



Photo: Groupe F - Thierry Nisava



FIAT'S FLOATING



PRODUCT LAUNCH

*A parade of visual surprises
announces the new Fiat 500*

By: Mike Clark

It was a true multi-media event: With 12,000 guests onsite and an estimated 100,000 strong crowd of inhabitants and viewers at home watching live TV coverage of the entire show, the riverside launch of the new Fiat 500 was also streamed on a dedicated website. Fiat's Canadian-Italian CEO, Sergio Marchionne, said that the company wants the new car—being built in Poland at an initial rate of 120,000 a year—to be “the iPod of cars; simple, clean, useful, and fashionable.” Whatever the fortunes of the 500, the international presentation show is sure to be remembered.

CORPORATE EVENT

The scene was the Murazzi area of the Po River at night, in Fiat's home town of Turin. Stadium-style seating for thousands of Fiat guests (including 1,200 journalists) was erected on the bank opposite a floating stage, with an enormous video screen as a backdrop.

The up-tempo, imaginative, and, at times, surreal event just had to have a strong nostalgic slant, since the original model was a symbol of Italy's economic rebirth after World War II, and a design icon in its own right; along with the Vespa scooter, it's one of the best-known symbols of modern Italy. So there was an Anita Ekberg look-alike, a Beatles cover band, and a Marilyn Monroe impersonator singing "Happy Birthday" to the new car, launched exactly 50 years after its predecessor. Although it must have perplexed foreign guests, the appearance of four "elephants" on stage was a flashback to a joke doing the rounds in the first 500's heyday: "How do you get four elephants into a 500?" "Two in the front and two in the back!"



Four lighting towers contains Robe and Martin wash units.

Fiat entrusted the production of the extravaganza to the well-proven FilmMaster K-Events team, led by Marco Balich. Balich, the show's director and creative producer, crossed over from a promising career as a fencer to organizing concerts in Italy featuring such names as Peter Gabriel, George Michael, R.E.M., Pink Floyd, U2, and others, then produced videos for clients ranging from top Italian rockers to Luciano Pavarotti. He also launched one of Italy's top summer rock festivals, before turning his hand to TV production and large-scale events. A partner and managing director with the FilmMaster Group, Balich was creative producer/director of the 2006 Winter Olympic Games Ceremonies in Turin, seen by two billion viewers worldwide; he called many members of that production's

team and contractors for the Fiat event.

An ex-musician and sound engineer, Marco Astarita, the technical producer, has an impressive resume that includes an Italian show by Madonna, the Italian date of the *Human Rights Now* tour with Bruce Springsteen and Sting, a Pink Floyd show in Venice, and Turin's 2006 Winter Olympics ceremonies. Ivan Manzoni's groundbreaking aerial choreography work (which has included *Waterwall*, a 70-minute show, on which a dance troupe interacted with a large artificial waterfall) has won him recognition, including the Total Theatre Award at Edinburgh Fringe Festival; his most recent career highlight was the dove of peace, formed by dozens of acrobats, at the Turin Olympics opening ceremony.

Durham Marengi, the lighting designer, was tasked by Balich—with whom he'd worked on the Winter Olympic Ceremonies and the recent 70th anniversary celebration of the famed Italian film studio Cinecittà—to create a theatrical event to celebrate the car, which is very important to the Italian manufacturing industry, to illuminate it in such a way as to be spectacular for to the live audience of over 100,000 (including government and industry VIPs), and to make the show look impressive on the live HDTV broadcast.

The manager for the lighting and audio contractor, Agorà, was Nicola Manuel Tallino; the associate lighting designers were Eneas Mackintosh and Nick Jones, with programming by John Sinden and Emiliano Morgia on High End Systems Hog iPCs.

The main challenge, as always with waterborne events, was to make the river visible to the cameras, and Marengi and his team achieved this by placing a row of fifty Coemar 2kW lights along the far bank of the river, just above the water, to create reflections both by bouncing the light directly into the water and having bright enough beams in the air to be visible as reflections. "Of course," Marengi says, "though casting nice reflections and illuminating the waterborne artists, the light on the river also went straight down the camera lenses, but, by slowly panning them back and forth, and through careful choice of dark, yet not saturated, colors, we alleviated this problem."

