

## THE TORNADO RACING TEAM AND THE TRIUMPHANT 1969 – 1970 SEASONS

By Marco Bertini



*The second version of the TRT logo, designed in 1971, which remained the team's official logo until 1975. This logo was used on various sized stickers and t-shirts. The other version depicted the 28' "Tornado" from 1968.*

The story behind the Tornado Racing Team dates back to early 1969, when the two best Italian drivers of the times, Vincenzo Balestrieri – who had just been crowned World Offshore Champion by winning the Sam Griffith Trophy in 1968 – and Francesco Cosentino - who, while yet to win any official races, had proven his capacity to do so if he could only gain access, at last, to a competitive boat – joined forces to give their best in the 1969 season.

The team was joined by a third driver, Nicola Chiatante and Captain Attilio Pertroni, who served the dual role of team manager and crewmember, if necessary, for any one of these drivers.

Vincenzo Balestrieri had been racing longer than any other Italian driver, having debuted in the first race in Italy, the Viareggio-Bastia-Viareggio in July of 1962, with his 55' Picchiotti motor yacht, which was already equipped with radar. His sports career then crossed paths with the Navaltecnica boats built by young designer Renato "Sonny" Levi and di Petroni, whom he would join as a co-owner.

It was with an "A' Speranziella", named after the series conceived by Levi, that Balestrieri won the 1964 edition of the Viareggio-Bastia-Viareggio, even though the clock showed Richard "Dick" Bertram to be the winner, but thanks to a racing rule which was as complicated as it was insipid, the final decision went to the Italian driver.

In 1968, Balestrieri decided to leave Levi's boats, which were vexed by Daytona motors. After witnessing the Magnum-MerCruiser's impressive performances at the hands of Aronow in 1967, Balestrieri managed to acquire one of these boats from the now established American driver-builder.

The boat was the 28' Magnum, with two inboard MerCruiser motors, with the same V-drive with which Aronow had recently won the Miami-Key West race, one of the many "Maltese Magnums" which had dominated the 1967 season.

In 1968, thanks also to the technical contributions of Don Pruett, an American, it gave Balestrieri a victory at the very outset of the season, in the famous Sam Griffith Memorial race in Miami, and this was the first time a foreign driver had ever won an American offshore race. It was a prestigious record, no doubt, for someone to triumph over the sport's inventors on their home turf.

The year led on to other victories, including another Viareggio-Bastia-Viareggio. In the end, despite the sinking of his white "Tornado" during the Cowes-Torquay-Cowes, the world offshore title and the prestigious trophy dedicated to the sport's inventor, Sam Griffith, left the United States for the first time ever.

Francesco Cosentino was only sporadically involved in the offshore competitions due to his job, as he filling the important position of Secretary of the Chamber of Deputies in the Italian Government at the time.

Cosentino's own 1963 debut - which was in the Viareggio-Bastia-Viareggio as well, which remained Italy's only offshore race until 1967 - was in a 27' motor yacht by Italcraft, paired with Luigi De La Penne, one of the men who sank a pair of English armored craft on a secret mission in the port of Alexandria, Egypt, in December of 1941. They placed eighth.

In 1967, Cosentino and Balestrieri teamed up in the 36' Levi "Delta Blu" for an Italian expedition to the Bahamas for the first edition of the '500 mile', which was a race around the northern part of the Bahamas archipelago that became the nautical version of the legendary Indianapolis 500. The race was conceived and willed into being by Sherman "Red" Crise, the histrionic organizer of the Miami-Nassau, the first offshore race in the world.

While the end result was a withdrawal, this race sanctioned the union of the two drivers, who would also race together for the Wills Trophy in England and the two Italian races, Naples and Viareggio, regardless of how all of them were punctuated by withdrawals.

Cosentino raced in the two Italian races in 1968, Naples and Viareggio, with the "Volpe d'Argento" [Silver Fox] - a new 28' boat designed by Petroni and built out of aluminum by the aeronautics company SAI-Ambrosini, outfitted with a pair of BPMs - earning a respectable fifth place overall in the VBV.

Balestrieri and Cosentino thus decided to join forces with Captain Petroni once again and set out to formulate racing strategies for favoring one of the team's drivers in every single race of the 1969 season, which promised to be very challenging and competitive.

Petroni was the one, as team manager and occasional driver, who prepared racing strategies based on the type of race and the actual competitors, strategies which, in his words, were mandatory for the Tornado Racing Team's drivers.

This approach was motivated by the fact that the official racing calendar for the 1969 World Championship had grown to 14 events, with 8 consecutive races in July and August, not to mention the competition for the European Championship and the newly-established Italian Championship.

The team's goal, furthermore, was to win all three championships. In principle the team had no preference between the two main drivers, Balestrieri and Cosentino, but it was tacitly understood that their choices and decisions would lean towards the former, who had won the most awards. This is in fact what actually occurred during the racing season, but not without provoking some polemics, especially in the Italian press.

The boat selection narrowed in on two new, identical 31' Bertrams outfitted with identical motors and stern drives, by MerCruiser. The "Red Tornado" for Balestrieri, with racing number '4', and the "White Tornado" for Cosentino, with racing number '89'.

After his loss when his 28' Magnum sank, Balestrieri now had the chance to drive one of the best 31' Bertrams that were participating regularly in the American national championship, the Team Mercury Bertram which was usually driven by Bill Sirois, who had placed second by mere yards in the 1968 Bahamas 600, behind Odell Lewis, the winner.

