

HYDROFOILS HOVERCRAFT SESS & CATAMARANS WORLDWIDE

# CLASSIC **FAST** FERRIES

NO. 46 **NOVEMBER 2012**

Italy  
thirteen years on



/ GIULIO RISPOLI photo



## ITALY THIRTEEN YEARS ON : Age is just a number

**I**n our first issue of *CLASSIC FAST FERRIES* back in January 2000 we said that the place to go to experience a nice variety of hydrofoils of various design, size, shape and age was Italy.

Almost thirteen years later this is still true to a great extent, although obviously the picture has changed. Perhaps not drastically so to the untrained eye but noticeable to the trained. Of the thirteen hydrofoil types, or variants of types, active in early 2000 four are no longer in service; the PT.20, RHS 140, RHS 150F and RHS 160. However, a few of the RHS 140 and RHS 160 craft still exist, more or less intact, sitting in ship repair yards in Sicily. Both types last operated in the Straits of Messina, at least one of the RHS 160s as recently as 2008.

The last of the pioneering PT.20s, of which the first entered service back in 1956, was withdrawn in 2001. Possibly with one or two exceptions, all PT.20s have vanished from the face of the earth. One that was laid up already in the late 1960s was spotted ashore in Napoli, surprisingly complete externally, as recent as in 2008. It has not been confirmed whether it is still there. Considering the relatively large number of PT20s once operating in Italy is is not out of the question that the remains of one or two more may be tucked away somewhere.

Another much more recent design which was retired by 2000 was the MEC (Maximum Efficiency Craft), of which only one was ever built by Rodriguez, in 1991. As is more often than not the case with a prototype, this spent most of its life high and dry or moored until it sank in Napoli harbour in 2003, it was raised only to be scrapped.

**Above :** Foilmaster Atanis entered service with Siremar in Sicily in 2006.

/ EGIDIO CINCOTTA photo

**On the cover :**

Vetor Aliscafi's PT.50 Nilo in full flight off Gaeta

/ GIULIO RISPOLI photo



### More of some, less of others

Conversely, one design there being more of now than thirteen years ago is of course the Foilmaster. A total of thirteen were delivered by Rodriguez from 1994 to 2007 – of which ten since 2000. Seven went to Siremar and six to Ustica Lines. Two of the Ustica craft have suffered considerable damage in accidents, one in

November 2007, only a few months following its delivery, and the other in August 2008. The former was written off whereas the other has been rebuilt. One of Siremar's Foilmasters which entered service in 2006 collided with a breakwaters in 2009 and has also been repaired.

**Below:** Vetor Aliscafi acquired PT.50 Freccia Adriatica, built in 1969, in 2005. It was refurbished to its early days glory and renamed Nilo entered service between Formia and Ponza.  
/ GIULIO RISPOLI photo, both



In addition to the Foilmasters, the hydrofoils still to be found in service around Italy are of the following types – PT.50, RHS 70, RHS 150M, RHS 150FL, RHS 150SL, RHS 160F, RHS 200, Kometa and Kolkhida, all but the last two built by Rodriguez. The RHS 70, 150FL and 150SL are only operating on the Lakes of Como, Garda and Maggiore in northern Italy, while the remainder are to be found in the north Tirrenian Sea, the Napoli/Formia area, in Sicily and in the north Adriatic. In the case of the PT.50, RHS 70, RHS 200 and Kometa only one of each remains active.

### **Age is just a number**

In reviewing what is gone and what is left of the Italian hydrofoils it is interesting to note that, as in life in general, age is not everything, it's just a number.

For instance, the oldest hydrofoil still going strong, in south-western Italy, is a PT.50 built in 1969, whereas an RHS 160F delivered in 1990 has not suffered from overstrain in recent years and is now being scrapped in Sicily. Likewise noteworthy is the withdrawal from service of four Kolkhidas delivered to Alilauro in Napoli in 1989–1991 and laid up in 2004–

2006. The 1991-built MEC and wrecked Foilmaster have already been mentioned.

Not surprisingly, the PT.50, *Nilo*, is of particular interest. It is the sole of its type still active in Italy, and more than likely in the world, with another sitting ashore on the Adriatic coast waiting for someone interested in buying it.

*Nilo* is operated by Vetor Aliscafi between Formia, north of Napoli, to the Island of Ponza. The 43-year old vessel was originally delivered to Aliscafi-SNAV in 1969 as *Freccia Adriatica*, but was immediately chartered to Channel Islands operator Condor which dubbed it *Condor 2* and operated it for two seasons linking Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney and Sark and Saint Malo in France. The hydrofoil was again leased by Condor in the summer of 1981. *Freccia Adriatica* stayed with SNAV for more than thirty years until laid up in Messina. Expected to be broken up it was instead, miraculously, acquired and refurbished to its early days glory by Vetor in 2005.

