



Patrizio Bertelli

# Passion Project

"The [America's] Cup fascinates me because it's a difficult, complex project that requires to develop a team of highly professional individuals super specialized in many different sectors that know how to unite and work together in harmony for a long period of time at a pace that is very intense. It's a difficult structure to set up but even more to manage," says Prada's Patrizio Bertelli.

BY LUISA ZARGANI

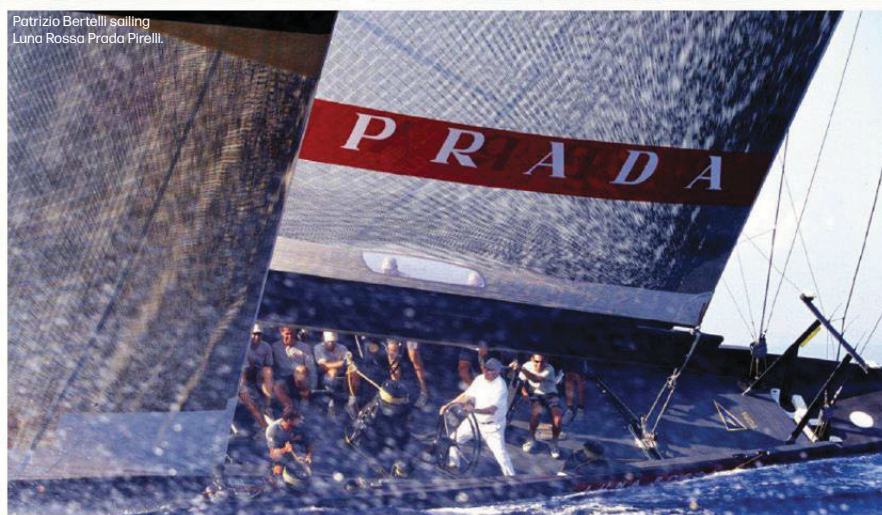
According to Britannica, the definition of passion is "a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something." This description perfectly describes Patrizio Bertelli's never-abated gusto for sailing and his ambition to win the America's Cup — although he contends it's persistence rather than passion that is "the true motor."

For the past 25 years Bertelli has been investing in the Luna Rossa project to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, building increasingly technologically advanced sailboats and contributing to shaping the history of the prestigious competition.

The latest iteration of the Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli AC75 foiling monohull was christened in April in the Sardinian town of Cagliari by his wife, designer Miuccia Prada, as is the tradition. The boat is set to compete in the 37th edition of the America's Cup sailing race, which is taking place between Aug. 22 and Oct. 27 in Barcelona.

Decked in a metallic "Metal K"-colored livery, the AC75 marks the 10th Luna Rossa America's Cup hull unveiled since the first boat in 1999.

Built at the Persico Marine shipyard in Nembro, Italy, the sailboat, made of pre-preg carbon fiber, required 70,000 hours of work by 35 boat builders. It is equipped with a 25.6-meter mast with a soft wing comprising two twin mainsails and a headsail made of carbon and Dyneema.



Patrizio Bertelli sailing Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli.

At the time of the christening, Bertelli, chairman of the Prada luxury group and president of Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli, said the boat has "become an iconic name in sailing worldwide" and that he had accomplished the goal "to create a team of extraordinary technicians and sailors capable of shaping the future of sport in our country and leaving a legacy for future generations."

The upcoming America's Cup will mark Luna Rossa's seventh challenge, but sixth race. The team withdrew from the competition in 2015 after disagreeing with the overturning of rules that had been unanimously adopted the previous year by the then-Cup holder the Oracle Team of the U.S., which was owned by Larry Ellison. The Oracle team eventually lost the America's Cup to the New Zealand team.

This year, five challengers in the Louis Vuitton Cup regattas — Ineos Britannia, Alinghi Red Bull Racing, Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli, NYC American Magic and Orient Express Racing — will battle it out on the water to win the right to face off against defender Emirates Team New Zealand for the Louis Vuitton 37th America's Cup Barcelona.

The Luna Rossa team was established in 1997 by Bertelli with the original name of "Prada Challenge for the America's Cup 2000." The team won the Louis Vuitton Cup in 2000, with a record of 38 victories over 49 races. It also competed in 2003 and in 2007, when it reached the

Louis Vuitton Cup final.

Luna Rossa won the most recent Challenger Selection Series, the Prada Cup, in 2021 but lost to contender Emirates Team New Zealand, which succeeded in defending the 36th America's Cup with a 7-to-3 victory over Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli, wrecking the latter's ambitions to take the trophy home.

Here, Bertelli explains why the America's Cup continues to hold his interest, reveals his expectations for this year and talks about the lessons learned through the different stages of the competition.

**WWD: Beyond your passion for sailing, what moves you to continue to invest in Luna Rossa and in the America's Cup? When did you first think you wanted to participate once again?**

**Patrizio Bertelli:** After the last edition in Auckland [New Zealand] I immediately said we would continue even without knowing at the time where the next challenge would take place. The Cup fascinates me because it's a difficult, complex project that requires to develop a team of highly professional individuals super specialized in many different sectors that know how to unite and work together in harmony for a long period of time at a pace that is very intense. It's a difficult structure to set up but even more to manage. ►





Patrizio Bertelli and Miuccia Prada with the Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli AC75 sailboat and team competing in the 37th America's Cup.



