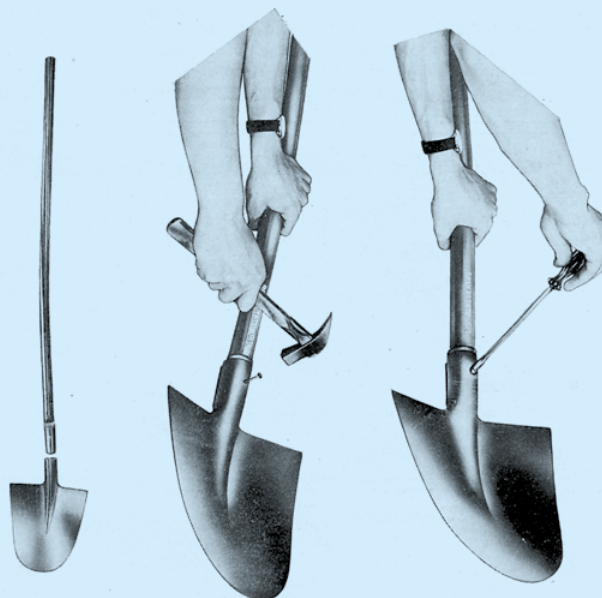




From farm implements



to van racking

From ***Francom*** **to**
Francesco Comunello



The first sixty years of the Syncro Group

1960-2020 Sixty years of Francom

Francesco Comunello officially registered the firm of FRANCOM and began the production of handles for farm implements back in 1960. Now, in 2020, the Comunello family is proud to celebrate the first 60 years of Francom which, in the meantime, has become a global leader in the field of van racking.

Surviving in business for sixty years is quite an achievement. Francom has managed it while setting new records in production, turnover and workforce numbers. The secret of Francom's success is a mix of carefully measured ingredients flavoured with the necessary touch of luck and topped with another indispensable element: determination to improve.

Continuous improvement is the philosophy behind every Francom decision. Every part of every product and procedure, every aspect of every work flow in production and design can and must be continuously improved. Meticulous attention to details like these pervades Francom and turns the company into a hive of constant activity. Francom never rests on its laurels. The same logic pervades management too: advanced enterprise control technology has made Francom a leading example of Industry 4.0. Design, warehousing, logistics, installation and sales are all interconnected digitally and in real time thanks to a common network designed to optimise processes and expedite procedures.

All this explains how, starting from a small workshop in San Zeno di Cassola, Francom has succeeded in reaching all 5 continents, grown from 0 to 100 employees and now fits out one van every 13 minutes. This is how Francom is determined to carry on too, offering customers even greater satisfaction and generating growth wherever it operates, always looking to the future and to the next objective!

Francesco Comunello

The genius of Francesco Comunello found fertile ground in post-war Veneto, where thousands of small enterprises flourished. Unlike the north-west of Italy, where the industrial triangle of Milan-Genoa-Turin attracted and employed most local youngsters in search of a job, large companies in the north-east could be counted on the fingers of one hand. The choice was between starting your own business or emigrating.

The purpose of this publication is not to describe the post-war development of the Veneto region. Some considerations (borrowed from scholars of local economic history) may, however, give us a better understanding of the context in which **Francom** emerged and grew.

The origins of Francom can be traced back to the entrepreneurial spirit of **Francesco Comunello** who rented a small workshop in the centre of San Zeno di Cassola back in 1953, to repair and build bicycles. Francesco was assisted in this work by his wife Maria who soon earned the nickname “Maria the mechanic”. This fledgling business was the fore-runner of a company that, 60 years later, is a world leader in van racking solutions, with a headquarters covering thousands of square meters, an international organisation, subsidiaries and dealerships in Italy and around the world.



■ **Francesco** Comunello
1933-1982

The Origins of Francom

Over the years, Francom has had to make many choices and some of these have certainly not been painless. The economic boom of the 1950s in Veneto permitted Francom and a myriad of other small businesses to flourish with little in the way of capital but an abundance of original ideas. In later years, however, the Comunello family had to face the premature loss of its founder, Francesco, who perished in a car accident in 1982, and ride out economic crises, fluctuations in the markets and dramatic changes in production and sales. The family has, however, always emerged stronger, more resilient and still faithful to its roots. As Giorgio Roverato, professor of economic history at the University of Padua explains, “Industry in the Veneto region is not a recent development. It can be traced back through the centuries and has its origins partly in traditional crafts and partly in the region’s instinct for seizing on moments of innovation”. Francesco Comunello does not fit easily into the two categories of entrepreneur identified by Roverato: he was neither an employee who set up in business using acquired skills, nor was he a shop-owner who invested his savings in the production of goods for which he already had a market. Like many of his contemporaries, Francesco Comunello was driven by the need and desire to improve his living conditions, and to do so he either had to move away or strike out on his own. Many tried the latter option. Few succeeded. Francesco’s choice of business was dictated by his passion for bicycles: not being able to afford a new machine, he had learned to construct bicycles from parts and had developed considerable manual skills. He therefore set out repairing and assembling bicycles. Starting with only steel tube, he built his own frames and added handlebars, saddles, pedals and other mechanical parts. This was just the first step towards **the formation of Francom: in 1960**. Francesco Comunello then had the idea of using the same steel tube to make handles for farm implements. This change of direction was inspired by the close links between farming, still a major part of the Veneto economy, and the nascent industrial and service sectors that were beginning to take hold and would soon attract thousands of young people with a promise of greater wellbeing.

The Rise of Francom and the Passing of Francesco

The crisis that struck the Italian economy and state in the late sixties and seventies forced many large industries into a corner. Luckily, the Veneto region was able to resist thanks to its vast network of small, more flexible and often family-owned businesses. This period saw **Francom** reach its first major crossroads. The demand for manual farm implements had collapsed as a result of agricultural mechanisation and Francesco Comunello was faced with having a choice between change or closure. He reacted with typical determination and business acumen and began the production of a completely different product. **Francom's core business became the manufacture of metal tool boxes and safes, an activity that lasted for almost twenty years.**

Business was flourishing when disaster struck. Returning from a trade fair in Cologne **in 1982, Francesco Comunello was killed in a car**

accident only a few miles from his home in San Zeno di Cassola. After the initial shock, Luca, the eldest son, who was just 19 years old at the time, and his mother Maria took over the reins of the family business. In later years, Adamo, the family's third son, who was a minor at the time of the accident, and Luca's wife Fabiola also joined the management team. After the oil crisis of 1979, the Veneto economy not only recovered but enjoyed a decade-long golden age, with growth in the region's industries and services outpacing the rest of Italy. By 1989, Francom had set a new production record and the company's output of tool boxes exceeded 300 thousand pieces per annum.