As far as specific instruments were concerned, Marengi specified 50 Coemar iSpot eXtremes for bright gobo coverage, 50 iWash Flex along the far bank, 50 wide-angle Robe ColorWash1200s on three barges as footlights, 50 Robe ColorWash and Martin MAC 2000 Wash units on the lighting towers, and 50 Mac 2000 washes on the near-bank FOH positions. In addition, the rig included 30 Arri Junior 2000s, 28 Coemar LED PAR 56 units, and eight Lycian SuperArc 4k spots.

Regarding the large red "500" logo routed into the stage floor, Marengi explains that samples of single and multi-color LEDs and neon were considered, but he and the set designer, Florian Boje, eventually chose double red neon



The area of the river that involved performers was covered at water level with eight groups of Meyer enclosures

as the brightest effect: “This wasn’t the most practical choice, as the barges flexed and cars and dancers ran across the logo, but LEDs were not bright enough to stand out against my finale lighting of the reveal cars, or Christophe Berthonneau’s trademark ‘white out’ at the end of the [pyro] display.”

DMX network signals were carried by a fiber-optic cable to the floating stage and the far bank through “Nessie,” a U-shaped metal pipe along the river bed. “Much fun was had during the welding of this monster, trying to run a cable wire through the metal tube,” says Marengi. “I believe a radio-controlled car and a ferret are probably still stuck in there!”

As to the effect Mediaset’s HD TV coverage of the event had on his design, Marengi says, “Roberto Cenci is a fine TV director and there were cameras absolutely everywhere, so we were obviously limited in our positions for lights. I think the reason for the success of the broadcast lighting was twofold—firstly ensuring that the cameras could always see clearly lit faces on performers and VIPs; the human eye will focus on these and, as HDTV makes everything far clearer, we should concentrate more on correct lighting of the human face—even in the audience, which used to be a blurred wallpaper background to the performers. This also always gives the camera somewhere to go for close-ups, important when you have a live screen—if you don’t show detail, what is the point of the screen?”

The second technique that clinched it for the lighting team was having a clearly defined “action area” on the river, as Marengi explains: “Roberto knew not to pick up artists floating downstream until a certain point, but, in his truck and for his cameramen, this was extremely difficult to define—you can’t paint stage marks on a river! We had to focus every wash light at up to 120m very carefully, in order to define a light/dark border. When the artist had not reached this line, they were clearly inadequately lit; once they had crossed it, they had good key light and backlight and were fair game for the 30 cameramen. Thanks to Nick Jones and his craft-handling skills for spending most nights out on the river to achieve this!”

Two HD OB vans with 30 cameras and a 57-strong technical crew were fielded by the specialist OB firm Frame to cover the event for Mediaset, which aired the entire show live on its flagship channel Canale Cinque, with a special edition of its show, *Non Solo Moda*.

Frame’s Massimiliano Anchise explains, “As well as mixing the 30 HD cameras used for live TV coverage of the show, the main truck also sent a mix down to the smaller van, equipped with EVS systems for playback of pre-recorded contributions to the show, in which a second team mixed this feed with shots from several individual cameras [such as the two dedicated to the rapper Lauryn Hill] and fed this to the two Komaden transparent

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Creative LED screens installed at the venue, a 40 sq. m. Image-Mesh screen and an 80 sq. m. Kapas screen.”

Paolo Gualdi, whose company, Le Grande Immagini, supplied the screens, adds, “Thanks to their see-through format, they were able to be flown from a height of over 50’ without any problems, in spite of gusts of wind of up to 80mph up to an hour before the show started.”

