

Super Test: Kerakoll

Power, Speed and Water



AUTO ITALIA HITCHES A RIDE IN
THE ISOTTA FRASCHINI-ENGINEED
P1 POWERBOAT

Story by Roberto Giordanelli / Photography by Michael Ward



This is a story about violence and brutality in the form of a wild ride in a 2+2-seater motor boat with, er... 2000 horsepower. A ride in a top P1 World Championship off-shore powerboat is one of those times when you hand your life over to a madman. Like riding pillion with Evil Knievel but without the Health and Safety. Instead of jumping the Grand Canyon our venue is the blue Mediterranean.

This story also concerns a 100-year-old car-maker turned top marine engine manufacturer. Isotta Fraschini Motori is part of the Fincantieri Group. Two 1000bhp Isotta Fraschini engines are fitted to Kerakoll, the name on the record-breaking boat currently leading the P1 Powerboat Championship. At the Bari-based Isotta Fraschini Motori factory, the powerboat Kerakoll was sitting on its transporter like a missile at a Red Square military show. The next day I was sentenced to be strapped to this missile which has more power than two Formula 1 cars. Isotta Fraschini engines start at 11 litres and go up to 62 litres. I had to make do with just 2 x 1000bhp 11-litre, twin-turbo engines for my boat trip. That is 22 litres, 2000bhp and four turbos. With such illustrious heritage in the motor car business, it is great to see the name on such high-profile modern machinery. A motor car brand relaunch is a distinct possibility. ↵



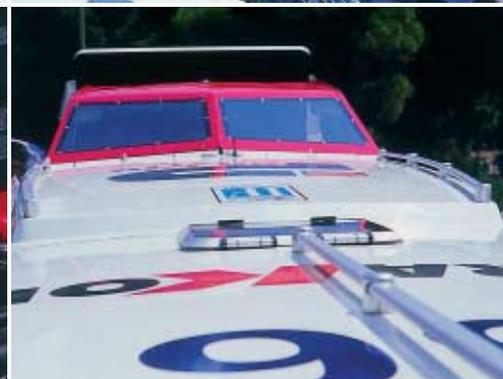


Powerboat P1

The P1 World Championship is the aquatic equivalent of Formula 1 Grand Prix motor racing. It is the morning of the practice day and from my hotel room I look down on the 19 boats that will soon be fighting it out. The venue is the Mediterranean Grand Prix round of the Championship in Gallipoli. There are two Gallipolis: Gallipoli in Turkey where in 1915 there was a proper battle that cost the lives of 300,000 Turks and 250,000 Allied troops. And the Gallipoli in the Puglia region of Southern Italy, where everyone has a great time. We are in the latter.

'My' boat is warming up. When moored, the rumble is deep. The sea at the aft end gently boils. Kerakoll is a regular race winner and record breaker, its high-tech composite hull built by FB Design (Fabio Buzzi) in northern Italy near Lake Como, and its two engines from Isotta Fraschini Motori. Kerakoll is 12.78m long and there is just enough space for four people. The racing regulations permit a maximum crew of three. The shape of the strong lightweight hull is designed to lift the boat clear of the water yet withstand the shock of high-speed impacts with the sea that has taken on the characteristics of granite. Nestling under the rear deck, the power of 2000 horses. With the boat spending a lot of time flying, cooling water for the engines and intercoolers enters the craft via the bottom of the hollow rudder. Just ahead of each prop are anti-cavitation outlets.