He had rented the "Sternwinder" for the last two races of the world championship, Miami-Nassau and Miami-Key West, but was traumatized in the former race after the boat stopped unexpectedly. When he turned the ignition again, the fuel vapors which had accumulated from an anomalous carburetor leak exploded, leaving unlucky mechanic Don Pruett with burns and a temporary loss of consciousness. Balestrieri could not be there for the latter race due to work commitments, but Pruett still managed to obtain a victory.

In two years of competition, in the end, the 31' Bertam proved itself to be a highly competitive boat with the new 475 hp MerCruisers and stern drives instead of the initial V-drives.

Aronow had sold Magnum shipyards in 1968 and did not have any new models for sale, so Balestrieri, while waiting for his 32' Cigarette, managed to acquire a 28' with a Magnum hull and Donzi cover and outfitted with an 8V pair and MerCruiser stern drives that the American champion kept on reserve. The boat came to be named the "Blue Tornado."

In terms of "Tornados," the 36' Delta Levi with twin MerCruisers and V-drive that Balestrieri kept on reserve was also at the disposal of the Tornado Racing Team.

Lastly, but for Italian races only, newcomer Nicola Chiatante had at his disposal a new 28' boat designed by Gagliotta and built out of aluminum by SAI-Ambrosini, outfitted with a single, old 427c.i. MerCruiser on a Z-drive.

The "Volpe d'Argento", which Cosentino had driven in 1968, was still available for Attilio Petroni, but for Italian races only.

To sum up the Tornado Racing Team's boats for 1969:

#4 – OP I - “Red Tornado” – 1969 - 31’ Bertram – 2 x MerCruiser – Vincenzo Balestrieri

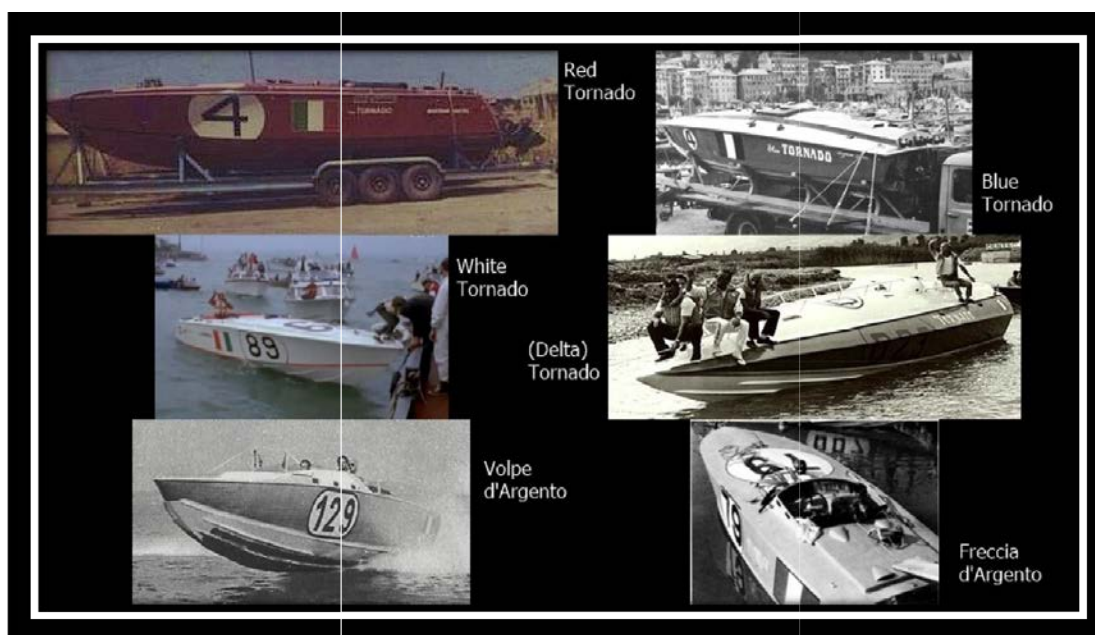
#4 – OP I - “Blue Tornado” – 1966 – 28’ Donzi-Magnum – 2 x MerCruiser – Vincenzo Balestrieri

#89 – OP I - “White Tornado” – 1969 - 31’ Bertram – 2 x MerCruiser – Francesco Cosentino

#023 – OP I - “Tornado” – 1968 - 36’ Delta – 2 x MerCruiser – a disposizione del team

#79 – OP II - “Freccia d’Argento” – 1969 - 28’ SAI-Ambrosini – 1 x MerCruiser – Nicola Chiatante

#129 – OP I - “Volpe d’Argento” – 1968 - 28’ SAI-Ambrosini – 2 x BPM – Attilio Petroni



*The six boats available to the Tornado Racing Team in 1969*

The team's base was a shipyard on the Tevere River in Fiumicino, about 15 miles southwest of Rome, stocked with all the equipment needed to outfit the boats, motors and back-up transmissions and a crane for hauling them in from the river, and trucks and trailers for transport.

The 1969 racing season started out in Hamble, England, which was as unusual, as was the lateness of the season start on June 14<sup>th</sup>, and witnessed the team's encouraging first-second sweep with Balestrieri's "Red Tornado" beating Cosentino's "White Tornado" by 4 feet. Don Aronow was not there, he was busy winning the Bahamas 500 on that same day with his new 32' Cary "The Cigarette."

