

# The Giant of Turin

***The industrial empire of Fiat is a major cog in the Italian economy. Its founder has often been called 'the Henry Ford of Italy'***

By **ANTONIO GIORDANO**

**CAR LIFE Italian Correspondent**

**O**NCE UPON A TIME, before the birth of such automotive giants as General Motors, Ford and Chrysler and when sports cars bearing the names of Ferrari, Lancia, Maserati and Alfa-Romeo still were to come, distinctive big red cars were roaring over the roads of Europe, carrying the emblem of Italy's first venture into the organized motor industry.

This was the day of Daimler-Panhard's, de Dietrich's, Mors, Mercedes, Darracq's and De Dion Bouton's, automobiles which paved the way for the present-day European sports car. This was the dawn of the Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino—soon to become known the world over at 'Fiat.'

To most American motorists, today's version of the Fiat is a small, well-built and economical Italian car with little or no resemblance to the sleek, roaring sports cars which come from other plants in Turin—Italy's Detroit. A fortunate few on this side of the Atlantic, however, have seen and driven the Fiat 8V, a beautiful luxury sports job which can hold its own on the road, like its ancestors of half-century ago.

In 1899 (four years before the Ford Motor Company was founded), a group of Turin businessmen, searching for new and greener industrial pastures, looked at the infant motor car and liked what they saw. Under leadership of Giovanni Agnelli, who took instant command of the organization as mastermind and top sergeant of all operations, the first Fiat works was built. Agnelli, who often has been called the Henry Ford of Italy, was much like his American counterpart in long-range planning. And, like Ford, his first products won

**The production of small, well built and economical cars is the keystone upon which the Fiat company is built.**



## A paternal interest in its workers

fame in road racing, thereby creating a public demand for a proven product.

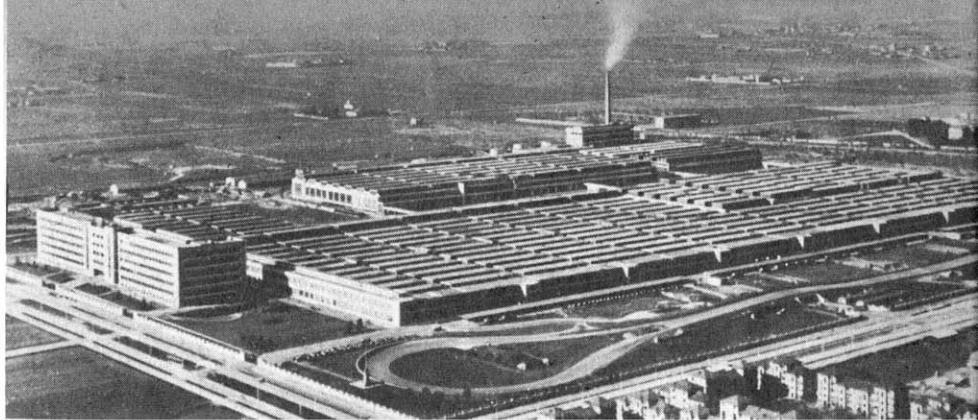
This first plant, a continuous block of buildings around an enclosed park, covered less than three acres, employed about fifty workmen and was supported by a company capital of approximately 800,000 lire or \$154,400 in U. S. currency of that day. The first Fiat, the 1899 model, was much like early American cars in overall appearance, but was superior in many fine, hand-tooled details. In those days, however, fine workmanship and styling played a minor role in customer appeal. A car had to race and win if it was to be accepted.

In the 1903 Paris-to-Madrid competition, an affair which left more than forty drivers, mechanics and spectators dead and which almost spelled the finish of European road racing, Fiat entered its first red racing cars. Within a few months, the powerful, speedy Italian products had attracted attention in the United States and Fiat soon became synonymous with such great drivers as 'Terrible' Teddy Tetzlaff, Louis Wagner, Lancia, Nazzaro, Bordino, Cagno and Salamano. With its share of victories in international events as an advertising 'pitch,' the Turin company quickly began mass production of stock cars and commercial vehicles to meet world-wide demand.

