Magneti Marelli's history

1919>2010

In 1891, Ercole Marelli founded the company bearing his name, specialised in the production of electrical devices and engines. In 1915, the company Società Anonima Ercole Marelli started the first tests in Italy in the field of start magnets for internal combustion engines.

Fiat contacted the company Società Anonima Ercole Marelli to start the mass production of start magnets in order to satisfy the growing demand for magnets and electrical components for the mobility sector. Magneti Marelli was founded on the 8th October 1919. The share capital was 7 million of the former Italian Liras, underwritten in equal parts by Fiat and Società Anonima Ercole Marelli, which contributed to the newly-founded company the machinery and the building commissioned by Ercole Marelli in 1905 in Sesto San Giovanni (MI). This building will become Magneti Marelli's first historical headquarters.

In the 1920s, Magneti Marelli activities gained strength and diversified: the company started producing magnets for automobiles, motorbikes, industrial motors, 4, 8 and 12-racing engines and for aviation, electrical equipment such as dynamos, acoustic buzzers, windshield wipers, lighting and start systems, aviation sparkplugs. The automobile battery production division was set up. The extensive activities for the study and design of new products, often innovative, required a significant investment in terms of manpower and facilities. The "Scuola Vedette" was founded in 1926 for in-house personnel training courses. Most importantly, Magneti Marelli was one of the first companies to institutionalize a Studies Department aimed at the development of new products, along with 13 testing laboratories in the following sectors: raw materials, injections, aptitude tests, radios, short waves, television, acoustics, radio receivers and transmitters design, chemistry, measurement, military radios, in addition to 2 testing rooms for electrical equipment and radio.

In the 1930s, Magneti Marelli started the production of radios, sold under the Radiomarelli brand, while under its own name it produced professional radio equipment for land, aeronautical and naval communications, and radio bridges. Mabo, a joint-venture between Magneti Marelli and Bosch for the marketing of electrical equipment for automobiles and motorbikes, was set up in 1935. In that same year, the company decided to produce sparkplugs for automobiles and motorbikes. This activity, along with the battery sector, will provide Magneti Marelli with fame and popularity for over 50 years. In 1938, Magneti Marelli's research and science laboratories availed themselves of the work of Enrico Fermi, precisely in the year he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics.

Magneti Marelli tested the first television broadcasts for EIAR and RAI (Italy's state-run television), designing and building the entire system, from the television camera to the television, including signal reception and transmission. Way back in 1939, Magneti Marelli developed the first experimental television connection from the Milan Fairgrounds, through an antenna installed on top of the Park Tower, today known as Branca Tower and a prototype television receiving device almost twenty years prior to the official launch of television in Italy.

At the same time, the company Fivre was founded for the production of electric radio valves and of future cathode tubes, in other words the screens, for television. Batteries for electric-drive vehicles, submarines and lighting applications started being produced at this time as well.

In the 1940s, Magneti Marelli became a supplier to the Italian Army, Navy and Air Force, as well as for the major Italian state institutions, for which it produced electrical equipment and mobile reception and transmission systems, built the Rome-Milan and Marche-Dalmatia telephone radio bridges, telegraph transmitters and short/medium-wave stations for the Italian Ministry of Communications.

Some plants were damaged by air raids during World War II. The company started to rebuild and recover right after the war ended, and in 1947 Magneti Marelli was listed on the main Italian stock markets.

Since its founding in 1919, Magneti Marelli has always been involved in the racing world. The 1920s competitions were usually held on unmade roads and using standard production cars. The mechanical and electrical components were subjected to extremely exacting uses, among dust and mud, which is the reason why sturdiness, reliability and an effective assistance on the racing fields were often the keys to success. Ever since that time, Magneti Marelli has bet on the performances and reliability of its magnets, coils, distributors and all electrical components. Moreover, the Magneti Marelli racing service has been a constant presence on the racetracks, supplying valuable technical assistance, in the beginning for the electromechanical devices, and subsequently for increasingly sophisticated electronic equipment.

In the 1950, Magneti Marelli built the first radio television bridges for RAI (Italy's state TV), including the Milan-Palermo bridge, first in Europe in terms of size and power. In 1959, it designed and built the radio bridge for the launch of the second RAI channel, inaugurated for the 1960 Olympics in Rome. At this time the mass production of televisions under the brand name Radiomarelli was also started: a survey conducted by Doxa in 1956-58 revealed that Radiomarelli is the brand preferred by Italians, as one fourth of the population owned Magneti Marelli household appliances.

Italy's weather network of the time and the reception and transmission apparatuses for professional land, air and sea transmission were designed and built by Magneti Marelli. In 1959, the world's largest proton synchrotron was put in the operation at the CERN in Geneva: the project and execution of the accelerator units was entrusted to Magneti Marelli. The uproar of the successes achieved in those years was accompanied by the incorporation of franchises in France, Spain, Brazil and Argentina.

During the 1960s, the company's choices led to a gradual focusing of activities in the automotive technology sector. In 1963, the entire telecommunication sector was sold, while 51% of Prestolite Italiana, a company specializing in the manufacture of ignition sparkplugs, was acquired. In 1967, Fiat became the majority shareholder and the first business combination operations were begun, leading to the incorporation in Magneti Marelli of the following subsidiaries: Mabo (commercial joint venture with Bosch), Radiomarelli and Imcaradio (production and marketing of radios and televisions for the consumer market), Rabotti (professional test benches), Iniex (fuel injection systems), and Fivre (valves and cathode tubes for radios and televisions). The year 1968 marked the production of Dinoplex, the first electronic ignition system, and a year later Magneti Marelli's electronic systems were installed on racing vehicles. The following year, the company MAKO, dedicated to the production of electrical and compressed-air equipment, was founded in Turkey.