Aronow was present for the third world championship race in Naples on June 29<sup>th</sup>, with one of his three 32' Carys, but Cosentino won in the "White Tornado" thanks to his skillful navigation of the route, which winds through the buoys and islands of the Gulf of Naples. Aronow took the defeat badly, convinced that he had won, while Balestrieri was slowed by problems with a flap and finished third. Petroni was in the race as well with the "Volpe d'Argento" with the BPMs.

The absurd calendar also called for two races on the same day, one after the other, which was also the result of a three-day postponement of the Yugoslav race due to poor weather. So Aronow left his European boat at the docks and rushed - uselessly, it turns out, since he would be forced to withdraw - back to Miami for the Sam Griffith Memorial on July 12<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile the Tornado Racing Team swept the first three places at Roseto, with Balestrieri winning in the “Red Tornado”, Cosentino placing second in the “White Tornado” and Chiatante placing third in the “Freccia d’Argento.”

After 5 races, both of the team’s top drivers were leading the world championship classifications - Balestrieri with 22 points and Cosentino with 21, while their rival Aronow had 15 points.

Aronow, however, was primed to claim a series of 4 consecutive victories, starting on July 20<sup>th</sup> with the Viareggio-Bastia-Viareggio, the Mediterranean’s own classic. Aronow drove a perfect race and won with apparent ease. Balestrieri, with his trusted mechanic Guidi, had chosen the smaller “Blue Tornado” in a play for speed, given the optimally calm sea conditions, but a malfunctioning compass led him on a poor route so that he came in second at Viareggio, while Cosentino placed third in the “White Tornado”, Petroni came in seventh with the “Volpe d’Argento” and Chiatante, in contrast, had to withdraw the “Freccia D’Argento.”

The umpteenth overlap between the racing dates in France and the USA prevented a dual confrontation between the Tornado Racing Team’s drivers and Aronow, their rival for the championship. The American kept at least one boat on each continent, in fact, but the two Italians did not. Aronow, however, not only lost the Hennessy Grand Prix in New York, he did not even gain any points.

At the Dauphin D’Or in Les Embiez, France, in another race on calm seas, Balestrieri raced with the 28’ “Blue Tornado” but was forced to withdraw due to wheelhouse problems at the start of the race, while Cosentino’s “White Tornado” was slightly slower than Aronow’s new Cary and ended up trailing the American by 3’50” at the finish line, with an average speed which was 1.4 mph slower. Petroni came in third, by an abysmal gap, in his “Volpe d’Argento.”



***Two of the shop-modified Ford F100 pickups used to haul the team’s boats to the racing grounds.***





***Cosentino at the wheelhouse, with mechanic Mike Vandenburg at Viareggio in 1969***

In the next race at Oregrund, in Sweden, Balestrieri and Cosentino signed up but did not participate because they opted instead to race in the second to last race of the Italian Championship, which has held that same August 17<sup>th</sup>. The two drivers were leading the championship with 1400 points, and having already sent the 31' Bertram to Northern Europe for the English races, Balestrieri raced in the 28' "Blue Tornado" and Cosentino in the 28' "Freccia d'Argento." The win went to Balestrieri and Cosentino placed second. Aronow raced in the Swedish race, instead, but was forced to withdraw. He also raced in and won the next race, the Hennessy Cup in Long beach on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, while the two Italians had no boats in the USA.

On August 30<sup>th</sup> at the Cowes-Torquay-Cowes, Aronow won again with his 32' Cary "The Cigarette", which an English trade journal had dubbed "The Aronow Express." Cosentino, still aboard the "White Tornado" with his trusted t-man, Mike Vandenburg, placed second 12 minutes behind Aronow and remained his only rival in the race for the world title, while Balestrieri in the "Red Tornado" was forced to withdraw due to a broken drive, after keeping pace the leaders during the first stages of the race.



***Balestrieri during the Cowes-Torquay-Cowes in 1969 with his "Red Tornado"***

Aronow was not at Deauville, on the other side of the Channel, because he preferred to wind up the championship either at the Miami-Nassau or at the next and last race, the Miami-Key West. Balestrieri was not there either, and was no longer in contention for the world title, in any event. Cosentino was there, however, in his effort to move up the leader board, but it did not go well - he was forced to withdraw the "White Tornado" shortly after the start because of a severe... toothache!

Meanwhile, the team managed to acquire one of the three The Cigarettes which Don Aronow had driven during the season, in specific the one he used until mid-season and with which he won the Bahamas 500. Francesco signed up for the Miami-Nassau with this boat, but was forced to cancel because of the three-day bad weather delay. Cosentino left the boat on the trailer due to work commitments with the Italian Government.

So ended the first racing season for the Tornado Racing Team. A positive season, on balance, with its top two drivers, Balestrieri and Cosentino, garnering 6 victories, 4 by Balestrieri, who won the first edition of the Italian Championship.

Cosentino, alternatively, won the European Championship title thanks to a series of high placings and two victories. The presence of the Aronow Express, as the English press had dubbed the United States driver-constructor, had also prevented the Secretary General of the House of Deputies of the Italian Republic from winning the World title on his first try, placing second overall with 37 points next to Don's stellar 60 points.

The winter of 1969-70 found the team strengthening itself considerably, in terms of the acquisition of new boats as well as a new driver who was young, indeed, but who everyone considered to be a valid competitor.