The same year, the Berlin Wall fell and the market changes that ensued heralded difficult times for businesses unprepared for international trade. By the nineties, globalization was well under way but by then most Veneto businesses were considerably more dynamic than their counterparts in other regions of Italy.

The Nineties

In the early nineties, plastic tool boxes began to arrive from America and proved extremely popular. In only a few years, they triggered a drop of almost 90% in the market for metal tool boxes. **Francom found itself at another crossroads and, in response, shifted production to yet another type of product: strong boxes and cases for components and tools.** Simultaneously and in line with the latest industrial developments, the company introduced major changes in production, switching from electro-mechanical to numerically controlled machines. Over the years, this significant investment in technology allowed Francom to handle more and more processes in-house and even become a contract manufacturer.

1996, the Year of Change

1996 was another year of strategic decision-making and radical change. Francom decided to expand its offering and start making products for van racking. The catalogue soon grew and, after a short period of supplying other companies, management decided to take another big step: direct sales and installation.

Luca Comunello, President of Francom explains: “When we changed product, we changed everything else too, from our management system to our organisation and production process. All the changes we made, even to sales and marketing, were inspired by the principles of lean production”. Over the last sixty years, Francom’s workforce has grown from 1 to 100. Determination, perseverance and an ability to change direction or hold a steady course, as needed, have enabled Francom to reach this major anniversary, thirty years after the tragic loss of Francesco, despite an economic climate that is hardly encouraging not only for the Veneto region but for the whole world.

A company is not just a business venture: it is also group of people who share an important part of their lives to build a future together. A company needs people to design, make and market its products. It takes people to keep passion alive and to remember the first person to shape a dream. It is only right, therefore, for Francom to pay homage to Francesco Comunello, its founder and mentor, on the thirtieth anniversary of his death.

Maria and Luca remember

The hands of Maria “the mechanic”, Francesco’s widow since 1982, bear witness to years of hard work. Her way of speaking and her accurate use of technical terminology confirm her mechanical experience. Indeed, Maria’s frank and sincere eyes have never looked at the Francom factory from behind the curtains of her living-room. She has been a constant presence on production floor and in the offices, and at the age of 80 still prefers to be there. Maria Comunello has faced life’s difficulties one after the other, along with her children Luca, Adamo and Bibiana, without ever losing sight of the core values of work, family and friends.

– **Maria says** – *“Everything is so different today from how it used to be when my husband set out in business. If a young person comes to me now and says he wants to start a company, I’d tell him straight away not to bother. It was far easier in our days. There were fewer bureaucratic hurdles and people were more willing to make sacrifices.”* Maria refers particularly to the sixties, economic boom years in which thousands of small family firms were established. Her life, however, has had its share of difficulties, including the death of her husband Francesco in a car accident in 1982, a sudden and tragic loss for the family and the company.

– **Maria recalls** – *“It was tough at the time. I had two young children and Luca was only 19. It was like starting from scratch. Luckily, we received a great deal of help, especially from our friends. People offered us practical support, training our staff to take over aspects of my husband’s work. And our suppliers deferred payment dates because they knew us and valued our custom.”*

– **Luca explains** – *“Those were tough times, even materially. I had to leave university to assume control of the company. We had just invested in a new factory building when the courts obliged us to stop production for 15 days to perform an inventory. We also received a bill for 100 million liras in inheritance tax. And our liquidity was not good at that time.”* Luckily, his father’s excellent reputation for fairness in business together with the family’s close relations with friends allowed Francom to overcome this moment of crisis.

Francom was officially formed and listed in the local Chamber of Commerce in 1960. Francesco Comunello registered his first patent for steel handles for farm implements that same year. Over the intervening decades, the firm has overcome crises and seen dramatic changes. Production has had to switch from one type of product to another on various occasions in response to market trends, but today the company is in great shape.

– **Luca recalls** – *“My father had great mechanical skills.”* The heritage he left his family has certainly been well used; the company that Francesco started in 1960 is still running smoothly.

– **Luca continues** – *“Compared to most companies in our area we have always been atypical. We have served niche markets and have never made products that were available from many other suppliers besides ourselves.”* Francom has gone from handles for farm tools to tool boxes and on to strong boxes and safes before meeting with success in van racking. Production may have changed but there has always been a common denominator: a desire to meet the needs of a changing market.

– **Luca recalls** – *“We have had our successes and our failures. Sometimes we have made the right decision for the wrong reason. But we have always tried to avoid the dangers of competing on price. Instead, we have preferred to introduce new products to differentiate ourselves. What gave us the final push to move into van racking was the expansion of overseas markets for component cases and tools cases. We decided to make cabinets to hold our cases. The rest followed from there.”*

– **Maria remembers with pride** – *“We fitted out our first van for free in 1996. It belonged to one of our electricians.”*

– **Luca confirms** – *“Yes, and we made our first paid-for installation a few months later, for a company in Cassola.”* Francom’s last range of products (at least until now...) has proved to be the making of the company. The Syncro System Group now employs 100 people and has installed racking in over 80,000 vans. 50% of installations are made on export markets and the group boasts a consolidated annual turnover of around 13 million euros.

