

# The history of Virgilio Conrero – the father to the Conrero GT

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<http://www.memorialconrero.it/Gallery/Virgilio%20Conrero/Virgilio%20Conrero.html>

The brief summary of the adventurous life of Virgilio Conrero was taken from the book "CONRERO IL MAGO - Story of a man in love with engines", written by Roberto Sgarzi and Emanuele Daniele. This volume has now become very rare and is the only one that tells the story of Virgilio Conrero, with a wealth of details and many beautiful photos.

Virgilio Conrero was born in Turin on January 1, 1918, his father Francesco, originally from Saluzzo, is a pioneer of the mechanical industry, his mother Caterina, originally from Biella, is a housewife. The family, as well as Virgilio, is composed of Anita and Dante, a whimsical mathematician who will become a manager at Olivetti di Ivrea as well as a good composer of light music.

The father, very charismatic, instilled in Virgilio the passion for mechanics. Life in the Conrero family runs quiet, but the tragedy is around the corner. To take the quality step and enlarge the company, Francesco has installed a gas turbine at the company, a cutting-edge equipment for the time, which can make the difference. The turbine explodes, destroying the company and causing 13 deaths and injuries. Among these also Francesco Conrero who can not do it and dies the day after the tragedy.

Virgil's career may change right now ... .. surely he would have become an engineer, a company manager, important, but a little anonymous, but the future will reserve him many sacrifices, but also fame and notoriety as a masterful and imaginative technician. .

At 15, he has to leave school and help the family overcome the black moment. The character of Virgilio is formed, intolerant of mediocrity, always demanding the maximum from his collaborators, but also from himself. Perfection is his creed, a deep love for his country and above all for his work.

He starts to work as a mechanic at a typographic construction company, but they are too simple and trivial! He attends an evening course as an aviation engineer. With huge sacrifices he gets the best vote and the motorist's license. This opens the doors of FIAT Aviation, in the field of competitions and records.

The war arrives, naturally serving in aeronautics as a motorist. After many vicissitudes, the defeat, the defeat and the armistice bring the Fiat to transfer Virgilio in a sector where it has nothing more to do with the engines and he, deeply disappointed, goes away. In 1945 he moved to Quincinetto to reach the rest of the family who already resided there since the beginning of the conflict. Virgilio is hired by Ilsa Viola, the Pont Saint Martin metallurgical industry in Valle d'Aosta, as chief engineer and responsible for vehicle maintenance.

But someone remembers him. Engineer Giovanni Savonuzzi known when he was an aircraft engineer. Together they founded the SVA Società Valdostana Automobili to enter the world of racing cars; there is need of people like Virgilio Conrero.

Here the nickname of "MAGO" will immediately be given to him and he became famous and known to the public at the time of Conrero's victory at the Tour de France. The new company deals with processing and assistance to Cisitalia cars of famous drivers such as Giovanni Bracco. The first racing car projects also start. The first ever is a F3 with a self-built chassis equipped with a 500 cc engine of Guzzi. Then there are many other projects including a turbocharged F1 with turbocharged alcohol and petrol engines. The car runs on

the Sanremo circuit with the Swiss Fisher. It is a success, very fast, even if it does not come to an end. Accelerated set-up causes the pistons to jump.

The adventure at SVA ceases, but we are in the first post-war period and in Turin the car company explodes, new models come out of the Fiat 1100, 1400 Lancia Appia and Aurelia, Alfa offers the 1900, the Giulietta. The new fashion is to have diversified cars, in the bodywork, in the engine, take refuge from the standard car, looking for something not trivial, especially "inside" the engine. The first workshops specialized in preparation are born. The mythical names of Turin, the capital of the car, were Nardi, Bosato, but above all Conrero. It is in this context that in November 1952 the Autotecnica Conrero was born and the great adventure of the Magician began.