Ronny Bonelli, a young man who was barely an adult and who lacked any experience in offshore competitions at all, arrogantly entered this sport, which was attracting more and more attention and reaching its peak success in 1970-73. Ronny, son of Carlo Bonelli, a famous Italian publisher of comic books, including "Tex," received a very particular gift from his father - the Bertram which the president of the famous American shipyard himself, Peter Rittmaster, had driven in the US during the 1969 racing season, winning the prestigious Hennessy Grand Prix race in New York.



***Ronny Bonelli in his first race, the Sam Griffith Memorial in 1970***

The red-white-and-blue “American Moppie”, newly rechristened the “Mister Charlie”, in honor of Ronny’s father, was facing a new racing season with this youth behind the wheel with the support of expert Captain Attilio Petroni.

Balestrieri and Cosentino now had - in addition to the two 31’ Bertram Red and White Tornadoes from the last season - two 32’ Carys, both formerly “The Cigarettes” which Aronow had driven in the triumphal 1969 season. The 32’, in fact, purchased shortly before the Miami-Nassau in 1969 had been joined by a second, identical boat. While both maintained the original black-white livery, they were now rechristened the “Black Tornado”, with their racing numbers representing the only difference between the two: ‘4’ for Balestrieri and ‘89’ for Cosentino. The motors on both boats were the same ones Aronow had used the year before, the MerCruisers coupled with stern drives of the same make.

The 28’ Magnum-Donzi “Blue Tornado” was passed on to Count Walter Pasquini, who only drove it sporadically, while Nicola Chiatante carried on with the same boat from the year before, the Freccia D’Argento.

A seventh boat was added to the team mid-season. This was a new cat made of wood, designed and built by Ron Jones, who was famous for his Unlimited boats, and which would be driven only on one occasion, by Attilio Petroni with Mel Riggs.

The team’s commitments during the racing season were the World and Italian Championships in the OP I class for Balestrieri, Cosentino and Bonelli, while Pasquini and Chiatante only engaged in Italian races, with the exception of Pasquini’s single international race on Lake Lemman, Geneva.

To sum up the Tornado Racing Team’s boats for 1970:

#4 – OP I – “Black Tornado” – 1969 – 32’ Cary – 2 x MerCruiser – Vincenzo Balestrieri

#4 – OP I - “White Tornado” – 1969 – 31’ Bertram – 2 x MerCruiser – Vincenzo Balestrieri

#89 – OP I - “Black Tornado” – 1969 – 32’ Cary – 2 x MerCruiser – Francesco Cosentino

#89 – OP I - “Red Tornado” – 1969 – 31’ Bertram – 2 x MerCruiser – Francesco Cosentino

#69 – OP I – “Mister Charly” – 1969 – 31’ Bertram – 2 x MerCruiser – Ronny Bonelli

#44 – OP I - “Blue Tornado” – 1966 – 28’ Donzi-Magnum – 2 x MerCruiser – Walter Pasquini

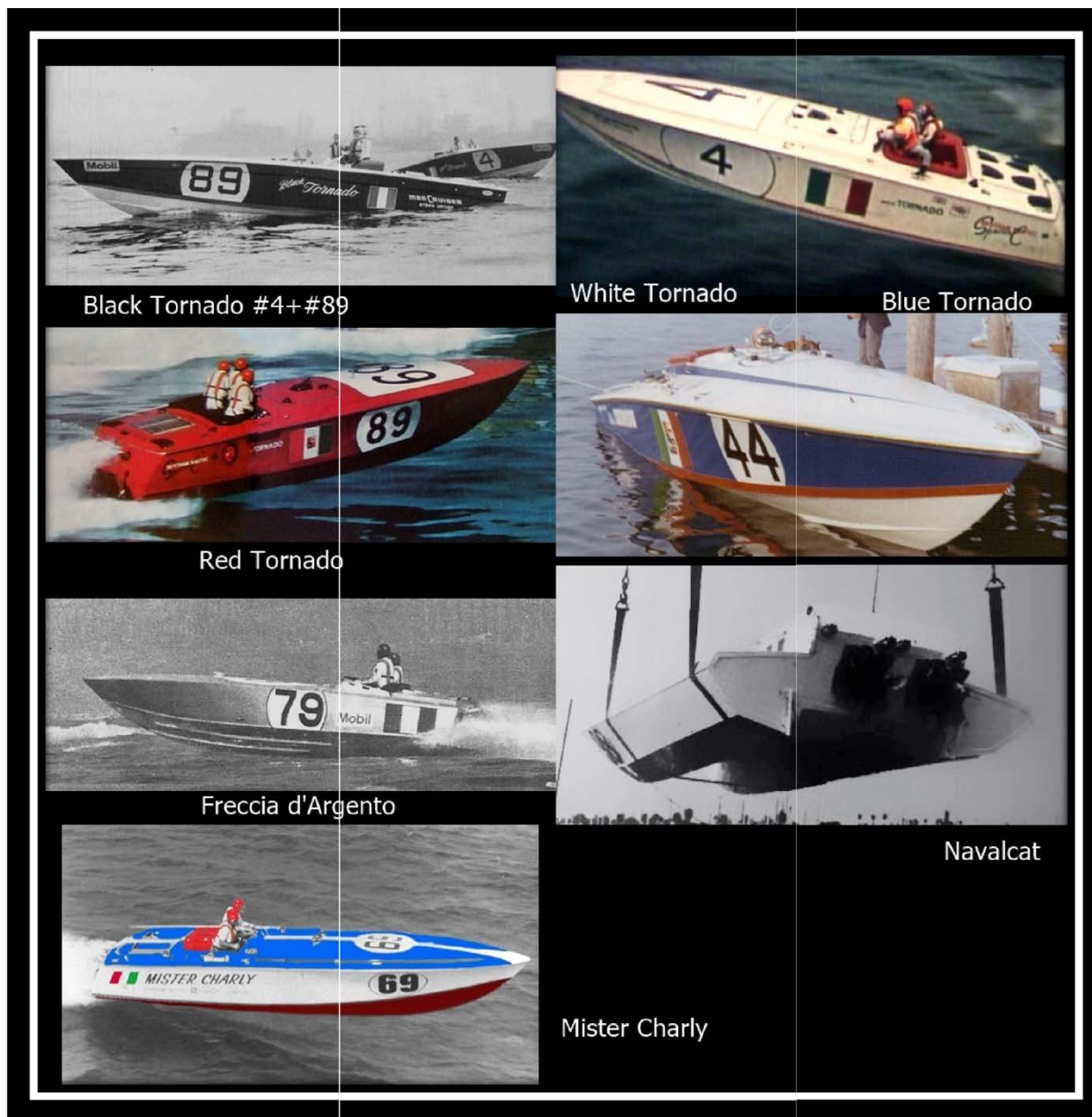
#69 – OP II - “Freccia D’Argento” – 1969 – 28’ SAI-Ambrosini – 1 x BPM – Nicola Chiatante