Francom
Photo gallery
1953-2020

1953

1-1-1953

Io sottoscritto dichiaro di ricevere
in affitto una stanza edile a
lavoro di meccanico per la somma
di L. 12.000 = annua -
che vengono pagate anticipate e
all'impegno di conservare la
storia in ottimo stato e di lasciare
compiuti in consegna con
tutti i vetri e finestre in buone
condizioni qualora volessi o dovessi
riconsegnarla al proprietario

Riguardo la luce per il momento
non conseguita una (1) lampadina
per vederla come si trova per
il lavoro d'assemblare e riparare
il resto della suddetta luce

+ Come Proprietario in fede Berio Gio.
Comunello Francesco

pagato ricevuto affetto dal 1-1-53 al 31-12-53

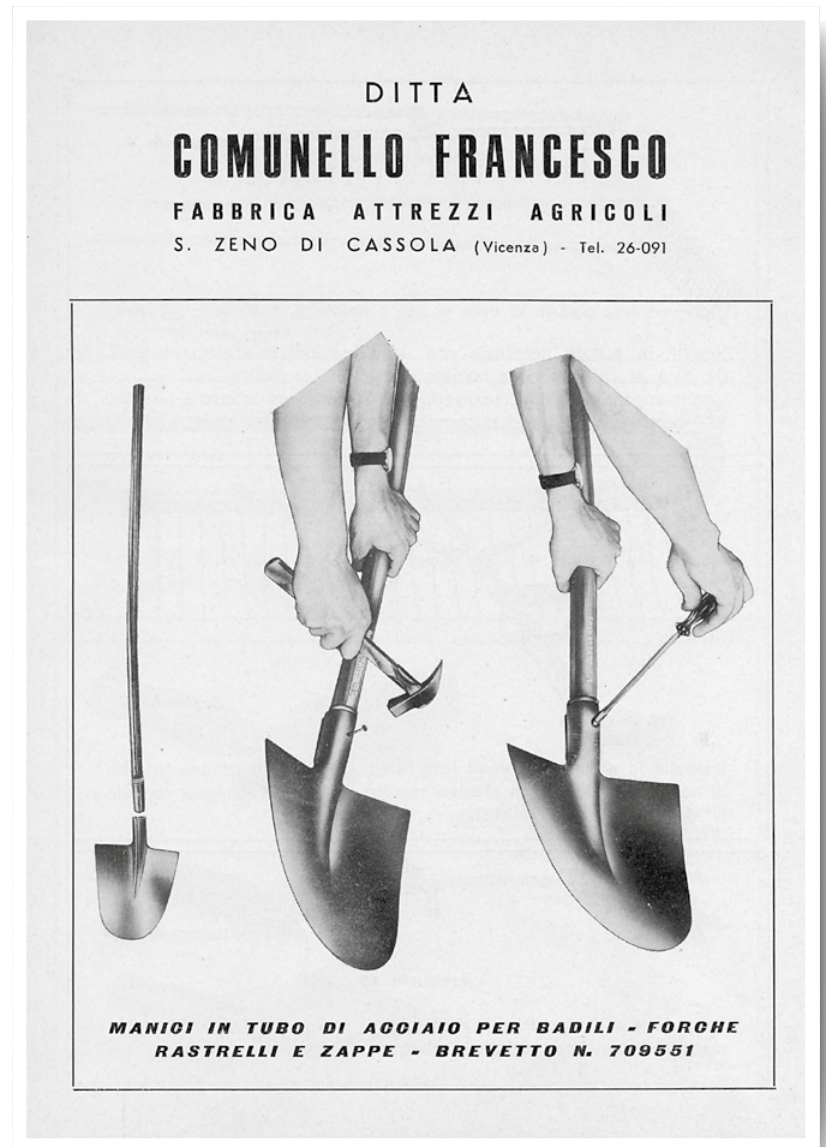
- Francesco Comunello (born 1933) rented a workshop in the centre of San Zeno di Cassola for 1,000 liras a month, to assemble and repair bicycles. The contract, hand-written on plain paper, is dated 1st January 1953.

1955



■ Francesco Comunello in a photo taken inside the barracks of Tolmezzo.

1960



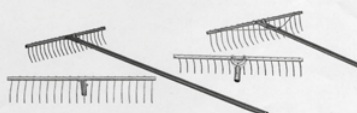
- Francesco Comunello took out a patent on steel handles for farm implements (first shovels, then pickaxes, scythes, rakes, spades, etc.). He began work in a small area behind the house, but registered “Francom” when he started larger-scale production of handles for farm implements and curry combs for animals.

RASTRELLI METALLICI



Articolo 8

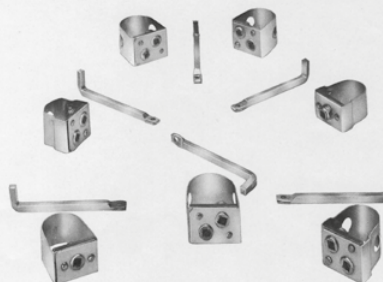
- Art. 8 Rastrella fieno dente in acciaio piatto biforcuto con telarino in tubo, completo
Denti: 24 - 28 - 30 - 32.



- Art. 6 Rastrelli fieno registrabili da denti.
Denti: 14 - 16 - 18 - 20 - 22 - 24.
Art. 6 Rastrello fieno attacco fisso da denti.
Denti: 14 - 16 - 18 - 20 - 22 - 24.

TUTTI I NOSTRI PRODOTTI SONO VERNICIATI A FUOCO

ANELLI SAGOMATI E DRITTI



- Art. 14 - Sagomato a una vite per porta falci in ferro con chiave
Art. 14 - Sagomato a due viti per porta falci in ferro con chiave
Art. 14 - Sagomato piccolo porta falci tipo piemonte a due viti con chiave
Art. 14 - n. 5 a due viti per porta falci in legno con chiave
Art. 14 - n. 1 a una vite per porta falci in legno e ferro con chiave
Art. 14 - n. 1 a due viti per porta falci in legno e ferro con chiave
Art. 14 - n. 3 a una vite per porta falci in legno con chiave
Art. 14 - Chiavette sciolte per anelli.