Virgilio Conrero was not a businessman, like many other famous manufacturers, the passion is great, money is just an option. What matters are the engine technique and the results on the track. The company often has economic difficulties because it often happens that smart pilots can use the equipment and the "advice" of Virgilio and Autotecnica for free. The difficulties never occurred to his collaborators, those who tightened their belts were always him! The Magician often finds himself in financial difficulties because of his intellectual honesty that certainly does not help him to obtain funding in the false world of finance. In his reign in the rustic shed of Via Monbasiglio, in the center of the old Turin, however, he begins to do what he will always distinguish: transforming them into victorious bolides.

The fame and notoriety of Virgil also begins. It often happens that engines intended for mass production are sent to the magician for a "review and tuning" before the release of famous models. Even the famous people begin their "procession" at the Autotecnica: Ranieri of Monaco, Nino Farina, Juan Manuel Fangio are often not only in Turin to talk about racing cars, but also often behind a table to taste with Virgilio, well-known gourmet, a dish or even more a good wine, (in the cellar of a well-known restaurant of Quincinetto still today you can see a huge cask of autographed wine "Manuel Fangio").

Now the story of Virgilio Conrero becomes actuality. The successes give strength and the Wizard begins his career as a builder, even though he never had much luck and never became a true complete builder. Some cars remember for the genius and the inspiration. The first was Conrero 2000. In 1953 a Swiss commissioned the car. The chassis is in trusses, the engine derived from the Alfa 1900, the body of Ghia, the Aurelia gearbox with the front end obtained from the Fiat 1400. The usual misfortune and the Thousand Miles the car goes out of the way and is almost destroyed. We start all over again by changing the bodywork and the technique. This time the pilot Munaron leads her to success at the Sassi Superga and then to the Lessolo Alice wins led by Balzarini, (this path that goes up to the Valchiusella was inserted in the path of the 2nd memorial Conrero in honor of the '53 victory). Then after winning a G.P. of Belgium, silence is incomprehensible for the car.

Following the Junior, it is 1958, the regulation requires a Fiat 1100 engine without too many elaborations, develops just over 80 hp, then the imagination of Virgilio indulges in elements of the frame and in the structure of the entire car. The gearbox, for example, is placed between the rider's legs. The streamlined body is built by Michelotti. The car is snapped up in France, where Conrero has become immediately famous, ordering 30 cars with Peugeot 203 engine. In this case, however, the car is abandoned as often happens to Conrero. We do not know the reasons, perhaps for lack of money for the evolution, perhaps for the lack of a circuit for the tests near Turin, Monza was far and expensive. In 1958 also the 1150 Sport Le Mans engine was born 1150 c.c. Derived from the 1300 Alfa Romeo. In the 24 Hours of Le Mans of '59 the car is in the lead with the drivers De Leonibus and Consten, the advantage is safe, but, there is always a but, it breaks a semi-axle away from the pits and is the withdrawal.

He also retires to the Targa Florio of 60 for bad luck. The song of the swan of Conrero is definitely the 2000th sport desmo. A wonderful car that is still admired today. An Osca branch frame completely rebuild in the rear to accommodate suspensions with F1-type reaction struts. For the engine we always start with a 1900 A.R. of which very little remains. The distribution is even desmodromic, dry carter, double ignition. The racy body is always Michelotti, finally made historic for the first times in Italy mounts disc brakes. In trial Munaron breaks a semi-axle and the unexplained happens, the car is abandoned in a corner of a shed. After twenty years Daniele Emanuele finds it in the shed, with the semi-axle broken, puts it back into operation and wins the Italian car championship in 1979. If he ran and won twenty years before ???

Conrero also builds an F1, in '61. De Tomaso has a chassis ready, the engine must be a 1500 c.c. The Magician immediately comes to mind, which at that time is achieving great successes in France with a 1500 engine that equips a Cooper. We use the monoblock of the Giulietta increased, Weber carburetors for 152 HP. The car will have a difficult life. A 4-cylinder engine is immediately inferior to the 6 and 8 cylinders that can reach higher and performing regimes. On the other hand, for a "private" it was impossible, without great funding, to be able to design and build a totally new engine. The De Tomaso Conrero runs and in two years obtains, however, excellent results with the pilots Trentignant, Vaccarella and Bussinello .