Like Henry Ford, Giovanni Agnelli kept a firm hand on the reins of his industrial empire until his death in 1945. From the little plant of 1899, he brought to Turin one of its biggest and soundest financial operations. Early in the game, Agnelli laid plans for a complete manufacturing cycle—production from the raw material into the finished goods in one giant plant like that run by Ford at Detroit's River Rouge.

Sometimes, the similarity between Fiat and Ford causes experts to wonder who had the idea first. Both entered the agricultural field with tractors and other motorized farm implements. Fiat built its first airplane engine in 1908 and by 1906, its big Diesel power plants were being used in merchant and fighting ships.

In 1939, just before Hitler launched the Second World War, the giant Mirafiori Auto Works was completed,



**An aerial view of Fiat's giant Mirafiori automobile plant, completed in 1939 just before the start of World War II. The company plays a paternal role in the lives of its workers and their families through a social welfare program.**

fulfilling Agnelli's dream of a self-contained manufacturing plant. During the war, Fiat engines and other equipment were used extensively by the Italian military machine.

A major cog in Italy's post-war economy, the company today employs more than 71,000 people and because of businesses which have sprung up around Fiat—parts suppliers, garages, dealers, etc.—it is estimated that half of Turin's population (750,000) earns its living, direct or indirect from the firm. Its land and buildings cover more than 6,000 acres in the country and its capital now stands at approximately 57 billion lire or \$91 million in U. S. currency.

Internationally, Fiat is a fast-moving competitor in the auto market. Its sales organization has branches or agents in almost every country and to increase the appeal of its cars abroad, it has set up a world-wide network of service stations to give technical aid to Fiat owners. A special factory turns out spare parts, both for current

and obsolete models since many vintage Fiats still can be found enjoying a ripe old age of 30 to 40 years.

Thanks to American monetary aid which was poured into a crippled Italian industrial economy after World War II, Fiat has modernized and expanded its facilities to include automobiles, aviation engines, farm machinery, railroad locomotives and cars, and huge Diesel marine and stationary engines. It hasn't missed a single bet in its field. Its first gas turbine car was displayed at the Turin Motor Show last April.

In agriculture, Fiat is the biggest Italian manufacturer and exporter of tractors. According to many experts, the firm's agricultural and industrial tractors are the most technically advanced in the world. In its outlook toward farming, many observers see a major weapons against Communism in Fiat's hands. A 'capitalist' industry, Fiat obviously believes in promoting and selling its product in competition with other manufacturers. Its masterminds



**The Model 1900-A Sedan is one of the company's most popular cars. Fiat is a strong competitor in the world market.**

again have overlooked nothing in making certain that the Italian farmer buys Fiat.

Constantly cooperating with agricultural experts to help get the most from the land, Fiat runs a tractor operator training school for young farmers. Special vans, fitted out with all instructional equipment, tour the countryside daily, teaching latest agrarian techniques and making new friends.

