

of their plants and the enthusiasm of their managers for an American vision of export driven expansion ensured that Fiat and Olivetti got the lion's share of the financial aid provided by the Marshall Plan. Fiat, for instance, received 22 million of the 58 million of the Marshall funds earmarked for the entire Italian engineering sector and accounted for half of all the American aid to the region of Piedmont before the summer of 1951. Valletta used the dollars to acquire the most advanced machine technology from the United States and to finance construction of a huge new assembly line for the mass production of commercial vehicles and private cars. At the same time, the Ceo of Fiat astutely cultivated relations with the leaders of the major state-controlled steel, oil, and construction industries to promote the development of a national highway system designed for private automobile transportation.

Valletta's investment and marketing strategies achieved extraordinary results from the mid-1950s onward. His new and expanded assembly line process dramatically increased productivity on the shop floor so that the completion of one car in the early 1960s required one-fourth the number of worker hours that it had in the late 1940s. By 1963, the company was able to churn out over a million commercial vehicles and cars per year in its three great plants, Mirafiori, Rivalta, and Lingotto. With the introduction of the Fiat 600 in 1955 and the Fiat 500 two years later, Valletta had two of the most affordable cars in the world and was thus able to launch a new era of mass motoring on the Italian peninsula and elsewhere in Europe. Between 1955 and 1970 the company manufactured more than 2.6 million "600s", in addition to another 3.6 million units of the "500" by 1975. The rapid multiplication of private cars on the highways and in the cities of Italy testified to the success of these popularly-priced models. In 1950 there had been only 342,000 cars in the country; by 1975 that number had reached fifteen million.

The enormous popularity of the "600" and "500" models assured Fiat a dominant position not only in the transportation sector, but in the national economy as a whole. During the 1960s the firm absorbed its few remaining competitors, so that it controlled 95% of all automobile production in the country at the end of the decade; only Alfa Romeo managed to survive as an independent manufacturer. At the same time, Fiat played a major role in the manufacturing of airplanes, ship motors, and trains. After 1965 it joined the ranks of the major multinational corporations by beginning construction of an assembly plant in the Soviet Union. Such growth meant that the Turinese automobile giant became the principal customer for a host of other industrial suppliers in the rubber, glass, plastic, and steel sectors. In this fashion, the compa-