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## O.E.B.: The Synthesis of the Italian Screw

### *Interview with the O.E.B. President*

Sometimes a product may be linked to the name of its manufacturer, but when we are talking about a screw with standard qualities, well-known with the name of the Italian family who decided to produce it first, we are talking about a unique situation of its kind.

The product we are talking about is the “vite con esagono incassato” (i.e. hexagon socket screw), well-known in Italy as “vite Brugola” (literally, Brugola screw). In fact, the Italian production of this specific type of screw had been started by Egidio Brugola in 1926.

The origins of this screw are obscure and doubtful. Germans affirm they created it, which is exactly the opposite of what Americans state.

What is sure is that the first Italian company to produce the “vite a testa cava esagona” (i.e. the hexagonal socket head cup screw) was the O.E.B. (Officine Egidio Brugola); they extended their product range, while always remaining the leaders in the production of the “vite Brugola”.

Egidio Brugola prematurely disappeared in 1959 and, after a short interregnum, Egidio’s son, Cav. del Lav. Giannantonio Brugola, started to run the company, making gradual changes not only in the structure, but also in the philosophy of O.E.B. He focused the production more and more on car manufacturing. This is how the company started fruitful collaborations with the world’s major car manufacturers.

Brugola has five different plants in Italy and recently opened a new one in the US, with a workforce of 450, an annual fasteners production of 48,000 tons and a EUR130 million turnover.

O.E.B. has recently turned 90, which means 90 years of continuous production activities. Over the time, there had been changes, of course: situations changed and the family generations, as well. After Cav. del Lav. Giannantonio Brugola disappeared in February 2015, the company passed over the third generation with Jody Brugola.

The passage from one generation to another has always been a gradual step in O.E.B. In fact, Giannantonio’s son, Jody Brugola started playing the active role of vice president of the company in 2011. Only after his father passed away, he took the presidential charge, ensuring continuity to the family company.

We asked some questions to Jody Brugola, who plays important roles in O.E.B., but also in the Associazione italiana dei produttori di fasteners (Italian Association of Fasteners Manufacturers).



#### **Q: What does OEB mean in the world of fasteners?**

**A:** We can say that today, OEB represents an excellence in the field of critical screws used in engines, which are becoming increasingly performing and smaller and smaller. Therefore, the automotive industry needs to rely on reliable fasteners complying with the extremely strict tolerances that are imposed, and capable of ensuring very high quality levels. To meet these requirements, it is absolutely necessary to guarantee constant technological innovation and to continuously improve the production process.

It is all that Brugola offers today, as the company has become over time a point of reference in the area of screws for engines, and it will be so also tomorrow for other kinds of products, because we want, and we will have the ability to differentiate our production in the forthcoming years.

#### **Q: How did you experience the generational handover?**

**A:** My personal generational handover process began when I was a young boy. I remember that I used to go with my father in our firm on Sunday morning. I began in that way to know and appreciate this work. Later on, when I grew up, I began travelling with my father and taking part in the business negotiations. So, I began understanding what the production and business stage did mean.

From the age of 21 to the age of 24, I experienced my first work period in the company, then there was a break until the age of 28. For three years I was the assistant of my father. When I was 32 I decided to completely devote myself to the company taking on the position as Vice-President. Then, when my father’s physical conditions began to worsen, I had to increasingly commit myself to the company, taking on responsibilities and making decisions that sometimes were very difficult and risky, which however proved winning over time.



**Q: What are in your opinion the prospects for the Italian fastener industry?**

A: When we think that three big Italian concerns as Fontana, Agrati, and Brugola have landed in the United States for the purpose of becoming a point of reference for the whole American market, we should conclude that the Italian fasteners are in excellent health conditions. Quite different, however, is the case of a number of small and medium sized Italian manufacturers who will be obliged, sooner or later, to choose whether establishing strategic alliances with other companies or pursuing the way to extreme specialization, that is to say, the production of special fasteners in a position to meet the requirements of particular market niches.

**Q: What are in your opinion the strategies to be implemented in today's fastener market?**

A: I think that if a manufacturer is unable to develop at least two or three innovations and/or improvements every year, he is destined not to have a future. What we are doing at Brugola is to find and test continuously new products, new materials, new technologies, in order to cut costs and improve quality.

**Q: Is it possible, today, to start expanding one's activity abroad? Is it worthwhile and cost-effective?**

A: Globalization drives manufacturers to expand looking for new shores. It is still possible to grow in Europe, although in a limited way. In any case, globalization drives us to be present in several markets. Anyway, when one decides to outsource production, one should have a clear idea about what has to be done, and above all, what customers already have. Producing abroad without having previously developed a market may be cost-effective but may prove quite risky, too.

**Q: What are, in your opinion, the most interesting markets for the Italian fastener production?**

A: All foreign markets are of interest for Italian manufacturing. Some of them have been particularly active for some time – specifically the German and French markets in Europe, then the United States of America, China, Brazil and India. These are countries where Italian operators have started establishing solid relationships. Taiwan is a unique market with a high propensity for production and export. At the moment we do not have any particular projects in this country, but we cannot exclude making an approach as part of a clear marketing strategy.

**Q: Which role should a trade association play?**

A: It is self-evident that the first task a trade association should perform is to protect members' interests. But in my opinion, the tasks of an association must be broader and more incisive, For example, a common action is necessary, both at a domestic and a European level, as regards demanding customers, such as those of the automotive industry, who always tend to prevail on their suppliers' requests. Anti-dumping measures are right, but there are not only them: equally important is to establish the adoption of a common strategy towards the market in general.

**Q: Thinking about the future, are you optimistic or pessimistic?**

A: I am realistic. So, when I think about what the next years will be, I become pessimistic. But when I think about my company, I immediately become optimistic.

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