

Day 3: Real loss

LUCA CIFERRI  

Europe Editor, based in Turin, Italy, for Automotive News

 TWEET SHARE SHARE EMAIL PRINT

Falchetti family

Umberto Falchetti, right, is pictured with his daughter, Maria Vittoria Falchetti.

Editor's note: Luca Ciferri, editor and associate publisher of Automotive News Europe, is living under quarantine at his Italian home in Villastellone, just south of Turin. He will be filing daily updates in this blog post.

Italy is mourning the first known death of an active member of the auto industry community to the coronavirus.

Umberto Falchetti, who for many years was the guiding force at supplier MTA, died after a short battle with the virus.

He was 86 and otherwise very healthy before developing a fever and never recovering, his daughter, Maria Vittoria Falchetti, told me during an emotional phone call.

MTA, short for Meccanotecnica Codognese, makes electronic and electromechanical components supplied to BMW, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, PSA Group and Renault. The company was founded in 1954 by Antonio Falchetti, Umberto's father and Maria Vittoria's grandfather. The company is based in Codogno, 36 miles southeast of Milan, one of the two epicenters of Italy's coronavirus outbreak that began in late February.

Only this year did Umberto stop his daily trips into the office of the company, where he was still chairman, having run the organization since the mid-1970s. MTA is a true family business as Umberto's son, Antonio, has been CEO since 2005 and Maria Vittoria serves as marketing director.

"He was healthy," Maria Vittoria said, "still following his great passions: classic cars and any type of technology."

Umberto developed a slight fever on Feb. 28, but no one thought it was anything serious. Maria Vittoria had breakfast with him on the morning of March 4. That afternoon the fever worsened, so Umberto was taken to the hospital. He died two days later.

Since Umberto was diagnosed with coronavirus on March 4, Maria Vittoria has been under a two-week self quarantine at home.

Despite the pain of losing a parent, she has continued to work. That is the responsibility that comes with being an executive at a business that employs 600 people in Italy, where 75 percent of staff is back to work, and another 950 outside of the country.

"Life goes on," she said. "My father had a wonderful life and I was blessed to be his daughter."

Maria Vittoria's final message was both powerful and succinct: "This virus is a serious threat," she warned. "Follow all the safety and hygiene orders that the authorities demand because death could literally be around the corner."