Vetor also owns the only Kometa still operating in Italy. Reportedly, both the Kometa and PT.50 may face retirement within the next six or so months.

**Below:** The only Kometa hydrofoil still active in Italy, Vetor 944, is operated by Vetor Aliscafi in the Bay of Gaeta, north of Napoli.  
/ GIULIO RISPOLI photo







**Above:** Two years senior to *Nilo*, PT.50 *Star Capricorn* was built by Rodriguez in 1967. It is seen here in Ortona on the Adriatic coast two years ago.  
/ GIORGIO MICOLI photo

The other PT.50, *Star Capricorn*, was last operated by Speedy Lines in the Adriatic linking Termoli on the mainland and the island of Tremiti. Being two years senior to *Nilo*, the vessel was delivered to a Danish customer as *Springeren* in 1967 and operated between Denmark and Sweden until sold in the U.K. in 1985. Renamed *Star Capricorn* it was briefly employed between Torquay and the Channel Islands. Having spent most of its time idling in England, the hydrofoil eventually returned to Italy in early 1987 and re-entered service with Covemar Eolie in Sicily.

### Now and ahead

In excess of 40 hydrofoils, including such being maintained or in winter lay-up, are currently operational in Italy. Of these two were delivered 1969–1979, twenty between 1980 and 1989, eleven 1990–1999 and ten 2000–2006. Ustica Lines' option for two more Foilmasters has so far not been turned into an actual order and perhaps never will as lately

the operator has added Italian-built monohulls to its ever-expanding fleet.

With a number of vessels approaching 30 in a few years' time, something has to be done if the hydrofoil is to survive in Italy beyond just a handful of units.

Indeed, in recent years Rodriguez has been working on two hydrofoils of a completely new design featuring fully submerged foil systems, but these are considered experimental craft and may not be operated commercially. One is completed since a few years and have been thoroughly tested off Messina.

Unfortunately, these are not the times of operators and investors having a lot of loose change to spend on hydrofoils and projects. Only the future will tell whether this new Rodriguez design once fully tested and having proved itself will go into production. Or if more orders for the Foilmaster are being placed. Or both.

**CFF**

# Age is just a number

PHOTOS BY Maurizio Gadda





**Page 6 :** *Delivered to SNAV in 1990 and intended for operation in Denmark with associate company Aliscafi Scandinavia in 1991, Citti Ships was one of five RHS 160Fs taken over by Ustica Lines in 2004 when SNAV decided to sell off its business in Sicily. The hydrofoil appears to have seen little or no service with Ustica Lines, contrary to the other four RHS 160Fs which remain in service, and did not look its best in September this year.*

**Below :** Botticelli was one of two RHS 160s to enter service with Siremar in 1980. It was active with the operator up to a few years ago.

**Bottom :** *Being broken up at Trapani in September was RHS 160F Giorgione. Delivered in 1989 to Siremar, this was involved in a serious accident just off Trapani in 2007.*

PHOTOS BY Maurizio Gadda



# Hovering across the Bay of Naples

**It wasn't all about domestically built hydrofoils in Italy in the 1960s. Others wanted a piece of the cake too.**

**This is a reprint (with minor modifications) of an article which originally appeared in *CFF* ten years ago.**

**Around that time** Leonardo Lella, a pilot and consultant in aero-maritime matters, had been talking with some of the persons who were involved with the first commercial hovercraft service in Italy in the 1960s. One of them was Captain Pandolfi, who provided these never-before published images from his personal album.

The first hydrofoil, a PT.50, appeared in the Bay of Naples in 1959. With the developing in the U.K. of the hovercraft a Napoli based company, Aeronave S.p.A, was formed to operate two 40-seat SR.N6 Winchester Class hovercraft built by British Hovercraft Corporation in Southampton. The first of these, hull 018, completed in 1966, was shipped to Italy in April 1967 and entered service on July 1 between Napoli and the islands of Capri and Ischia. The second craft (028) followed in August.

The two craft operated a daily service until mid-October. On an average crossing the 18-nautical mile distance to either Capri or Ischia was covered in approx. 25 minutes, compared to 40 minutes by hydrofoil or 80 minutes by conventional ferry. According to Mr. Pandolfi, whenever conditions in the Bay became too rough for the hydrofoils to operate, the SR.N6s would continue doing so, albeit at a reduced speed. It is safe to assume that the comfort for the passengers and crew was likewise less than ideal.

## **Does it fly or sail?**

Four pilots were hired by Aeronave for the service.