The love of engines is always at the origin of everything. There are many brands that go through the Virgilio workshop: Fiat, Renault, Opel, Lancia, but above all Alfa Romeo, great love. Already since 1956 Conrero's commitment has been repaid, especially in France with numerous customers and with many victories. Class 1300 c.c. worldwide it is fertile with victories. Pilots like Carlo Abate, the brothers Pedro and Ricardo Rodriguez, Consalvo Sanesi, break the north (12 hours of Sebring) and South America. Also in Europe, you win in Le Mans at the Tour de France in Reims. The natural consequence is that in '63 he became the official trainer for Alfa Romeo. The direct relationship with the parent company allows obtaining original pieces. Autotecnica moves to Via Madama Cristina 115. The squares are always full of 1900 Super, 1300 TI, 1300 Sprint, some TZ, but above all Giulietta, which in the hands of the Magician get powers above 100 HP / liter. The "Drop", elaboration of Michelotti on a Giulietta basis, fast sprint for the Peroglio driver, who immediately wins the Aosta Pila and obtains a speed record at Monza. In these years we begin to appreciate the professionalism of the Preparer, but also the extreme correctness, never to a technical control, on cars prepared by him, there will be only one infraction of the regulation ". It is a question of honor. The victories flow: in '57 two titles on the road and mountain with Abbot, in '58 the Consten brothers win the Liege Roma Liège, the Coppa delle Alpi and in 14 races get 12 victories. In '59 it is the turn of the 12 hours of Sebring, in '60 the victories are 78. With the Giulietta Conrero race and also win drivers like Joken Rindt and Lorenzo Bandini.

In 1968 the turning point, Ing. Chiti, the toscanaccio does not deny its character. With Virgilio there is no relationship. Others become Alfa preparers, even if they use the same "ideas" of Virgil. But the moment is complicated again. Conrero had made important investments for the purchase of refined technical equipment. Fortunately, Count Zanon intervenes, a well-known enthusiast who gives a hand to ours. The GTA era arrives, Virgilio gets powers that from the original 130 hp rise to 160, 180, 185 hp. The victories are no longer counted. The moment of revenge also comes. Monza 1970 Autodelta squadron of the hated Chiti, clashes with two small GTA Conrero. Luigi Colzani wins with a lap of advantage. And 'the triumph, during the awards Virgilio lights up with a speech "Because, dear sirs, is not that today my cars have gone particularly strong, no! It is yours that has gone slowly, particularly slowly! "For men like Conrero these are the moments for which life is worth living. Magico 1970, Artiglio Swiss champion with the Renault Alpine A110, Colzani Italian champion GTA 1300 group 2, Luigi Cabella Italian champion GTA 1600, Ramoino Italian champion 1300 Group 3 with the Alpine A110.

We must not forget that the Japanese came from Conrero. The esteem and friendship that have linked at some point in the career Conrero and Soichiro Honda, is representative of the reputation that good Virgil had accumulated over the years. There are many Japanese engines a bit "poor" that arrive in the workshops of Turin and come out reinvigorated, enhanced. Virgilio Conrero's trips to Japan were unusual for him, used to more spartan and good terms ... he was welcomed as a great man, as he would have deserved in Italy too. Instead, some "gentlemen" of Italian motoring, very close geographically to Conrero, so as to breathe the same air of Turin, have never been unbalanced towards him, certain refinements of the owners of the Fiat house were not reconciled with the hands gnarled who the work was really serious in the first person.

Renault also entrusts Virgilio with the preparation and evolution of the Gordini 1300 for the rally, the 90 hp engine. It rises to almost 130. You begin to explore the world of rallies; you make the first knowledge of pilots such as Cavallari, Paganelli, Ballestrieri, Audetto.