#98 – OP I – “Navalcat” – 1970 – 33’ Ron Jones – 2 x MerCruiser – Attilio Petroni

The team’s base was still in Tevere, west of Rome, while a second base was set up in Miami by Jack Stuteville.

The racing season opened on April 6<sup>th</sup> in Capetown, South Africa, the first race in the World Championship circuit. Balestrieri and Cosentino were the only foreign drivers in the race and





***The seven boats available to the Tornado Racing Team in 1970***

driving the 32' Cary "Black Tornado" and the 31' Bertram "Red Tornado," respectively. Cosentino won, while Balestrieri was forced to drop out due to problems with one of his motors.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, the world offshore circus moved on to the classic waters for this sport, Miami, for the traditional Sam Griffith Memorial, a race whose first half was Miami-Nassau, followed by a crossover to the Bimini island group and then the return to Miami, thus completing the triangle. The team showed up with three boats - two 32' Carys which were exactly the same, the only difference being the racing number '4' for Balestrieri and '89' for Cosentino.

The two were joined by 21-year old newcomer Ronny Bonelli, who had just acquired the boat which Peter Rittmaster had raced in during the American season the year before, the beautiful 31' Bertram "American Moppie" with its red, white and blue livery and the usual pair of

MerCruisers, the boat for which the young Milanese had simply changed the name and racing number: Mister Charlie and #69. On board with him were two experts, Captain Attilio Petroni and Sammy James, boat builder and Rittmaster's t-man.

The race took place on rough, windy seas and Cosentino was forced to drop out due to wheelhouse problems, and Balestrieri due to a broken reverser. Balestrieri's problems had begun when he put himself in charge of the race and his navigator, Davey Wilson, mapped out a route over a shallow, rocky zone, which ended up breaking the two propellers. When Stuteville dove in to replace them, it turned out that both of the backups were clockwise, so Balestrieri decided to continue the race by inserting the reverser on one of the motors as a counterbalance, but the motor could not withstand the anomalous effort in the end.

Bonelli was at the helm for the initial stages of the race, until he injured his leg when a metal plate, which had been holding a fractured bone in place from a previous accident, broke through his skin due to the powerful bouncing caused by the waves. Bonelli retreated into the cabin to stop the bleeding, while Petroni and James continued the race. No for much longer, though, because the attitude control system which exploited the fuel tanks soon broke down, leaving the boat impossible to navigate.

The victory went to Bill Wishnick in another 31' Bertram, the red Boss O'Nova, who thus took the lead in the classification with nine points, together with Cosentino. The American, however, was not a direct rival of the three Italian drivers in the race for the World Championship. At least not this year.

In the third race, the tough Bahamas 500, the team did not bring its own boat and Bahamian Doug Silvera ended up winning in a 31' Bertram with 4 Mercury outboards, placing him in the lead of the classifications thanks also to his two points from the Sam Griffith Memorial, but this was another driver who seemed uninterested in the World Championship.

On June 13<sup>th</sup>, the world offshore circus made landfall in Europe, specifically in Poole, in southern England, for the Needles Trophy. Balestrieri was there with his 32' Cary "Black Tornado", but not Cosentino, who signed up but had to withdraw for work reasons. Balestrieri, with the usual Stuteville aboard and Tim Brand-Crombie as navigator, beat the two top English drivers, Sopwith and Powell, in their pair of 33' aluminum hulls designed by Don Shead, "Miss Enfield II" and "Double O Seven", respectively. Both with pairs of MerCruisers, but Powell's had overdrive in addition. This victory put Balestrieri in second place in the World Championship.

The Trofeo Napoli was the fifth round in the Worlds and the first in the Italian Championship, and Balestrieri and Cosentino were there that June 28<sup>th</sup>, the drivers for the Tornado team, with the twin 32' Cary Black Tornados, #4 and #89, Bonelli and Petroni with the 31' Bertram "Mister Charlie" and, lastly, Nicola Chiatante with his "Freccia d'Argento", which was racing in the OP II class, and Powell the Englishman with his 33' Avenger, as well as other Italian drivers with less competitive boats.

