time Umberto started to manufacture kart chassis tested 'at home' by his brother Guido, a driver of great notoriety, and by his two sons. The youngsters were attracted by the new sport which promised amusement and glory. The number of competitions increased and with them the request for chassis that year after year became more and more numerous, so that, after its World Championship victory in 1967 with Rossi, the company abandoned once and for all carpentry work to concentrate primarily on

manufacturing chassis for karts.

In 1968 the family firm decided to branch out and manufacture a car for Formula 3, with which, in the same year, Vittorio Brambilla won the Italian Championship. But just two years later, after some hesitation, Umberto took the decision to devote the company solely to manufacturing chassis for karts.

The patron's attention to detail in forecasting and manufacturing did not give room for improvisation, the only choice was to specialise.

1974 was another important year for the company. Birel changed its structure and became a corporation managed by Umberto's sons Oscar, already an



Beggio's Formula C World title was the first for Birel Motorsport and the latest in a string of successes for Birel

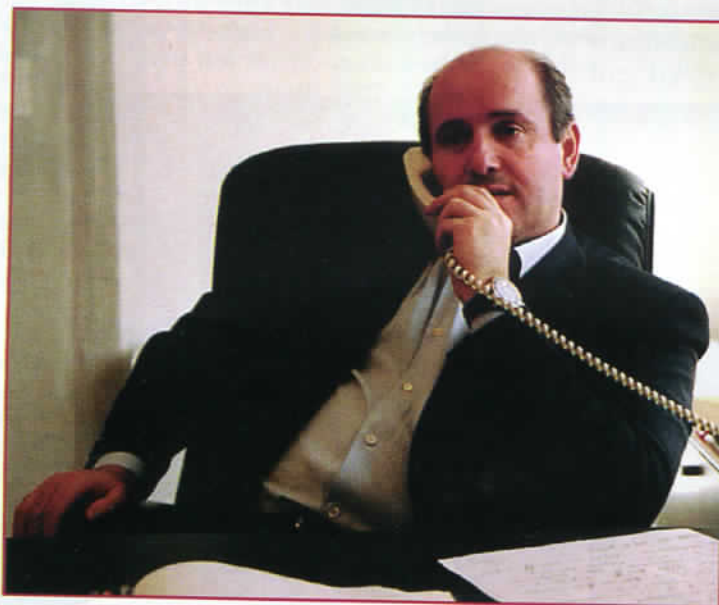
international driver, and Ermanno. The two young men, although guaranteeing the continuity of the technical and manufacturing base, realised that only by promotion could they increase the number of fans and followers of this sport that was now starting to decline in popularity. After many studies, together with IAME they conceived a new class, Cadet 100cc. Thanks to this new category, karting began to rise again in Italy.

The 70's and 80's saw many World Championship victories achieved by drivers on Birel chassis such as Terry Fullerton, Riccardo Patrese, Stefano Modena and Mike Wilson and then in 1989 came the next big step forward for the company when Oscar Sala took over full control. Soon after he started the production of a new line of accessories, Freeline, manufacturing items such as wheels, bodywork, steering wheels and silencers right through to braking systems which, because they were badged as Freeline and not Birel, could happily be used by other kart manufacturers. Six years later, in 1995, the company moved to its current premises, the need for extra space prompted by demands on production. Birel now occupies over 3,000 sq. metres for production and at least another 2,000 sq. metres for stores. Annually they currently produce about 5,000 chassis, 250,000 wheels, 40,000 fairings and more than 10,000 brake systems! The high production levels also demanded a technological modernisation and for this reason a robot appeared in the workshop for welding operations together with many computer controlled stations for the manufacturing of other components.

Birel's staff now totals some 50 persons for the various departments - Manufacturing, Administration, Sales, Research



Designing more components. On the wall is one of Mike Wilson's karts, the Brit won three World Championships using Birel chassis



Oscar Sala took over full control of Birel in 1989

& Development and the Racing Department. The Research & Development section uses sophisticated internal systems such as 3D integrated CAD-CAM to design parts with the help of computers and beyond that it also employs advanced external systems for the study of new materials and components. Birel Motorsport was born in 1995 and manages the Racing Department, testing new parts and models for the parent company. Birel Motorsport's staff includes two engineers engaged in structural calculations and data collection, so as to confirm with mathematical calculations the information given by drivers. The young independent company occupies an area of about 800 sq. metres,



Just a few of the items in the Freeline range



Guido Sala winning the 1962 Grand Prix d'Europe at Lausanne, Switzerland



You need to be well organised to produce 5000 chassis a year

where karts are prepared just before each competition and then tested to ascertain their efficiency. Four full time drivers and 15

engineers and mechanics are employed to undertake the season's competitions, including all the overseas events and track



Karts for team use are prepared in the Racing Department



The racing team enjoy a spacious work area at the circuit

tests. The company also helps external teams, supplying them with experimental materials and parts so as to receive even more feedback before passing all its data to the manufacturing department.

Although in Europe Birel continues with a traditional structure linking it to its importers and dealers, for the American and the Asian countries it has created three new structures: Birel USA, Birel Pacific and Birel Sudam. Their aim is to live these markets from the inside so as to be conscious of the clients needs and production necessities. For the future the company has devised new production developments for these three new divisions which already play an important part in the distribution of Birel products all over the world.

Birel has certainly come a long way since Umberto Sala had to decide whether to stick with carpentry or move into karting!

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP VICTORIES

1967	Edgardo Rossi (CH)	100 Senior
1971	Felice Rovelli (I)	100 Junior
1973	Terry Fullerton (GB)	100 Senior
1974	Riccardo Patrese (I)	100 Senior
1978	Stefano Modena (I)	100 Junior
1978	Lake Speed (USA)	100 Senior
1979	Thomas Glauser (CH)	100 Junior
1981	Mike Wilson (I)	Formula K
1982	Piergiorgio Deila (I)	100 Junior
1982	Mike Wilson (I)	Formula K
1983	Mike Wilson (I)	Formula K
1983	Gianni Mazzola (I)	Formula C
1984	Andrea Gilardi (I)	100 Junior
1985	Andrea Gilardi (I)	100 Junior
1986	Fabrizio De Simoni (I)	100 Junior
1986	Guba Ribas (BR)	Formula K
1987	Manufacturers	
1989	Manufacturers	
1990	Alessandro Piccini (I)	Formula C
1991	Alessandro Piccini (I)	Formula C
1991	Manufacturers	
1997	Gianluca Beggio (I)	Formula C



Birel Motorsport's boss Ronni Sala