These received one month of training in hovercraft handling at BHC in England prior to the launching of the service. In the early days of the hovercraft it was debated whether it was to be considered and classified an aircraft or a ship. Italy was no exception and this was reflected in the name of the company, Aeronave, and the operating license was granted by the Aeronautica Civile.





## PHOTOS COLLECTION OF CAPT. PANDOLFI



Mechanical reliability of the two Italian SR.N6s was good. Some trouble associated with sea water penetration and hydraulic failure due to cable leaks were experienced, as was normal skirt wear. There was however some public dissatisfaction, particularly from people living in Capri and Ischia, with regards to the noise level generated by the crafts' engine and propeller and also the spray. Otherwise passenger response was good.

### Short-lived

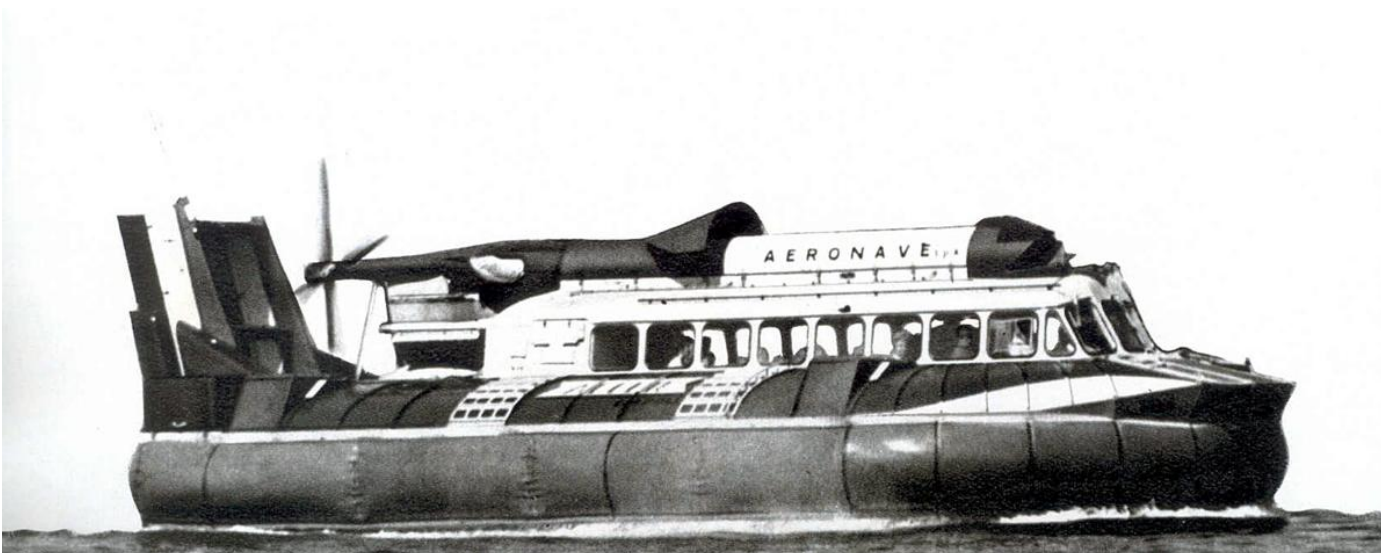
But the service did not survive for very long. Apart from the noise and spray, one of the reasons for the service not becoming a success was the relatively small craft; 14.7m in length and carrying a maximum