The initial phases of the race found Cosentino in the lead with Balestrieri following at a distance, until the former was forced to slow down due to problems with one of the MerCruisers. Balestrieri took charge and went on to win in spite of some wheelhouse troubles during the final stages of the race. Cosentino came in second and Bonelli took third, thus completing a perfect sweep for the Team. Chiatante placed fifth behind Powell for a win in the OP II class.

The World Championship now found Balestrieri and Cosentino in first and second place, just as in the Italian Championship.

The next weekend, the circus moved on to the waters of the Adriatic, in Roseti degli Abruzzi, for the Rosa D'Oro Trophy – the crossover being from Roseto – and the towns of Split and Makarska in what was Yugoslavia at the time. The Neapolitan drivers were there in addition to Sopwith with his “Miss Enfield II.” Balestrieri went with the “Black Tornado,” while Cosentino chose the Bertram “Red Tornado” he had won with at Capetown.

The race started and Balestrieri was stopped with one motor out only 15 miles into the race. The rest of the race found Cosentino take the lead with Sopwith close behind, in an apparent game of cat and mouse. Right towards the very end of the race, in the coastal stretch between Split and Makarska, Sopwith pushed the pace to the max, gradually caught up with and passed Cosentino in the end to take the win. Bonelli, with Mel Riggs as his t-man, held steady in third place until the very end, and Chiatante finished fourth.

The absurd UIM schedule called for one race in the USA on July 15<sup>th</sup> and one race in Italy on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Only those drivers backed by a large organization could manage to be at both races. This was Vincenzo Balestrieri, who fielded the 31' Bertram “White Tornado” which had enabled Cosentino to win the European Championship and take second place in the Sam Griffith Trophy the year before. The American race was the New York Hennessy Grand Prix, and Balestrieri found himself with a malfunctioning flap at the very outset, forcing him to lag behind the other Bertam twins, in specific those of Wishnick - the “Boss O’Nova” - and Ed Lecarreux - the “Maelstrom” - which ran the race and finished first and second, respectively, but were disqualified because their passages by one check point were not recorded because the two boats had passed too far out of sight of the race officials. This left Bob Magoon as the winner with his 32' Cary “Andrea” with four Mercury outboards, while Balestrieri took an agonizing fourth place.

On July 19<sup>th</sup> was the most important Mediterranean race, the Viareggio-Bastia-Viareggio, with the same race participants as in the Adriatic. Pasquini joined the Tornado team with Balestrieri’s old boat, the Blue Tornado. Balestrieri was with his Black Tornado, and Cosentino once again opted for the Red Tornado.

Balestrieri dominated the race from start to finish. There was one nail-biting moment in site of Viareggio, when the Black Tornado stopped for a couple of minutes while Stuteville adjusted the carburation of one motor. Batten down the hatches, onward to a glorious victory. Cosentino, who had been in second place all along, failed to exploit his teammate’s problem and finished second. The team found Bonelli in third place again with “Mister Charlie”

and Pasquini in fifth with the “Blue Tornado”, while Chiatante and his “Freccia d’Argento” were forced to drop out this time due to a variety of problems.

Cosentino won the Italian Championship by defeating Balestrieri in the team competition. Balestrieri took the lead in the World Championship with 3 points over Cosentino, who proved to be the more regular driver. It seemed as if the Tornado Racing Team would dominate the field, but problems started to rear up at the hands of Sopwith the Englishman.



***Balestrieri with the “Black Tornado” and Cosentino with the “Red Tornado” during the Viareggio-Bastia-Viareggio in 1972. They placed first and second, respectively.***

The “Dauphin D’Or,” the ninth race in the Worlds, was on August 2<sup>nd</sup> in Les Embiez, a new marina to the south of Tolone, in a race which paralleled the coast up to Montecarlo and back. Balestrieri, Cosentino and Bonelli showed up in the same boats as the last races, “Black Tornado”, “Red Tornado” and “Mister Charlie”, and then there were the two Englishmen Sopwith and Powell with the “Miss Enfield II” and the “Double O Seven” - one of these five would be the winner of the French race.

Sopwith led the race from the start, with Balestrieri close behind, while Cosentino’s steady sailing was brought to an end by a broken stern drive. Bonelli met the same fate, but due instead to a broken motor. Balestrieri was unable to close the gap which the fast English hull had built up over the Italian, and the two finished the race in second and first places, respectively.

Neither Balestrieri nor Cosentino raced in the next race, the Long Beach Hennessy Cup on August 15<sup>th</sup>, because they preferred to race in Sweden, but the team was still there with a new boat, Ron Jones' 'cat' which Petroni and Riggs were trying out. This was the first OP I class multi-hull ever to race in an offshore competition. The motors positioned in the stern part of the bridgedeck were the usual pair of MerCruisers equipped with stern drives. The fuel tanks and the cabin were also centrally located.

Wishnick won the race with his usual 31' Bertram "Boss O'Nova." Petroni's Navalcat proved its competitiveness on the ideal, calm seas, and nearly managed to catch up with the American in spite of a pause to change a propeller, before being forced to stop for good when it ran out of fuel.

The Getingloppet was raced on that same day, August 15<sup>th</sup>, in Orgerund, Sweden, but both Cosentino and Balestrieri had difficulties with the fuel that was provided. The high-compression MerCruisers required Avio fuel, in fact, which is only used by certain types of aircraft, but the organization had only provided automobile fuel and no tanks of this special fuel. The race was postponed to the next day to allow time for the Avio to arrive. Cosentino had to withdraw due to work commitments and Balestrieri still ran into fuel problems with his 32' Cary "Black Tornado" shortly after the start, probably because of the low-grade fuel, and dropped out. The Englishmen Sopwith and Powell were not there, and local driver Joergen Book ended up winning the race.