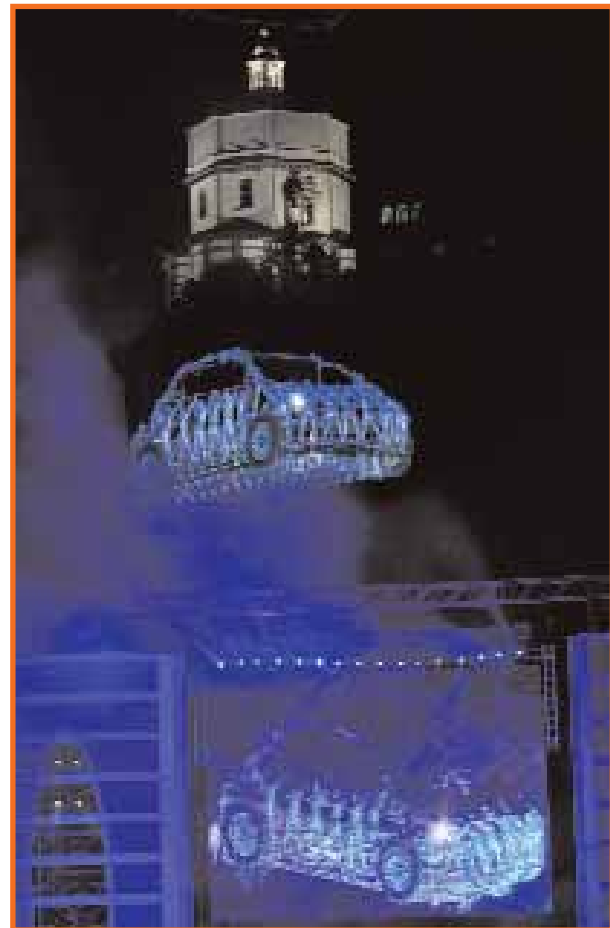
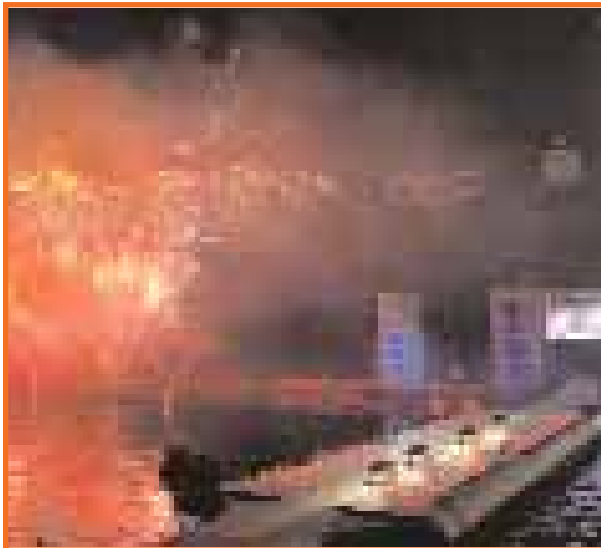
In addition to the load-in and set-up time frame being very limited (the 6,400-seat stand had to be erected in a week), organizing the logistics for an event of this size in a sensitive area such as a river flowing through a large city was a daunting task. However, after having successfully navigated through the red tape for the Olympics, Astoria and his team once again came out on top.

However, there were a series of “firsts,” even for them: The stage, installed on a series of modular pontoons, obviously had to be firmly moored, which required a boat with an onboard pile driver. Although weather was good and the water level low during the period prior to the show, the risk of high water also had to be taken into consideration when deciding pile lengths and ballast weights. A floating barrier had to be installed upstream to stop debris from arriving in the show zone and, as well as countless forklift trucks and aerial platforms, a 300-ton crane was needed to fly the huge “500” logo above the stage and a Terex Demag AC-800 (the world’s largest telescopic boom truck crane) to lift the metal skeleton on which a group of acrobats formed a “human” 500, which took off from the stage and flew into the night. As well as premises normally used by canoe clubs and other organizations being “occupied” for the event, seven containers were also brought in for use as offices and control rooms. A security team of over 150 was at work on the day of the show, but a considerable number of staff was

also required beforehand, as the adjacent venues in the Murazzi area were open to the public day and night during the entire set-up period.

Agorà called in sound designer Daniele Tramontani, who is no newcomer to events of this scale, having worked on the Olympics ceremonies and Medals Plaza in Turin, as well as numerous other spectacular events as far afield as Seoul, Korea. Two veterans of Italy’s concert audio scene—Willie Gubellini and Angelo Camporese—coordinated the interaction between the production team, Agorà, and Tramontani. Other key crew members included sound engineer Maurizio Nicotra, in charge of the audio control room, which he manned with a 48-input Midas Legend console; Ettore Cimpincio, who was responsible for the playback of the spectacle’s recorded soundtrack; Adriano Brocca and Emilio De Rose, who were in charge of the radio frequencies used at the event; and Orlando Ghini, Tramontani’s right-hand man as far as the PA was concerned.

Tramontani’s brief was to ensure optimum sound coverage for four key areas: The official audience was hosted in tiered seating erected on 350m of road running along the river bank, at about 10m above water level; in front of this



Pyro was created by the French specialists Groupe F (left). Ivan Manzoni’s aerial choreography created a human Fiat (right).

zone was a 10m wide strip of riverbank with standing spectators. The pontoon-mounted main stage hosted part of the show, but a lot happened on the water itself, which meant that approximately 400m of river also had to have audio coverage to enable artists to move in sync with the music.