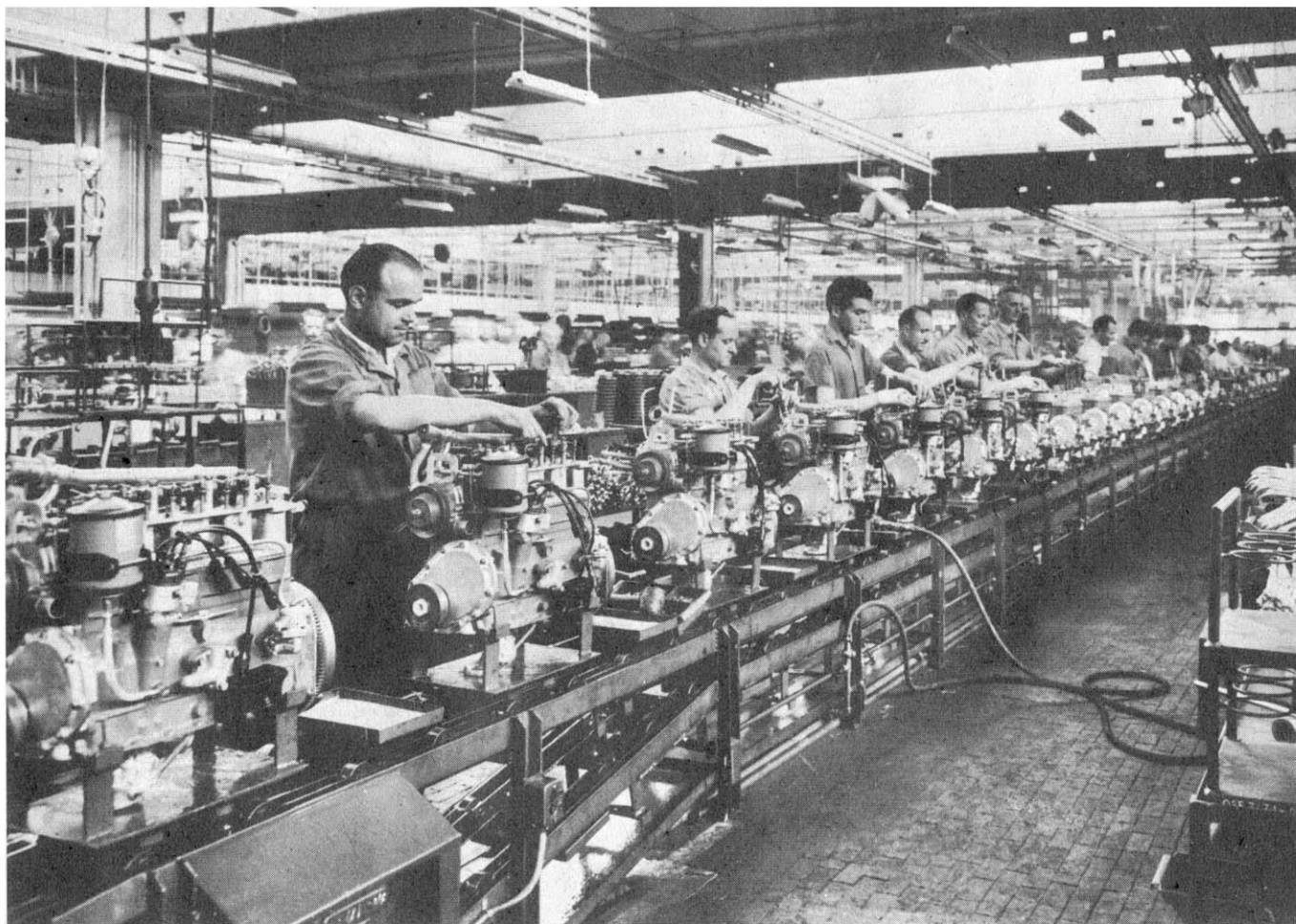
The Turin company plays a paternal role in the lives of its workers. Its social welfare work accompanies all employes and their families for life. Known as the "Mutus Aziendale Lavoratori Fiat" (Fiat Workers Mutual Benefit Service) the organization would give many American labor leaders the screaming meemies in attempts to organize in Fiat plants. Few, if any, unions could offer more.

The service is chiefly medical and utilizes more than 600 doctors in providing medicine, orthopedic treatments, hospital care, convalescent homes and cash sickness benefits. Mobile medical units tour outlying areas offering treatment of workers' families.