The experiences of Autotecnica never end. We also prepare motorboat and minor boat engines such as Roger Boudot and the English Triumph. **The love for Opel breaks out, it is 1969. The well-known name of Conrero becomes a mass phenomenon with the German house. Virgilio becomes the official coach of Opel, director of the racing team with decision-making power also in the choice of drivers. The collaboration is splendid and lasts many years from 1970 to 1986.**

**In '69 it debuted with the GT 1900 and the Commodore 2300 in speed races uphill, also begins the relationship with riders like Giorgio Pianta, Conrero's standard bearer.** In '70 he obtained incredible victories with Benedini at Mugello and Pianta at Imola. In '71 victory at the Targa Florio in the group 4 class 2000 and ninth place overall, behind only Ferrari and Porsche prototype.

Giorgetto Pianta wins the Trieste Opicina, the Trofeo Scarfiotti, the Bolzano Mendola, the Trento Bondone, the Cesana Sestriere and again at Imola, the Coppa Nissena and Monza. **At the Opel day in Germany the first clash between the official German cars and the Mago cars takes place. The best test time is from Pianta, but he is thrown out at the start. Rosselli still wins in front of a certain Stuck. We could continue this way also for the years '72, '73, '74, '75, an endless series of victories. But we come to another milestone in Conrero's never-ending career.**

**In '73 the Opel abandoned the track activity, Virgilio already has considerable experience in the field thanks to the French, always them, there are many Alpine developed in Turin.**

We throw ourselves headlong, as is now the habit of Autotecnica, in the new sector. The Ascona A is evolved and gets 175 hp in the group version 1. The workshop head of this period becomes another mythical name, for the rally Mario "Mariolino" Cavagnero, who later will become responsible for the technical management of Peugeot cars, (those who form professionally at Conrero always obtain important results). The results of the years '73, '74, '75 etc. follow those of previous years on the track. Wins throughout Italy and Europe, and not only in classes, but also absolute victories. The riders range from Salvatore Brai, to Fagnola from Mondino to Presotto, from Lucky Battistolli to Cerrato, from Ormezzano to Biasion passing through Tony Fassina, but also Ballestrieri, Verini and dozens of "minor" drivers who find in Conrero not only a great coach, but above all a great man or, as many official pilots say a second father, always ready to help and advice and help even when money is few, the important thing is that passion is so great. **Cars are born as the Kadett GTE 1900 and 2000, the Ascona 400, the Manta 400 ... up to the Kadett**

**GSI. It often happens that Opel Conrero arrive at the end of the Italian championship in second place behind Fiat.** In '81 even the big Fiat is defeated, Tony Fassina finally wins the Italian Rally Championship, even the houses that ran officially never managed to beat the Fiat group at home. In '84 Virgilio falls ill, so many years of hard work and sacrifices are undermining the strong fiber. It does not stop working, it is the last years of activity first on the Peugeot Talbot, the Samba and the 205 GTI, then becomes a consultant to Lancia, the legendary Lancia relies on the great magician who for a while has also assumed the nickname of " White Pen ", the advice of the old lion is basic, born cars like the S4, the 037, the mythical Delta.

In 1985 Virgilio Conrero passed his hand and retired to the Moncalieri house.

His victories? Someone says three thousand and more, he stopped counting them after the thousandth.

Of men like him, unfortunately, few are born. We are at the beginning of January 1990. January had seen the birth of a great man and in January he saw a great man die. The world of rallies without him will never be the same; maybe he would not like it any more. When it becomes easy to even make the preparer, just recalibrate any electronic control unit and you're done. Someone says that now even the pilots have become the Play Station. Of course the wonderful 70s will never come back. Years that we have had the good fortune to live, especially in the world of Rally, will always remain in memory. Hello Virgilio, we always think of you and hope, with our little competition, to help keep alive your memory, even among those young people who have not had the good fortune to meet you, and that you would have surely educated your way, the right one !!!

The 1990s lasted only until Saturday morning of 6 January: Virgilio Conrero, his machines, the world of rallies of the '70s and '80s are sucked away and, at the same time, resume living in the cycle of timelessness. January had seen a great man be born and January sees a great man die. "