TUTTI I NOSTRI PRODOTTI SONO VERNICIATI A FUOCO

PORTA FALCI METALLICI



- Art. 10 - Tipo Piemonte maniglia rialzata registrabile
Art. 10 - Tipo Piemonte maniglia retta
Art. 12 - Registrabili universali
Art. 12 - Tipo fisso universale
Art. 16 - Tipo Romagna registrabili curvi
Art. 24 - Tipo Valtellina fisso
Art. 28 - Registrabili zona Bologna Mantova
Art. 30 - Tipo Bolzano attacco fisso
Art. 30 - Tipo Bolzano registrabili



TUTTI I NOSTRI PRODOTTI SONO VERNICIATI A FUOCO

MANICI METALLICI VERNICIATI

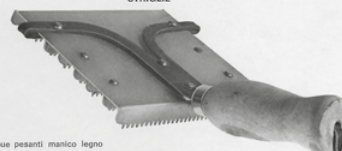


- Art. 18 - Per rastrelli in tubo acciaio lunghi m. 1,80
Art. 18 - Per rastrelli giardinio lunghi m. 1,50
Art. 19 - Per zappa tubo acciaio
Art. 22 - Per badili metallici
Art. 34 - Per picconi in ferro di facile applicazione



- Art. 36 - Porta coti in plastica attacco in lamierino

STRIGLIE



- Art. 20 - Striglie buie pesanti manico legno
Art. 20 - Striglie buie pesanti manico ferro

TUTTI I NOSTRI PRODOTTI SONO VERNICIATI A FUOCO

1961



■ Francesco Comunello and Maria Menon were joined in marriage in 1960. Their eldest son, Luca, was born in 1962.

1963



■ At the wedding of a couple of friends.

1966



1966



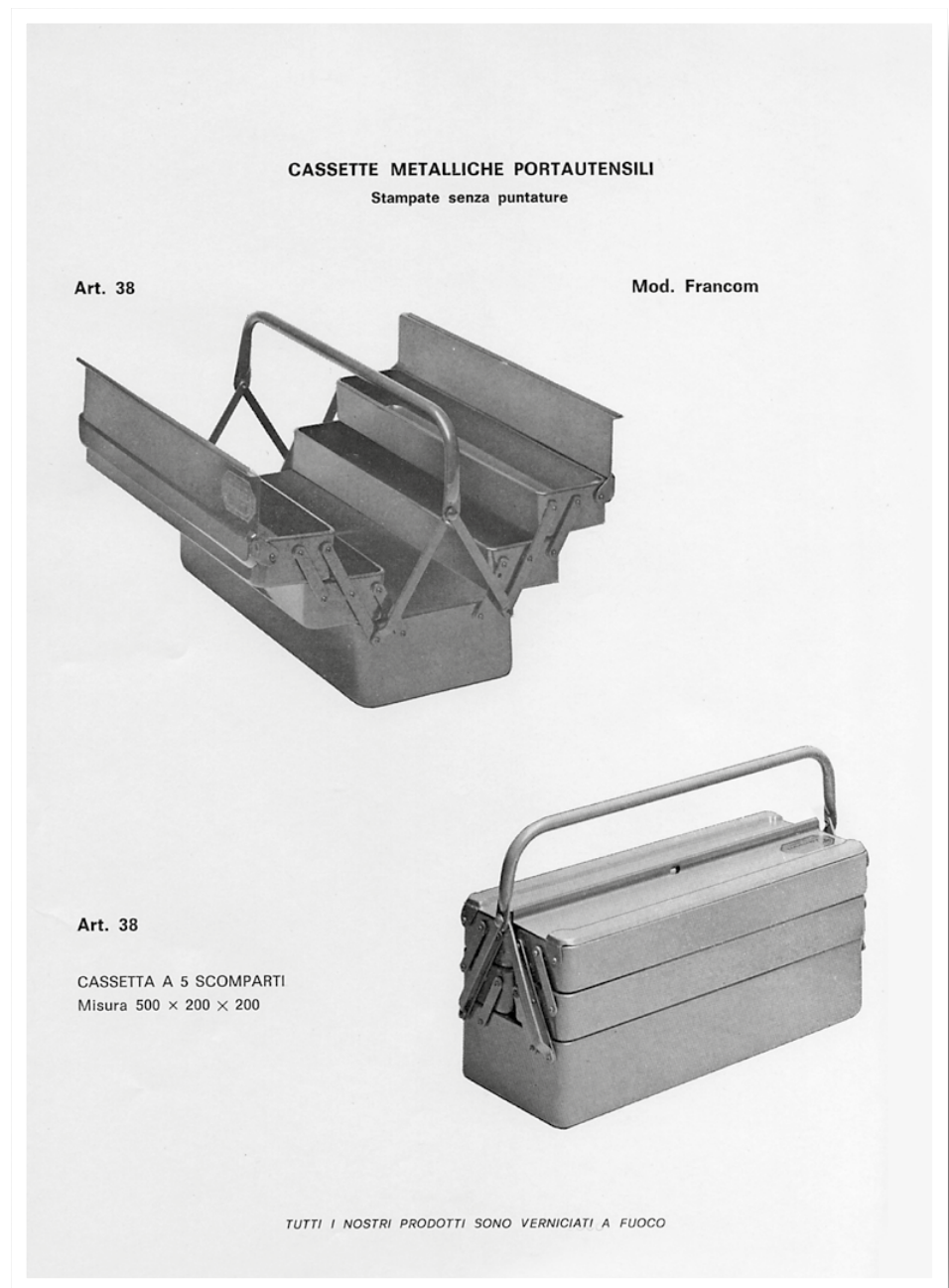
■ Luca celebrating his fourth birthday.

1970



- As a result of the decline in sales of agricultural equipment, Francesco Comunello started the production of tool boxes, containers and safe-deposit boxes.

1970



■ These tool boxes were hugely successful and remained in production until 1996.