Six days later and the contenders were ready to compete in the tenth edition of the Cowes-Torquay-Cowes in England, the most famous race in Europe, not simply because it was the oldest but also due to the large number of participants who always turned up at the starting block.

Balestrieri was there, naturally, with the 32' Cary, as well as Cosentino, who continued to favor the 31' Bertram "Red Tornado", and Sopwith and Powell were there, of course, on their home turf.

Balestrieri took the lead in the beginning, as usual, and led the group for the first few miles, until problems with one motor forced him to drop out once again. This left Cosentino in the lead, trailed by Sopwith. It already seemed as if the Englishman was repeating the same game he had played at Makarska, following and watching the Italian all the way to Torquay. Sopwith took the lead at Torquay, and Cosentino seemed as if he could keep up with him for a stretch, until the Englishman left him behind at last and went on to win the race. Cosentino placed second in this race for the second time in a row, Aronow having won the year before ahead of his 31' Bertram, the "White Tornado."

The World Championship situation became complicated for the Tornado Racing Team at this point, because the two contenders, Balestrieri and Cosentino, with 40 and 36 points, respectively, were separated by Sopwith, who was holding third place with 39 points. The last three races promised to be feisty, and so they were.

Powell ended up winning that September 5<sup>th</sup> in Deauville, in fact, on the coast opposite to Cowes, but Sopwith placing second, Balestrieri third and Cosentino fourth. The first half of the race, on rough seas, found the two Italians in the lead, in identical boats, since Cosentino had opted for the 32' Cary this time, too, which he had not driven since the race



in Naples. Cosentino was in first, followed by Balestrieri, when his teammate was forced to stop when the motor compartment access doors fell off. Balestrieri's approach to the St. Marcouf islands was not optimal, however, which allowed Sopwith and Powell to pass him up. Powell, in his boat with turbo-compressed MerCruisers - which were not giving him any problems, like in past races - then succeeded in passing his countryman to win the race.

Two races to go: 45 points for Sopwith, 44 for Balestrieri, and 39 for Cosentino.

The Miami-Nassau on October 16, 1971, for the offshore powerboat racing, would end up being remembered more for the events which occurred a few hours before and just after the race than the race itself.

The current leader of the classification for the World Championship, Sopwith the Englishman, had not entered his "Enfield Avenger II" in the race but his "Double O Seven" instead, which his countryman Powell had lent to him for the occasion, but the organizer of the race, Sherman "Red" Crise, immediately announced that this boat was not eligible because it was considered irregular for being supercharged. This triggered a ferocious diatribe between Sopwith and Crise, with the *Union Internationale du Motonautique* (UIM) itself being taken to task for its unclear ruling on the matter. In the end, it was decided to admit the boat in the race "sub judice" while waiting for clarification of the rules.



***The Italian base of the Tornado Racing Team, on the Tevere River in Fiumicino. Several of the 1970 team's boats can be seen - #89 is Cosentino's 32' Cary "Black Tornado", #79 is Chiatante's 28' SAI-Ambrosini "Freccia d'Argento" and #023 is the 36' Delta "Tornado", Balestrieri's reserve boat. The team had another base in Miami, where boats were kept for the American races in the world championship.***

Balestrieri was the initial leader in the race, with the usual Stuteville and expert "Knocky" House on the 32' Cary "Black Tornado", but had to defer to Sopwith with his powerful boat who, as usual, had employed a wait-and-see tactic before lunging past and going on to beat the Italian by a full minute, in this case, while the Tornado team's other driver, not Cosentino, who once again had to withdraw due to Government commitments, but rather Attilio Peroni with the 31' Bertram "Red Tornado", finished in fifth place.



At this point, however, Sopwith was unexpectedly disqualified and the decision remained "sub judice," while the championship schedule moved on to Key West for the last race, with the same players-rivals in the running - Sopwith with the "Double O Seven" and Balestrieri with the "Black Tornado."

In the early phases, Sopwith trailed behind the trio in the lead, headed by local driver Bob Magoon with his new 36' Cigarette owned by Mercury's former boss, the founder of a new company bearing his name, Kiekhaefer, as Balestrieri had to pull back to replace a propeller. The Italian had managed to recuperate some of his disadvantage when Sopwith's boat caught fire and the entire crew had to abandon ship, diving into the sea. Balestrieri saw the boat in flames and came to the rescue, picking up the English crew and shuttling them safely to a rescue boat before going back to follow the leaders in the race.

Magoon was the winner with his "K.A.M.", the acronym for Kiekhaefer Aeromarine, a company which builds V8 racing motors, with Balestrieri finishing fifth.

Shortly thereafter came the announcement of Sopwith's definitive disqualification from the race in the Bahamas because of the fact that the Double O Seven's turbos were mounted on V8s, which were mistakenly allowed to race in the races of the 1970 racing season with Powell at the helm.

This is how Balestrieri won his second Sam Griffith Trophy, a.k.a. Offshore World Championship, while Cosentino kept his third position in the rankings behind Sopwith the Englishman.

