

2011 Raid Pavia-Venezia - 68th edition

Pavia, February 8th, 2011

Motors are warming up for this year's edition of the Raid, starting Sunday, May 29th. The legendary Pavia–Venezia, the longest and oldest powerboat race in the world, is organized by the Associazione Motonautica Pavia (AMP, the historical organizer) together with the Federazione Italiana Motonautica (FIM).

Enthusiasts and pilots can participate in this year's official 384 kilometer course. As per regulations, the Raid is run with an official minimum speed of 60 KPH. It is open not only to expert pilots but also to anyone who wants an exhilarating experience aboard a monohull, catamaran, racer or jet-ski, and includes fan boats and waterskis along with any vessel in the FIM and UIM class circuits with a engine larger than 400cc. The race will start in the Ticino River at Pavia and then run down the Po River towards Cremona, then to Borghetto Po, where the Adige River joins the Po River, with the finish at the Circolo Nautico Marina di Brondolo near Chioggia. **A possible finish in Venice in the splendid San Marco Basin is being evaluated.**

History of the Raid

This race is more of a legend than a competition: the first edition was run in 1929 when Vincenzo Balsamo, a Neapolitan engineer and enthusiastic seaman, head of the Milan Naval League's Gruppo Motonautico, approached the Canottieri Ticino in Pavia with a proposal to run a race on the Po River. 414 Km from Pavia to Venice, down the Ticino, the Po, and then across the Brondolo Channel (then known as the Vittorio Emanuele IIIrd Channel) to the Venetian lagoon and Chioggia, with the finish in Venice. Power-boating was already popular in those days; racing and speed trials were already under way on the local lakes. It was obviously a sport for elites, with nobility and bourgeois enthusiasts. Piero Sozzani and Paride Negri, with his sons Ettore and Tino (rowing champions and owners of a pier on the Ticino where they rented boats), gave a hand to Vincenzo Balsamo in running this audacious long-distance event.

The first Raid was run on June 6th, 1929. Ettore and Paride Negri participated, the former with an Elto 350cc engine, the latter with an Elto 500cc engine. Many participants raced with a crew, necessary not only as an onboard mechanic, but as a navigator with precious local knowledge of the Ticino and Po rivers: Quartana-Varesi (Johnson 500cc); Carbone-Zanassi (Lockwood 350cc); Benzoni-Fregnani (Johnson 500cc); Castaldi-Borromeo d'Adda (Elto 500cc); and Dino Feltrinelli (Miss Garda II). The race started at four in the morning, and the river banks were packed with fans: De Capitani for the Touring Club, the journalists Emilio De Martino for the *Corriere della Sera* and Arturo Pianca for the *Popolo d'Italia* were among the illustrious guests who gave a hand to the race officials and the Waters Commissioner Rear Admiral Camperio. The race was won in 11 hours, 36 minutes and 23 seconds by Ettore Negri and his tiny outboard, with Luigi Calvi as mechanic. Count Franco Mazzotti was second with his beautiful *Pitta* powerboat, having gone aground four times at the most tricky parts of the Eridano, as the Po was once known. Miss Balboni, after an infinite number of mishaps, took more than 40 hours to complete the race. Within a few years the average speeds rapidly increased: in only seven years the average increased from 35.67 KPH to 86.73 KPH, from Ettore Negri's time of eleven hours to Theo Rossi di Montelera's five hours and one minute. Beautiful fan boats appeared on the water and reined supreme over the hulls with underwater propellers.

Today's competition, known as the river version of the "Paris-Dakar", runs at a dizzy speed and in incredibly short times. The Pavia-Venezia has always been honored with the participation of power-boating's greatest champions: Theo Rossi di Montelera, Augusto Cometti (winner of six editions), Leopoldo Casanova, Renato Molinari, Eugenio Molinari, Antonio Petrobelli (winner of eight editions and record holder from 1990 to 2002 with 198.8 KPH), the banker Carlo Rasini, Prince Diofebo Meli Lupi di Soragna, present FIM board member Mauro Danini, Maurizio Caramelli,

Gianpaolo Montavoci (2010 Endurance P1 World Champion), Stefano Gialdini (2009 Endurance Group B World Champion), Dino Zantelli (winner of seven editions and present record holder with 203.341 KPH), Fabio Buzzi (record holder in 2004 with 212.750 KPH on the stage between Serafini Island and Boretto), the late Cesare Vismara (Jet-ski World Champion). In addition several foreign pilots have participated - Tony Williams (1980's Formula One driver), John Hardings, and the celebrities Clay Ragazzoni, Alessandro Benetton, Andrea Bonomi, Adriano Panatta and the Ravizza brothers (Pellicceria Annabella).

AMP and FIM are evaluating the possibility of inaugurating a Vintage Championship, open to famous race-boats from the past.

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