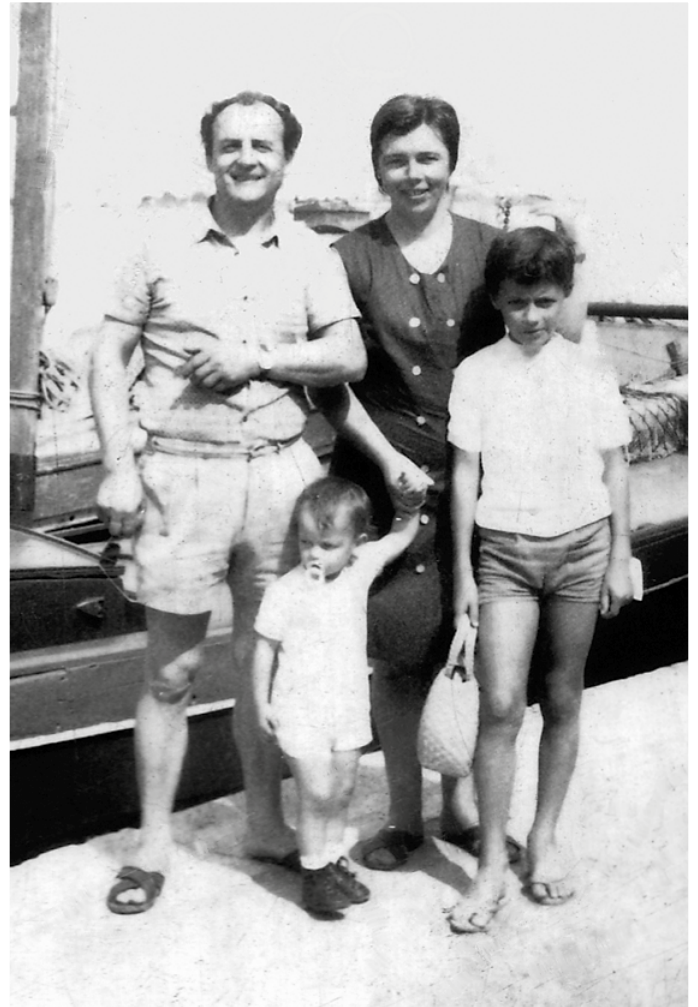
1971



■ From the top: Luca, Bibiana, Adamo.

■ In 1968, the family grew with the arrival of Bibiana. The third son, Adamo, was born in 1970. He is portrayed in this photo taken in Chioggia, together with his older brother, Luca, and his parents.

1972



■ Francesco and Maria with their sons, Adamo and Luca.

1973



■ Mother Maria with Adamo, Bibiana and Luca.



■ Adamo, Luca, Bibiana.



■ Francesco, an Alfa Romeo enthusiast, with Bibiana.

1978



■ The family together for a birthday.

1978



■ Francesco was a great fan of Vicenza football club. Here he appears with Paolo Rossi (centre) and Mauro Sandreani (bottom left) in the “Real Vicenza” years.

1979



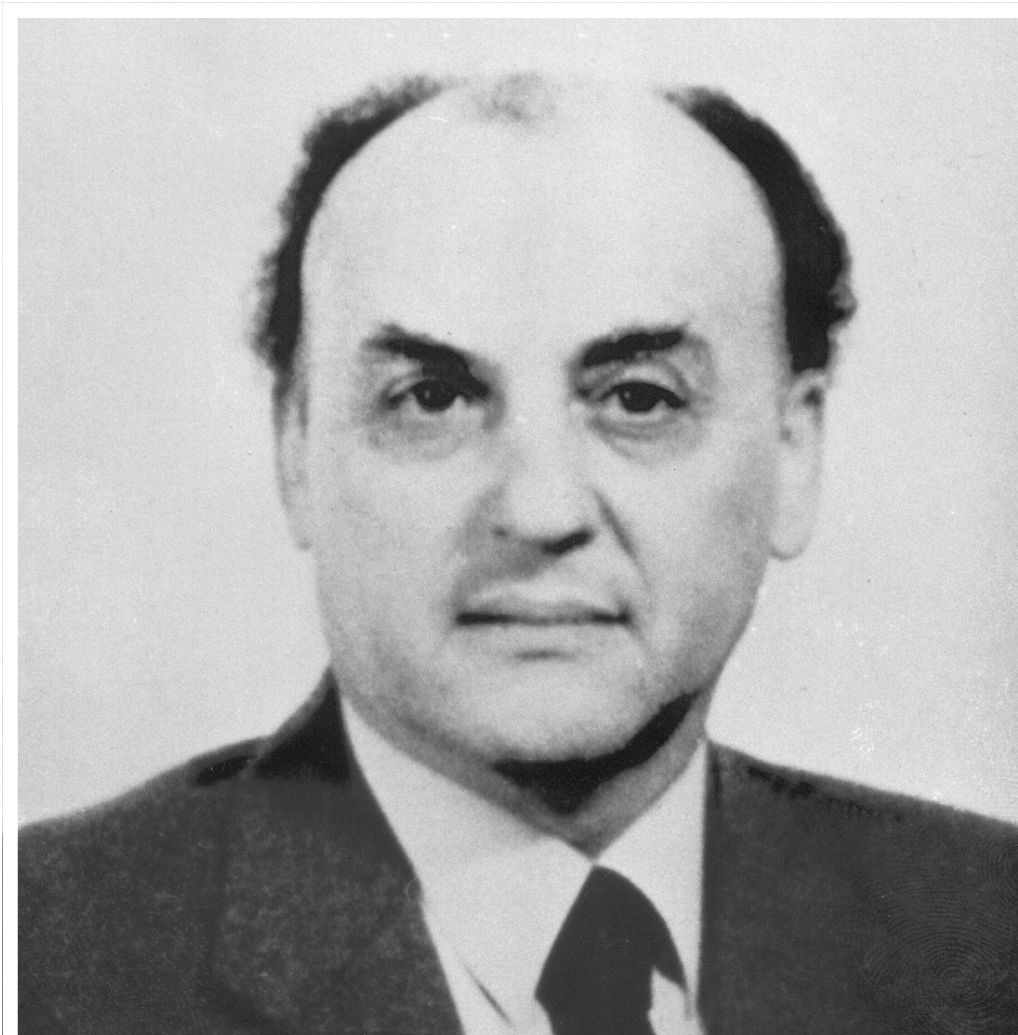
■ A photo from the late 1970s.

1980



■ Francesco's birthday.

1982



- Francesco Comunello was killed in a car accident while returning from a trade fair in Cologne. His wife Maria and son Luca (then 19) then assumed control of the company. Francesco's youngest son, Adamo was 12 at the time, and his daughter Bibiana 14.