The Tornado Racing Team had met with extraordinary results, to which was added Francesco Cosentino's Italian Championship in the OP I class and Nicola Chiatante's in the OP II class, and the following overall victories in single races:

-Mobil South African Race – Capetown – SA – Cosentino – 31' Bertram "Red Tornado"

-Needles Trophy – Poole GB – Balestrieri – 32' Cary "Black Tornado"

-Trofeo Napoli – Naples – ITA – Balestrieri – 32' Cary "Black Tornado"

-Viareggio – Bastia – Viareggio – ITA – Balestrieri – 32' Cary "Black Tornado"

-Miami- Nassau – Nassau BAH – Balestrieri – 32' Cary "Black Tornado"

The team had undoubtedly proven itself to be the best prepared in the offshore environment, with great prospects for 1971 as well. This only concerned Vincenzo Balestrieri, however, since there was a parting of ways for both Cosentino and the Bonelli-Petroni duo. As it turned out, in fact, the young Bonelli, having garnered experience with the team in the 1970 season, decided to form his own team, the Firebird Racing Team, taking with him the experience of Captain Petroni, who would be his sports director in addition to joining the crew for single races. Cosentino, Chiatante and rookie Giorgio Mondadori would also join this team.

Balestrieri, for his part, would keep up the Tornado Racing Team for the 1971, 1972 and 1973 seasons, in which he was always a top rank player with the trusty 32' Cary "Black Tornado", to

which he added, in 1971, a second 32' Cary which was modified and shortened to 31' for racing on calm seas, plus two of the latest 36' Cigarettes, still "Black Tornadoes", which arrived in 1971 and 1972, a three-pointer built by Abbate whose only race would be on a lake, in Geneva in 1972, travelling but a few meters before dropping out, and last of all, a 34' Cigarette, also for use on calm seas and acquired in 1973.

In 1971 and 1972, Balestrieri joined the Cigarette Racing Team formed by Don Aronow, in the meantime for the drivers of the boats built in his new shipyard, founded in 1970, but which also welcomed other drivers who were not driving Cigarette boats but who still wanted to join.

Balestrieri did not succeed in winning a third World Title, unfortunately, and his dream of becoming the only offshore driver to boast of such a victory.

In 1971, Balestrieri's main rival, Sopwith, was replaced by an American, Bill Wishnick. The Italian drove both the 32' Cary and the shorter 31', which turned out to be too fragile, however, with its new deck made of thin, light marine-grade plywood, and was abandoned after a couple of races. Neither did the new 36' succeed in the battles with Wishnick, even though he managed to win the Dauphin D'Or in France with this boat in August. The excessive withdrawals due to breakdowns that characterized Balestrieri's races in 1971, however, were what kept him from beating the strong and well-prepared Wishnick, and the Italian withdrew from competition just after mid-season.

In 1972, two other drivers rose up to block his third world title: American expert Bobby Rautbord and Italian rookie Carlo Bonomi. Rautbord raced in the South American, US and European continents with two 36' Cigarette boats with motors officially prepared by MerCruiser, while Bonomi, with his own 36' Cigarette, which was joined by a second one at the end of the season (one of the two had been Rautbord's) raced with Kiekhaefer's powerful official motors.

Balestrieri, for his part, drove two 36' Cigarettes and the old 32' Cary, and he also dedicated himself, like his two rivals, to almost every race on the 1972 World Championship circuit, but once again his only two victories, in Pescara and Viareggio, with the 32' Cary were outweighed by countless withdrawals due to mechanical problems, so much so that by the end of the season he decided to abandon the MerCruisers, which he had been using on his boats since 1968, in favor of the "siren" of the powerful Kiekhaefers for the next season.

The year 1973 witnessed a new triangle between Balestrieri, the usual Bonomi - who had also formed a new team in the meantime - the Martini offshore Racing Team, with three 36' Cigarettes and Kiekhaefer motors and Englishman Don Shead, the driver designer of his 37' Enfield "Unowot", which also had Kiekhaefer Aeromarine motors.

Still only two victories - Rio de la Plata and Pescara - both achieved at the helm of the new 34' Cigarette "Tornado" "Mostarda", which was named after the color of the hull planking, one 36' which had been shortened for



***The "Tornado" also known as "Mostarda", after the color of its hull planking, was the last boat to join the Tornado Racing Team, in 1973. It was also the only boat that Balestrieri kept for himself even after he quit racing.***

calm seas, and a disconcerting series of withdrawals due to mechanical problems, especially with the new Kiekhaefer, which also led to a vicious argument with Bonomi and the American boss himself, the latter being accused of not dedicating equal attention to the supply of motors for the two Italian drivers, led Balestrieri to give up on his umpteenth attempt to win his third world title in the last two races of the season in favor of the Milanese driver.

Exacerbated by these disputes, which isolated him from the rest of his driver colleagues, especially the countrymen accusing him of self-promotion, Balestrieri participated in his last two racing seasons, in 1974 and 1975, in races of the Italian Championship only, with the new team sponsored by Country Jacket, winning three races - two in 1974 (Pescara and Sanremo) and one in 1975, the Bellaria - while driving the two 36' Cigarette "Black Tornadoes."

The Viareggio-Bastia-Viareggio on July 20, 1975, which he had to abandon due to mechanical problems, was the last race in the offshore career of the great Italian champion who had started out with this same race back in 1962.

His Tornado Racing Team was the first organizational example in a sport which, until that 1969, had only involved amateur drivers who were racing without any clear goals. The TRT was followed by other more or less seriously prepared examples, but there is no question that it served as the role model for all drivers, and when the 1980s witnessed the peak splendor of this sport thanks to the participation of teams which were organizationally well-prepared, our thoughts go back to the original lessons.