Kookaburra II, Patrizio Bertelli

The Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli boat with the UNESCO and Sea Beyond logos.



**WWD: How does this reflect on you personally and what did you learn over the years from the past experiences?**

**P.B.:** Since the first launch in Punta Ala [Tuscany], 25 years have passed and the enthusiasm is the same. As [Sir] Peter Blake wrote in the foreword to the first "Luna Rossa" book [on the 30th America's Cup in 2000] it is the difficulty to win that makes the America's Cup so unique. Time is not important, it's necessary to have the courage to continue to try and not give up. This curious and strange game requires persistence to reach the objective and it is the difficulty that gives meaning to the challenge. Passion has nothing to do with it, persistence is the true motor and behind this obstinacy is all the technological research that over these past years brought an enormous development to the world of sailing and repercussions also on daily sailing. It's a continuous challenge where you learn something every day.

**WWD: How does all this affect Prada and the brand's products?**

**P.B.:** There wouldn't be enough time to explore this in this interview, I would rather go back to talk about Luna Rossa.

**WWD: How has Luna Rossa changed and how has the project changed over the years?**

**P.B.:** Everything has changed if we look at all the challenges we took part in. In the first three challenges we sailed with the traditional IACC [International America's Cup Class yachts], which today seem almost prehistoric where the team was engaged in changes of sails at every lap and the regattas were stretched on for hours. Then the era of catamarans started with the 34th edition in San Francisco, fast boats with winged masts and rigid sails similar to wings of airplanes. Now from the last Cup, in 2020, we

sail with flying boats that travel at more than 40 knots and that have only the helm and the lateral foils in the water. You don't change the sails, the regattas are very fast, they last around half an hour, and tactics and strategies have been revolutionized. The regatta field is limited by virtual boundaries, so it's entirely another story. But this is the America's Cup, the most advanced expression of this sport.

**WWD: Some sponsors have also changed, and Oakley for example has joined as the new technical performance partner. Can you tell us about the relationship with those who believe in the project with you, including skipper and team director Max Sirena?**

**P.B.:** Our storied sponsor Pirelli has stayed on and I think the relationship with Marco Tronchetti [Provera, executive vice president of Pirelli, the co-title sponsor of the team] is increasingly more solid. Also Panerai and Woolmark have renewed their confidence in the team because they believe in it. We have two new sponsors, Oakley and Unipol. In addition, on the sails are now the logos of UNESCO and Sea Beyond, the educational project aimed at the protection of the oceans, born from a collaboration between our group and UNESCO. Then there are the suppliers that have a fundamental role in the project and with which the relationship developed over the years has increasingly strengthened. They represent Italian excellence and have obtained global recognition also thanks to Luna Rossa. With Max the relationship is excellent and consolidated, he has all my trust.

**WWD: What are your thoughts now on Luna Rossa and the team? What has impressed you the most so far and how has the team evolved in parallel with the changes of Luna Rossa?**

**P.B.:** Ever since the first challenge in 2000 we have invested a lot in our team because I think it is fundamental to compete at these levels. We have focused on the human relations, creating a community of interests that has generated strong and close-knit relations. There have been weddings, children, people that went to other teams and then returned recognizing the human quality of the relations within our team. Naturally in 25 years many things have changed to adapt to the evolution of the challenge and especially of the boats and the technology, even if a storied nucleus is still present.

Once we had a group of more than 30 sailors because we trained with two boats and there were 16 on board. Today they are eight – two helmers, two flight regulators and four cyclists who, pedaling, produce the energy for the functioning of all the systems aboard. Instead, the design team has increased exponentially with the evolution of the boats and the systems. We have inserted AI, mechatronics and simulators.

The shore team has also changed. Today there is a true dockyard within the base, where we have realized both the hull for the LEQ 12 [less than or equal to 12 meters] training, the masts of Luna Rossa and many other parts of the boat.

**WWD: How do you think this evolution will impact the sailing world?**

**P.B.:** The impact is already visible on daily sailing. Today if you don't have a foil, from the sailing boards on, you are a "nobody." I think this course has been very fascinating for the new generations who find an added pleasure in speed.

**WWD: What do you think about the other teams?**

**P.B.:** It's premature and I don't like to talk about others. Surely they are all very well-prepared also because if you think you are not, it's best to give up. It is a very cynical competition because you work for years and then only one of us challengers will acquire the right to participate in the America's Cup against the New Zealanders.

**WWD: Do you think you will be present in Barcelona for the whole time? What are your expectations?**

**P.B.:** I will be in Barcelona, I don't know if for the whole period but as long as possible.

**WWD: Do you continue to sail?**

**P.B.:** Certainly, whenever I can, I like to stay on the open sea and navigate.

**WWD: I know you collect boats; can you tell us about this?**

**P.B.:** It's a great passion, I very much enjoy it. I am fascinated by the restoration phase. We try to safeguard as much as possible the originality of the construction and return the original beauty and function to the boats. I also very much like to race with them. Today, modern boats require professional crews who need to be very well-prepared athletically. Instead, vintage boats allow me to race and have fun with a team of friends led by [Olympic Brazilian sailor] Torben Grael.

This year, we were gratified by winning both the 12 mR Pre-Worlds at Saint-Tropez as well as the 12 mR World Championship in Porquerolles [France] with Kookaburra II, a world championship we won twice before with Nyalá and once with Kiwi Magic KZ 7. ■