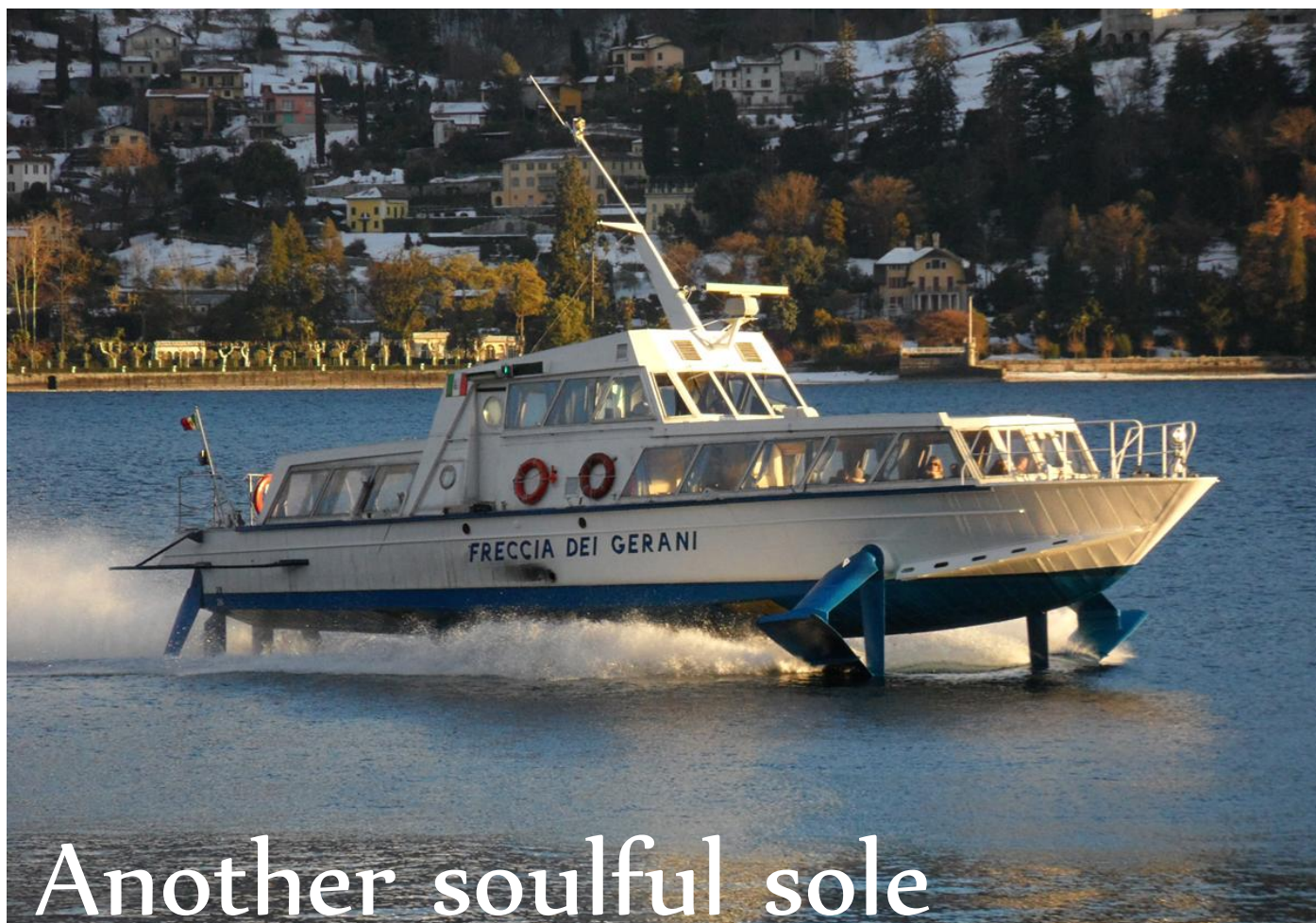
of 40 passengers. The PT.50 carried almost three times as many and even the smaller PT.20 was bigger at 20.7m and typically laid out for 70 passengers.

Following the second season on the route, in October 1968, the two craft were repossessed by BHC and relocated to the Canary Islands for demonstrations. While at the time the Bay of Naples service may not have been declared altogether dead it was not resumed the following year.

The 018 subsequently ended up in south-western Africa where it also ended its days following an accident. The other Aeronave unit went back to the U.K. and following employment with Hovertravel and Hoverwork was broken up in 1975.

**CFF**





## Another soulful sole

**Above:** The last active RHS 70 Freccia dei Gerani off Tremezzo on Lake Como in the golden winter sun on February 15, 2012. Note the snow on the hillside.  
/ JACOPO MEMEO photo

**As mentioned** in the article 'Age is just a number', there is still a single RHS 70 active in Italy.

The vessel, *Freccia dei Gerani*, is one of six delivered in 1974–77 by Rodriguez for service on the north Italian Lakes of Como, Garda and Maggiore. It originally operated on Lake Garda but was transferred to Lake Como in 1995. The RHS 70 design did not find its way to any other area within the country, however four were sold in the U.K..

Since our last report in March 2006, *Freccia dei Gerani* worked on Lake Como up to the spring of 2010 when it experienced an engine failure. It was

grounded for almost two years while the engine trouble was fixed, which included bringing in parts from a retired Lake Maggiore RHS 70, and re-entered service in February this year. From April onwards the hydrofoil was replaced by the operator's catamarans to meet the demand for larger capacity during the tourist season. It will be back in service for the winter, starting any day now.

The hydrofoils operating on the Lakes of Como, Garda and Maggiore have been dealt with in detail in previous issues of *CLASSIC FAST FERRIES*, last in the February and April 2005 issues.

---

## CLASSIC *FAST* FERRIES

ALL ARTICLES AND DESIGN EXCEPT WHERE NOTED, COPYRIGHT 2012 CLASSIC FAST FERRIES  
COPYRIGHT OF PHOTOS HELD BY THE SOURCE INDICATED

[www.classicfastferries.com](http://www.classicfastferries.com)  
[classicfastferries@gmail.com](mailto:classicfastferries@gmail.com)