

# Oleg Marchenko

## a long, deep friendship



- On July 1991, the 10<sup>th</sup>, I left Milan and set off to Armavir, South Russia.
- Fellow travellers were Marco Cattaneo, my clever research worker, and Pucci, a mechanic who never in his life had left his small village in the Appennino mountain.
- Oleg Marchenko was an old acquaintance of mine.
- We met several times in Milan, in Bologna, looking for agricultural manufacturers, and in Russia too, where Ettore Gasparetto and me were trying to start up research plans.

- Cars were then, in Russia, despite Garbaciov's Perestroika, very rare goods, so Oleg asked me, to reach him in Russia, not by plane, but driving an Italian car, just the car he badly needed.
- He convinced me at last to set out on this long journey, playing on our friendship and on my love for adventure.
- On the occasion of testing a stripper in the VIM Experimental Center, located in Armavir, deep south of Russia, I made up my mind, and begun to search a Fiat Argenta, that looked quite a luxury car but was, mechanically, very simple and similar to Ziguli, the car that Fiat produced in Togliattigrad. The look of the car was first class, and the maintainance easy.

# The Argenta

Marco Cattaneo found a beautiful second hand Argenta, almost new, at a low price and, after an accurate engine inspection made by Pucci, the three of us left.



# The trip

We travelled for three days, without stopping, taking turns.

3.700 km of almost deserted roads, sometimes paved, sometimes very bad and full of pit-holes that forced us to be very careful.

Our map was drawn to a scale 1:2.500.000, too large to be helpful.

We only stopped in Budapest, and then went on to Lviv, Kiev, Charkiv, Rostov.

We made a detour to have a quick look at the Azov sea, and at last we reached Armavir.



# Amenities

The collapse of the Soviet regime made our trip more easy and interesting: as the Police was not interfering, we could have plenty of adventures, as the amazing ways to fill up our tank from the fuel tank of military trucks, hidden in the woods.



# In Armavir

In Armavir a very cheerful Oleg welcome us, willing to start to work with his Italian friends and colleagues,

and to learn to drive his new beautiful car.

We spent a week in Armavir's countries, testing Russian combines and strippers, having a proof of the ruinous management of the Soviet agricultural system.



# The agricultural situation

In Armavir the corn production was very high, more than 5 t/ha, but harvest losses went beyond 10%, not to mention ways of carriage, storage and ventilation that raised them up to 40%.

We were lucky enough to see the mythical Poliescin combine at work. It had been drawn by Oleg Marchenko and built in Bielorussia.



# The Poliescin

It was a retroverted machine, efficient and very innovative, about which Oleg had been talking to us in the past years.

Regrettably the various machines were in very poor conditions.



# To Moscow

Finally, we left for Moscow, on the Argenta and Oleg, its new, satisfied owner.

During the long journey, more than 1500 km, we met many groups of people, civil and military, looking for freedom but not knowing what to do. The situation appeared quite dangerous, but luckily nobody stopped us.



Childrens wondering around the Argenta on the way to Moscow!

## In Moscow

In Moscow we stayed at VIM, Oleg's Institute, but spent also some days in VIM's farm, 6000ha, 60 km west of Moscow.

We had meetings with Oleg's chiefs, the VIM's manager and Kormanosky himself, the clever vice-president of URSS Science Academy.

Later I advanced a reorganization plan of the farm, splitting it in 3-400 ha units, in view of the new Russian agricultural system.

Unfortunately this project couldn't be realized because of the political instability, and Kormanosky's consequent loss of influence.



Eating and drinking !!! during a pit stop of our work in the fields of Vin Farm close to Moscow

# Farewell

- We left at last Mosca, by plane, after a few driving lessons to Oleg.
- In my following journeys to Mosca Oleg used to meet me with his Argenta and drove me proudly along the Cremlino's avenues.
- in Bologna too, he never omitted to inform me about Argenta's health.

# The Cotton Harvester

- When Giuseppe Pellizzi asked me to evaluate the possibility to develop a cotton harvester suitable for the Italian conditions, I asked Oleg to put me in contact with some managers, friend of him, belonging the soviet plant of cotton harvesters in Uzbekistan. An huge company with a capacity of almost 10.000 units per year.
- Finally, accompanied by Maria, my wife, I flight to Taskent doing a stop over in Mosow where we met Oleg in order to receive some suggestions and details about our mission. In Taskent I spent some days testing and studying the Soviet harvesters and realizing the difficulties in developing such a complex machine.

# The cotton harvester

So, remembering a cotton harvester I saw some years before in Argentina, we got the Argentinian heads and install them in our prototype.

Some years later mr Scalmana, the cotton machine manufacturer, received by the largest agricultural cooperative in Uzbekistan a request to supply many units because nobody there was still in condition to produce such kind of machine. But mr Scalmana had to deny because in the meanwhile time he had sold the rights of that machine to an Turkish company. This unbelievable triangulation across the world between Russia, Italy, Argentina, Uzbekistan, Turkeey is emblematic of these so deep changements I lived with Oleg and thanks to Oleg.



Testing the Italian prototype in Spain

- I met Oleg last time during the last meeting of Club of Bologna last year in Bologna and I spent with him some pleasant time, as usual, joking and remembering.
- But, as you have seen in the photos projected by Ettore, he was very tired and that was the last time I saw him.