1984



■ In the eighties, the company emerged as a leader in the field of tool boxes.

mod. BIBI



ART. 2501
mm. 400 x 200 h. 100
1 scomparto



ART. 2505
mm. 400 x 200 h. 200
5 scomparti



ART. 2503
mm. 400 x 200 h. 150
3 scomparti

In robusta lamiera, verniciate con polveri epossidiche ed essiccate s forno.
Chiusura centrale lucchettabile.

mod. LUKE



ART. 2601
mm. 450 x 200 h. 100
1 scomparto



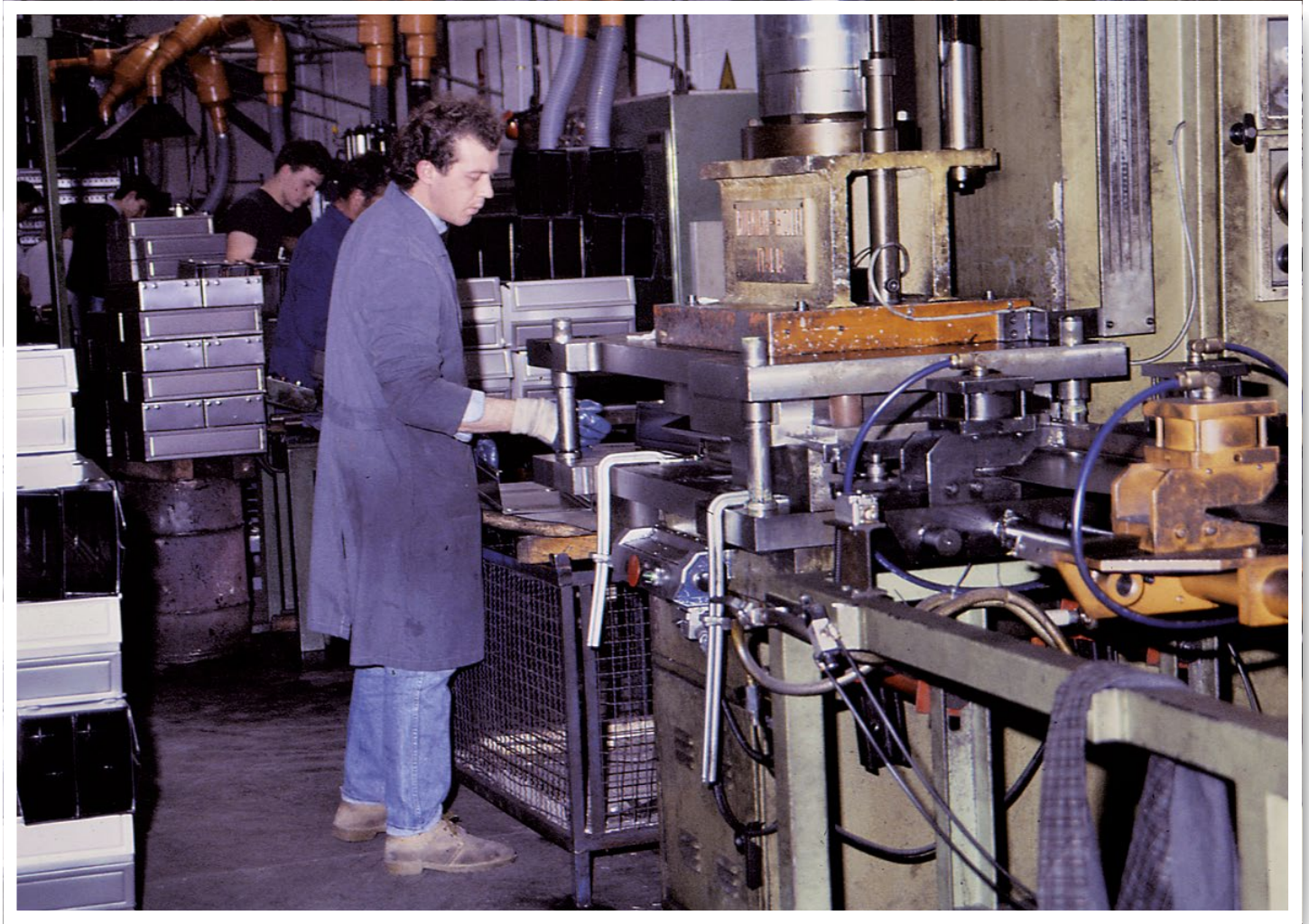
ART. 2605
mm. 450 x 200 h. 200
5 scomparti

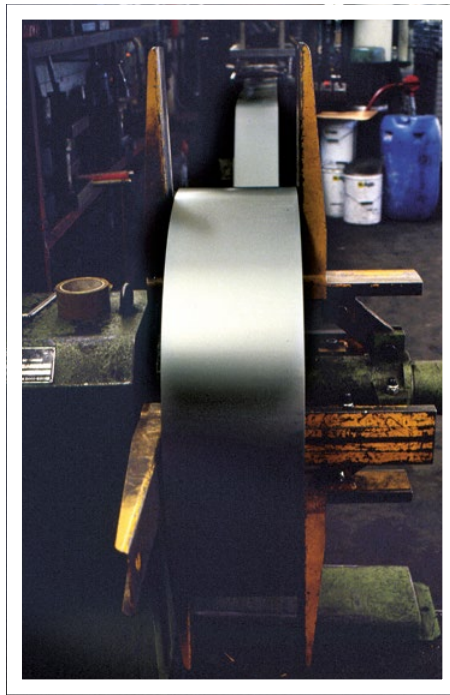


ART. 2603
mm. 450 x 200 h. 150
3 scomparti

In robusta lamiera, verniciate con polveri epossidiche ed essiccate a forno.
Chiusura centrale lucchettabile.

1989





■ The production of tool boxes in the eighties.

1993



- The arrival of plastic alternatives caused a collapse in the demand for metal tool boxes. Francom switched production to tool cases, component cases, tool racks and strong boxes.

CASSEFORTI COFFRES-FORTS SAFES



Francom

MADE IN ITALY

1995



- In 1995, Francom's management decided to diversify and enter the market for van racking products. This was the beginning of the transformation that led to the formation of the Syncro Group.



1996



■ Francom's stand at the fair in Cologne, Germany.



1998



- Production changed radically in the late 1990s with major investments in numerically controlled bending and laser cutting machines. Instead of relying on contract suppliers, Francom became able to take on contract work for others.