The production of radios and televisions for the consumer market was also abandoned in the 1970s, downsizing Radiomarelli to the sole marketing and assistance until 1975, when it was finally sold. In 1978, Magneti Marelli inaugurated its first production facility in Brazil, which today is one of the main hubs of the company's activities, second only to Italy for number of employees.

In these years, Fivre began a study programme on "thick film" circuits for automotive applications and, together with Fiat, set up a Research Centre for the application of electronics to automobiles. In 1979, the company Marelli Autronica was set up, consisting of a joint venture between Magneti Marelli, Fiat and Weber (Bologna) for the study and production of electronic control devices for ignition and supply systems.

To Magneti Marelli, motorsport has always represented a dual-fold opportunity: the possibility to create, design and test in an environment characterized by extreme conditions and performances, technologies, know-how and methods which could then be applied to mass-produced vehicles or, vice versa, to use the components fitted on everyday automobiles and making them suitable to the high performances of the racing world.

In the 1980s, practically the entire sector of batteries and accumulators for the automotive and electric drive sector (naval, submarine, road and railway) in Italy is controlled by Magneti Marelli, through various brands such as Titano, Tudor, Hensemberger, York and Fap. The mass production of the Digiplex electronic ignition began, along with the industrialization of the Cityplex system, which automatically turns off and on the engine during stops, and of the Cut-off system, which cuts off supply upon releasing the accelerator pedal, solutions already aimed at saving fuel and reducing polluting emissions. In 1984, the company headquarters were relocated from Sesto San Giovanni to Cinisello Balsamo (MI). Between 1986 and 1987, Magneti Marelli was reorganized as an industrial holding, incorporating important and prestigious European companies such as Weber, Veglia Borletti, Carello, Siem, Solex and Jaeger, whose various industrial specializations in the field of lighting, fuel control and supply and in-vehicle electronics merge to form Magneti Marelli's patrimony of technological competences. The first Excellence Centre for electronic automotive systems was set up in 1989, with facilities in Italy and in France.

In the 1990s, strategies were implemented in order to streamline and strengthen the automotive core business, at the same time proceeding to the divestment of areas considered to be non-strategic. Through a complex policy of acquisitions and joint ventures with industrial sector leaders, Magneti Marelli expanded its presence on the international markets, developing innovative competences and offering a wider range of products and services. The year 1994 marked the merger between Magneti Marelli and Gilardini, which resulted in the Magneti Marelli maxi hub in the field of automotive components. Two years later, Magneti Marelli started its operations in China with the Guangzhou plant, consolidating its presence through the years with additional production facilities in Shanghai and in Wuhu. In these years, the company structure was reorganized into business lines, and the Magneti Marelli headquarters moved to the current location in Corbetta (MI).

With the start of the new Millennium, Magneti Marelli expanded its vocation of major components manufacturer with the ability to design and produce complete automotive systems for leading carmakers. After starting way back in 1998 its activities in the area of satellite navigation, in 2000 the first Magneti Marelli satellite system was fitted on a mass-produced car, the Alfa Romeo 147. Between 2000 and 2001, the refocusing of industrial activities led to the company's delisting from the stock market and to the Fiat Group's decision to sell certain business branches, such as electronic systems, aftermarket, and air-conditioning. That same year, in the field of motor vehicle lighting, Magneti Marelli takes full control of Automotive Lighting, a joint venture started with Bosch in 1999.

Magneti Marelli is committed to providing the best answers to the automotive challenges of the future, specifically on the subject of environmental sustainability, safety and "intelligent" automobiles. In 2003, Magneti Marelli launched in Brazil the multi-fuel technology called Flexfuel SFS®, which allows internal combustion engines to run both on ethanol, gasoline or any blend of the two.

The following year, with the installation of Sergio Marchionne in 2004 at the helm of the Fiat Group, the automotive components business regained strategic importance, and with the new management team a new season began for Magneti Marelli, during which the entire industrial perimeter was recreated through the reintegration of the Electronic Systems and After Market divisions.
In 2007, Automotive Lighting developed the world's first mass-produced full-LED headlamp for the Audi R8, while in 2008 the multi-fuel technology TetraFuel®, developed by Magneti Marelli in Brazil in 2006 as the evolution of the Flexfuel SFS®, awarded the 14th edition of the PACE Award, a prestigious award given the best market innovations at the global level.

In 2009 Magneti Marelli celebrated the 90th anniversary of its founding. That same year, Magnet Marelli's entire industrial perimeter was duplicated in India, also thanks to the start of 6 local joint ventures that completed a strategic presence in one of the key countries in the global scenario for the future of the automotive market, while in 2010, with the President of Fiat Group, John Elkann, and the President of Confindustria, Emma Marcegaglia, on attendance, the plant for the joint venture between Magneti Marelli and SAIC, aimed at the production of hydraulic components for the Freechoice™ (or AMT) automated transmission was inaugurated in Jiading, Shanghai.

Magneti Marelli's commitment in motorsport is confirmed and strengthened thanks to engine control systems, telemetry, electro-hydraulic controls for gearboxes, displays, electromechanical systems and software applications. In fact, Magneti Marelli has competed and won in Formula 1 with Ferrari and Renault, among others, in the rallies with Lancia, Seat, Peugeot and Citroen, in MotoGP and Superbike with Ducati e Yamaha, as well in speedboat racing in the Powerboat competitions. Between 2008 and 2009, Magneti Marelli Motorsport also developed the KERS, a system for the recovery of kinetic energy under braking intended for Formula 1.