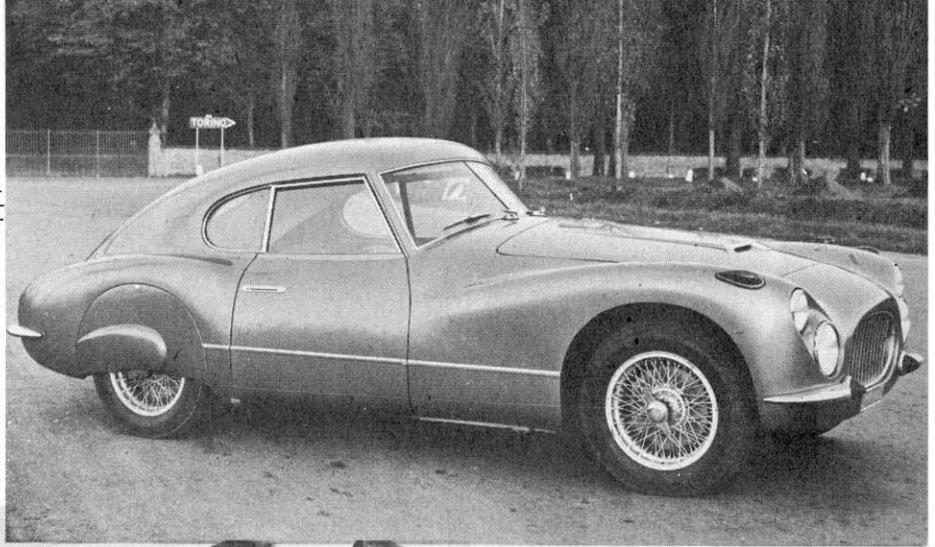
An apprentice training school turns out young, new workmen for the Fiat plants and older engineers and technicians have access to refresher courses in advanced techniques at any time.



**This modern testing track at the Mirafiori plant testifies to the up-to-date methods employed in production as well as sales and service by the Fiat firm.**



**As in all successful automotive enterprises, efficient mass production is the key to Fiat's success. And in addition to its world-wide sales organization, the firm maintains service stations in every country for technical aid to Fiat owners.**



**Fiat products run the range from the V8 sports car (above) to huge diesels, aviation engines and farming machinery.**

Even before World War II, the Italian automobile giant had built homes for its employees. Since 1947, it has donated building sites and given large cash advances to workers for construction of new housing.

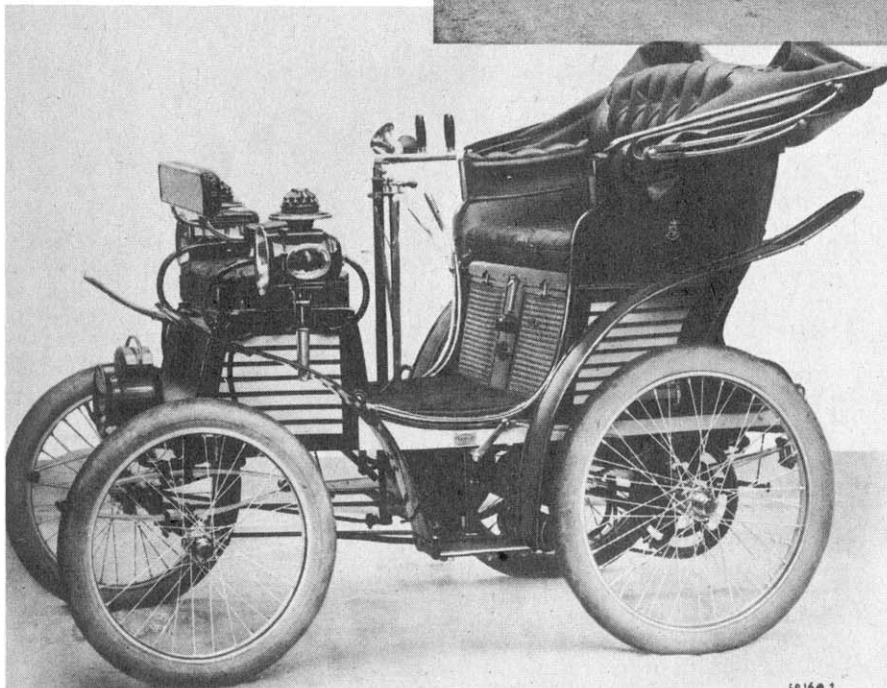
Other workers benefits sound utopian in their scope. A big recreation, culture and sports center and a free circulating library offer after-hours enjoyment. Holiday camps for workers' children lie on seashore and mountains. Day nurseries for working mothers are available at each plant. Free legal and financial advice is given all employees. And lifetime pensions await all who either complete 30 years' service or reach age 65.