“We had to cover the large number of spectators with speakers positioned on the riverbank without obstructing their sightlines—or those of the 30 TV cameras covering the event,” explains Tramontani. “Although the music had to have a stereo ‘image,’ I also had to ensure separate access to the various groups of speakers, in order to create the effect of sound coming from various directions, and, for the VIPs in the crowd, even surround effects.”

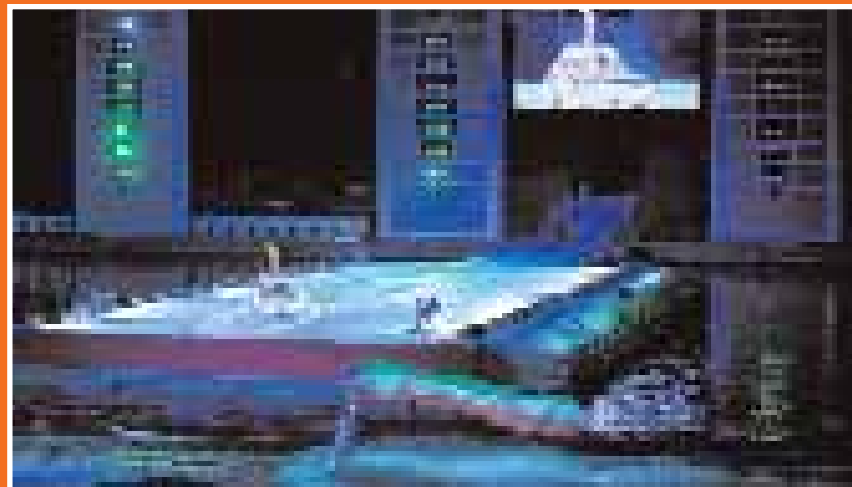
As well as the considerable length of the cable runs involved—compensated by using line amplifiers—a lot had to be run through water-tight tubing to and from the stage, such as that used to connect the smaller stage on which Lauryn Hill and her band performed after “sailing” along the river to dock at the main peninsula stage.

This floating stage, complete with onboard, front-of-house, and monitor engineers, sent a mix down to the Nicotra’s control room on shore, from where it was fed out to the PA. “We also had a monitor set-up covering the entire stretch of river on which other artists performed,” says Tramontani, “and had to ensure that sound reached the spectators in perfect sync with performers’ movements and other aspects of the show, such as lighting and pyro effects.”

After abandoning the initial idea of large hangs on the opposite bank from the audience, due to the excessively long throws involved, a solution was eventually found using a series of Prolyte aluminum towers, supplied by La Diligenza, installed along the edge of the river

Each tower had a main hang comprising five L-Acoustic V-DOSC, which gave front coverage to the top stand seating, below which there was a second smaller cluster of six dV-DOSC, covering the lower part of the audience, close to the river. To ensure that the sightlines for VIP spectators in the center seating were completely clear, two clusters of 11 Meyer M’elodie enclosures each were flown from the truss ring erected over the stand, while the corresponding part of the audience close to the river was covered by a series of groups of Meyer UPA systems, installed on the riverside subs.

Along the rear of the entire 350m stand, there were 24 UPA systems, whereas the “left and right back” effects for the VIP zone were played back through two groups of five Meyer M’elodie and the area’s “side” effects were courtesy of two more clusters of seven Meyer M’elodies each. The bottom end was handled by eight groups of four L-Acoustic SB218 subwoofers along the river bank, plus other subs installed directly under the center zone of the stand.



The stage was installed on modular pontoons.

The floating stage was equipped with wedge monitors along either side. The area of the river involving performers was also covered at water level by eight groups of enclosures installed on the ground along the river bank, each of which consisted of a Meyer 600-HP subwoofer and two or three Meyer Mica systems. (Mics included a Shure wireless handheld transmitter with a Beta 58A for Lauryn Hill and a Sennheiser SK50 pocket transmitter with a DPA 4066 for Claudia Gerini, the Monroe lookalike.)

System management, EQ, and delay, with 14 channels fed in and 30 out, was handled by five BSS Soundwebs, set and controlled via Tramontani’s trusty Meyer SIM III; the designer prepared his design using AutoCad and 3-D VectorWorks, whereas the 3-D acoustic preview was prepared with SoundVision acoustical simulation software.

Although the breathtaking pyrotechnic show by French specialists Groupe F and local firm Panzers closed the unique event, the evening continued with a DJ set that kept guests dancing until dawn and all-night festivities held throughout the city. 🎧