2001



■ Maria Menon and Dr. Tullio Chiminazzo at a private hearing with Pope Wojtyła.

2009



- Maria Comunello (née Menon) continued to work alongside her children after her husband died and saw the van racking business expand well beyond regional boundaries. Her commitment was officially recognized by the Municipality of Cassola, which presented her with an award for 50 years of work in 2009. Francom celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2010.

2010

- For many years, Francom served the retail trade, selling mainly to hardware stores. In 1997, the company opened a workshop to install its own products and began selling directly to end users. The first branches and dealerships opened and the Syncro System Group was formed and consolidated. Business organisation and management evolved along the lines of lean production and information technology was introduced. This continuous quest for improvement has led the company to attain important quality and safety certifications. All Syncro branches are required to conform to the standards laid down by HQ and all installation technicians and sales people follow a structured training path.





2012



- With the business expanding beyond regional boundaries, it became necessary to open local branches to undertake installations and advise customers. Francom now employs 75 people, about half of whom work at the parent company. The remainder are employed at the Group's Italian and German subsidiaries.



■ The Bamberg (Germany) subsidiary.



■ The Moncalieri (Turin) subsidiary.

2012

- On the thirtieth anniversary of Francesco Comunello's tragic death, the family wanted to remember his exemplary loyalty and technical ability along with friends and employees. After a Holy Mass, commemorations continued at the restaurant, where company president Luca Comunello, accompanied by his mother Maria, brother Adamo, sister Bibiana and wife Fabiola, described the origins of the company and related vivid memories of his father, the driving force and heart of Francom. The first edition of this book was distributed on that very occasion.





2013



■ Francesco with his grandmother Maria.

- 2013 saw an important new addition to the Comunello family with the birth of Francesco, the third son of Adamo. In the words of Luca Comunello, president of Francom, the name chosen for the newborn “symbolises the fact that he is part of our family’s tradition and has inherited the values and ideas of his grandfather, a free-thinking man who always went in the direction he though right”.



■ Adamo with his wife Federica, their two daughters, Giorgia and Alessia and the young Francesco.

2014



- Francom is constantly looking to the future. Work on the new plant in Via Portile, Cassola, began in 2012 and the plant became fully operational in 2014. The factory building is 10 metres high and provides 6500 square metres of indoor floor space.



■ The warehouse.



■ Sheet metal processing machines.

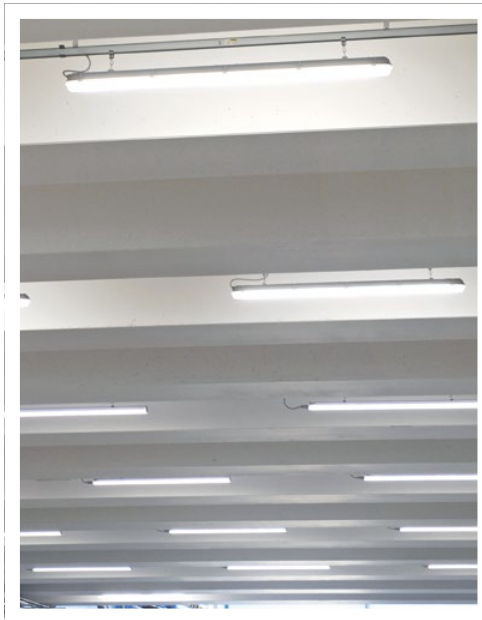
2016 Syncro for the environment



- Syncro System goes green. The new plant features important innovations that dramatically reduce the environmental impact of the entire supply chain.
 - Modern insulation systems to reduce heat loss.
 - Roof windows to exploit natural sunlight and artificial lighting almost entirely from LED sources.
 - A rooftop photovoltaic system that provides over 40% of the plant's energy requirements.
 - New machines, all with energy saving systems.
 - A waste-free, solvent-free, low-emission painting system.
 - Paper communications on FSC certified paper for responsible forestry management.



■ Photovoltaic panels.



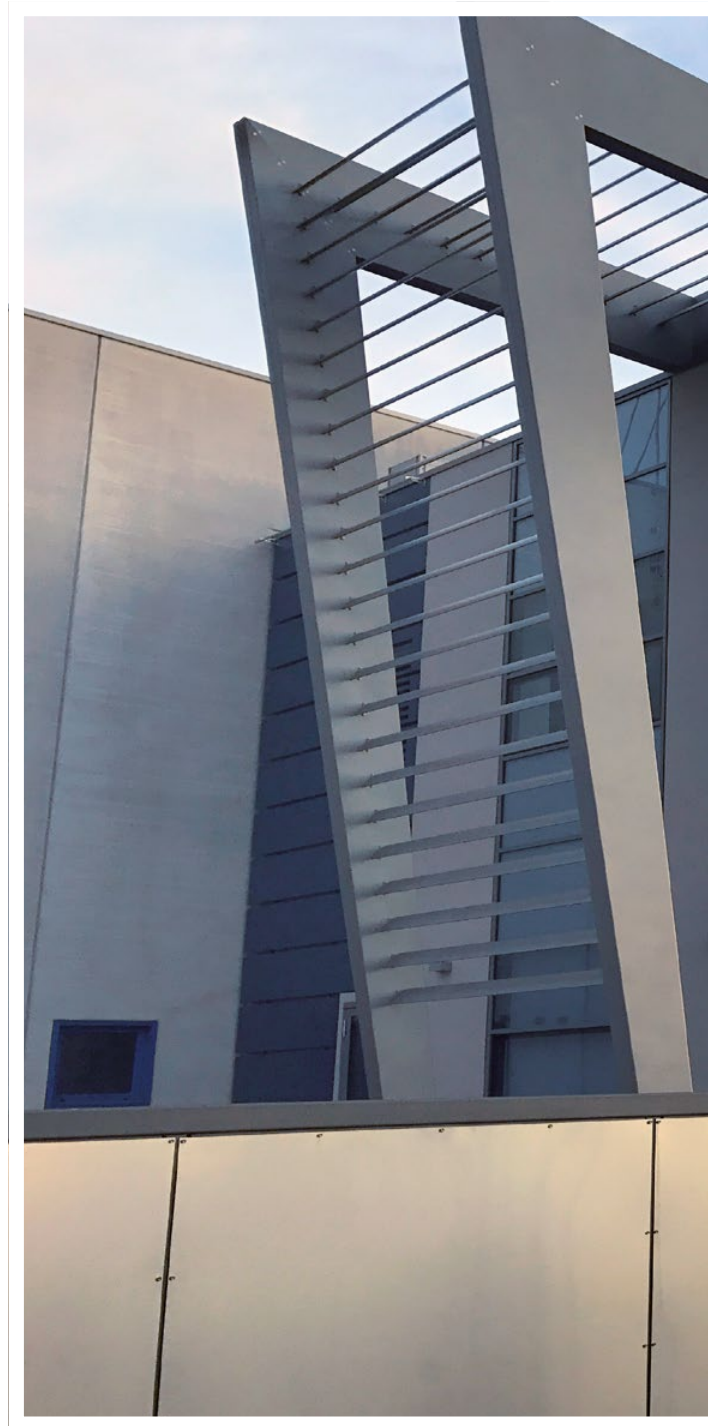
■ LED lighting.