Fiat's altruism toward its 'family' pays dividends. From its huge, modern assembly lines pour a practical, serviceable line of cars which are invading the world market in a bid for a lion's share of revenue. While other Italian auto makers are concentrating on ultra-expensive, hand-made sports cars, Fiat mass-production vehicles are reaching showroom floors with price tags that appeal to the average motorist. Like Henry Ford's concept of a low-priced family car, Fiat eyes the budget-minded purchaser.

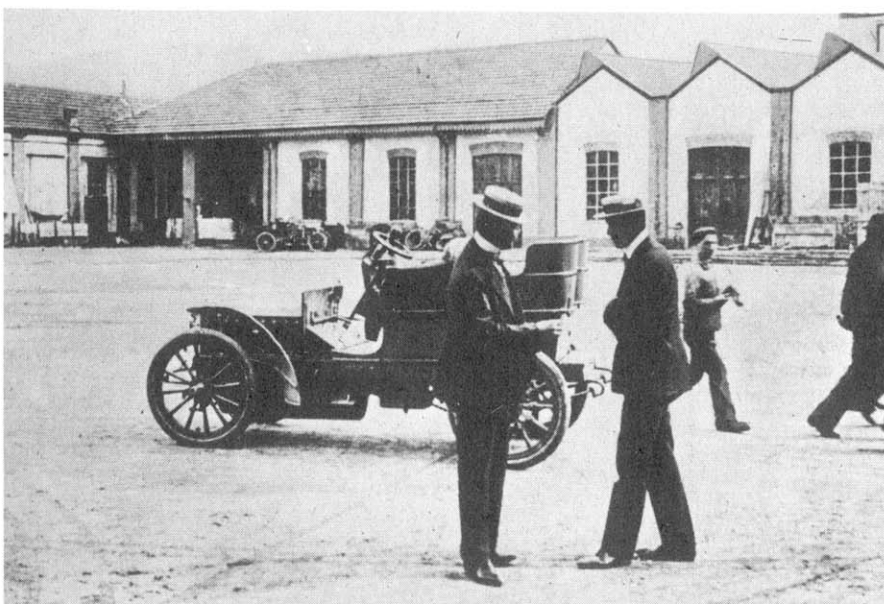
It's been a long time since bright-colored 'arty' posters were plastered over Europe to advertise Fiat as a red giant offering a classy, fine car to the world. There were many historical models produced in that period. The Model 0 of 1912, Model 501 of 1918 and Model 509 of 1925 helped write many pages in auto history. From the 1932 'Balilla,' the firm has produced the 1100, 1400, 1900 and 8V series, all on today's market.

Fiat's publicity men must have learned their trade from American advertising agencies. There is nothing modest or shy in their approach toward prospective customers. When asked about the merits of their product, they unhesitatingly proclaim:

"Fiat is supreme on land, on the sea and in the air!"



**The first Fiat (above) was produced in 1899, four years before the Ford Motor Company was founded. This early car boasted of many fine, hand-tooled details.**



**Giovanni Agnelli (left), founder of Fiat, is shown in 1899 talking with Felice Nazzaro, later an ace race driver, with the first Fiat plant in the background.**