The Kerakoll boat was built in 2005 when it carried Sony sponsorship. If you were at Cowes in 2005, you would have seen it win. The title Kerakoll comes from the sponsor of the same name which is one of the world's biggest chemical companies. Kerakoll also sponsors God (or Valentino Rossi as he is known on planet Earth). The boat has four tanks for the fuel, which is pumped around the boat to balance it. At full bazzooka Kerakoll consumes diesel at a rate of 500 litres per hour. That's about half-a-mile per gallon. P1 powerboat racing reminds me of F1 motor racing in the 1960s as the teams spend time socialising at the event



Super Test: Kerakoll



BELOW: Kerakoll's helmsman Giovanni Carpitella
 BOTTOM: A bit of hard cornering during the Mediterranean Grand Prix

instead of being whisked away in corporate aircraft the minute they get out of the cockpit. In the interests of research, this writer and our photographer joined the teams and organisers in the buzzing Gallipoli nightlife only to confirm this fact.

Sea test and race practice

Thanks to the efforts of P1 boss Nathan Knight, PR boss Martin Allerton, the organisers and the boat's owner and crew, it was time to get ready. I am to ride in the back seat behind Mario Invernizzi (throttle) and Giovanni Carpitella (steering). On with P1 race overalls and white crash helmet. Then a long wait in the hot sun. A Dutch official approaches. "You can't use a white helmet. The rules stipulate orange only." The thought of a 3000-mile, four-flight, five-day trip without a ride looms. Radios crackle up

the line of command till the buck stops. I hear the words "Journalist, white helmet, visibility, helicopter rescue, rules, blah, blah..." But we are in Italy where if they want something to happen, it does. And if they don't, you meet an impenetrable Soviet-style brick wall. I get the nod. Another delay — one of the rescue boats breaks as it hits unlisted fishing nets on the course. Finally we get a green flag. Manoeuvring Kerakoll between the gin-palaces is tricky. With no bow thrusters, a stiffish breeze and a lightweight boat designed to travel at nearly two miles per minute, we gently pin-ball between the yachties.

My seat has a full harness and an electrically controlled squab. It means that I can sit, stand or do something in between. Tales of frequent spine-crushing impacts spring to mind. Powerboat racing is dangerous even if you don't crash. Being Italy, there is no briefing. No advice like, "Keep your jaw closed if you like your teeth" or "Never stand ↵





RIGHT: Roberto Giordanelli all suited up and ready for his run as third crewman
BELOW: Kerakoll and OSG Donzi are battling it out for the Championship honours

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Team Name:	Alpo
Boat Name:	Kerakoll
Nationality:	Italian
Team Owner:	Mario Invernizzi
Team Manager:	Mario Invernizzi
Throttle Man:	Giovanni Carpitella
Boat Builder:	F&B Design
Construction:	Composite/Kevlar
Hull Type:	Stab
Length:	12.78m
Width:	2.60m
Weight:	6500kg
Fuel Capacity:	2600 litres
Driving Position:	Seated
Engine Manufacturer:	Isotta Fraschini
Capacity:	2 x 11,300cc
Max Power:	2 x 1000bhp
Layout:	2 x Straight-6 Turbodiesels
Turbos:	4 x KKK at 3.2 bar
Engine Weight:	2 x 1000kg
Transmission:	Trimax



rail to reduce the load on your back" or "Don't poke your tongue out unless you want to see it on the floor."

Slowly we rumble out to the open sea with pitching of horse-riding proportions. The general harshness is reminiscent of a racing car cockpit. Noise builds. Speed rises and the slamming begins. My pilots are connected by

BELOW: Nightmare engine fire for Thuraya. Remarkably the 1600bhp Lamborghini-engined boat, the last of the breed, was back in action for the Cowes race



intercom, while my ears are assaulted by man-made mechanical madness.

Describing engine noise is a fraught business but here goes. If you are a mile away from Kerakoll when it's on full chat, you know something big is happening. It's a bit like hearing, or rather feeling, a distant column of armoured tanks speeding through in a city; like a war zone or Paris on Bastille Day. At close quarters, the sound makes the hairs on the back of your neck twitch. With the two engines millimetres from my feet, the noise and the feeling of power is surreal. While the rest of the world hears the deep hair-raising rumble of 2000bhp, interior decibels are dominated by the high-pitched whine of four giant turbos.

We hurtle across the sea at aeronautical speeds. The laws of physics appear to be broken. Sea water has become steel. The propellers have become 2000bhp gear wheels biting into the sea of metal like some kind of mad rack and pinion. Drive and propulsion feel as positive as in a racing car. At 30mph, water is not water as we know it. Just as in aeronautics, air becomes semi-solid at supersonic speeds, so fast water evolves into a new unyielding element.

The sea gets choppy. The waves combine with wash from other boats, one of which (No 76 Thuraya) explodes and is well ablaze. The awesome-sounding 1600bhp, petrol-powered, Lamborghini-engined boat of ex-Tennis Champion Adriano Panatta becomes a casualty and melts. We flash past the stricken craft, its three-man crew in the water waiting for the rescue boat. While Thuraya sends smoke into the sky,



Super Test: Kerakoll

Kerakoll (No 66) sends a huge plume of water skywards. They say that the feeling of speed doubles on water. Kerakoll is travelling at 100mph, so it feels like 200mph.

The impacts on Kerakoll's hull build to horrendous levels. Interspersed with the smooth heaven of flight, up and down high-speed belly-flops are bad enough. Worse is the brutality that involves yaw, roll and corkscrewing. Back-breaking impacts of 6g are commonplace with peaks of 9g. The pilots will tell you that the g-forces are no trouble for the boat; it is the people inside that are the problem. As for accidents, they say that big seas are not as dangerous as the crews slow down. Danger comes with top speed in a light swell that hides a rogue wave. Boats can roll, spin, nose-dive or back-flip. The helmsman and the throttle man read the waves hundreds of metres ahead of the speeding boat. As with motorsport, you need a good team to win. The single element of speed is not enough. Gallipoli blurs into the distance as I try to think of a comparison. In 1967 I had an enormous high-speed car crash that involved a period of flight followed by multiple heavy impacts. So if you want to know what P1 powerboating is like, it's like having a serious car crash that goes on for an hour.

The Grand Prix

Nineteen boats from Italy, Britain, Austria, Belgium, China and Malta head for the start. There are two classes in the same races: Evolution and SuperSport. The classes are based on power-to-weight ratio.

2006 P1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUNDS

For 2006, there are twelve rounds at six venues:

12-14 May	Grand Prix of Malta (Valletta)
3-4 June	Grand Prix of Italy (Anzio)
1-2 July	German Grand Prix (Travemunde)
29-30 July	Mediterranean Grand Prix (Gallipoli)
26-27 August	British Grand Prix (Cowes)
30 Sept-1 Oct	Portuguese Grand Prix (Oeiras)

The start of a P1 race is a tricky affair. The racing boats slowly circle the start boat before forming up in a line for an aquatic version of a rolling start. A green flag from the start boat and a crescendo of noise. Over 20,000bhp turns the blue sea into plumes of white surf. The action takes place as close to the shore as possible for the spectators' benefit. As for TV, the races are shown to 100,000 homes worldwide and the two races were televised on the same day in the Italian RAI network. The speed attained on the straights is one thing but, as in motorsport, the drama is in the corners where the boats combine porpoising with alarming jumps and roll angles.

Both rounds of The Mediterranean Grand Prix were won by boat 88 OSG Donzi, piloted by Giancarlo Cangiano and Stefano Cola. One of the best-looking and best-prepared boats is the number 55 'Arpro' boat of the British pairing of Mike Shelton and Jackie Hunt, currently in second position in the SuperSport class. Our boat 'Kerakoll' suffered a rare mechanical problem and withdrew. Nevertheless, it is still narrowly leading the championship. Keep up to date with news, video clips, regulations, violence and more at www.powerboatp1.com.

Contacts:

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FB Design:	www.fbdesign.it
Kerakoll:	www.kerakoll.com



BELOW: The sleek, silver-grey Kition puts out to sea. Run by Team Trident, Kition was lying in third place in the P1 Championship after the Gallipoli rounds