■ The latest generation of energy saving machines.

2017

- Development never stops at Syncro. Francom's new premises in Via Portile now also houses the group's offices in a building alongside the main production, assembly and logistics plant.





2017



■ Scenes from the inauguration of the new factory in Via Portile.



2018

- A family photo taken on Bibiana's 50th birthday.

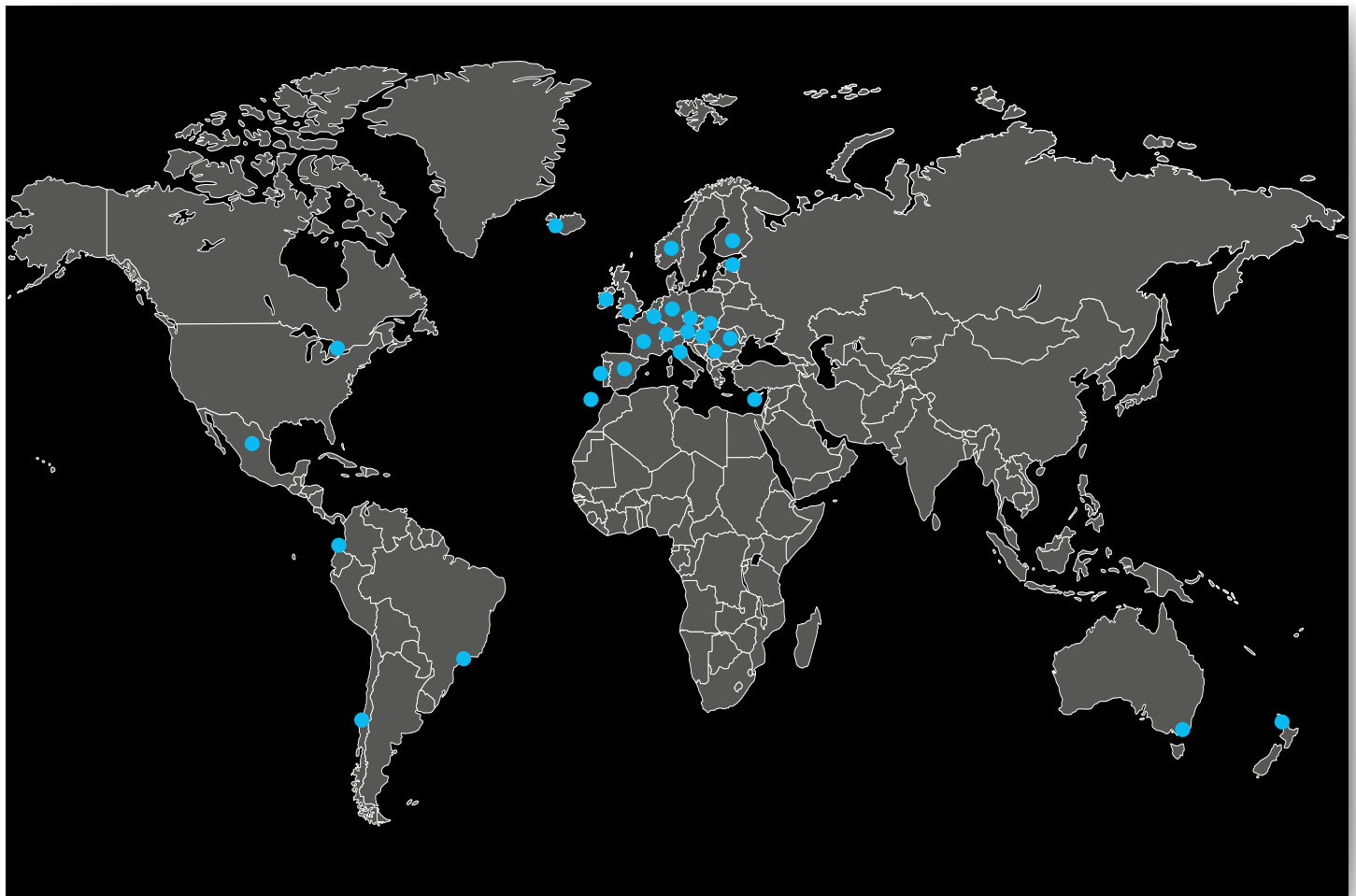




2018

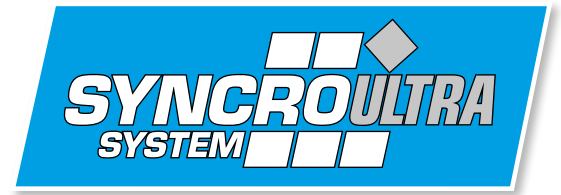


- Work to extend the factory in Via Portile was completed in 2018. The building now provides 10,000 square metres of usable indoor space on three floors; the roof is completely covered by solar panels; another 10,000 square metres of space is available outdoors and offices are now housed in a dedicated four-level block.



- The “internal” growth of the Syncro Group reflects the expansion in dealerships, which now serve Europe, the Americas and Oceania. A total of 30 countries worldwide now benefit from Syncro System van racking solutions.

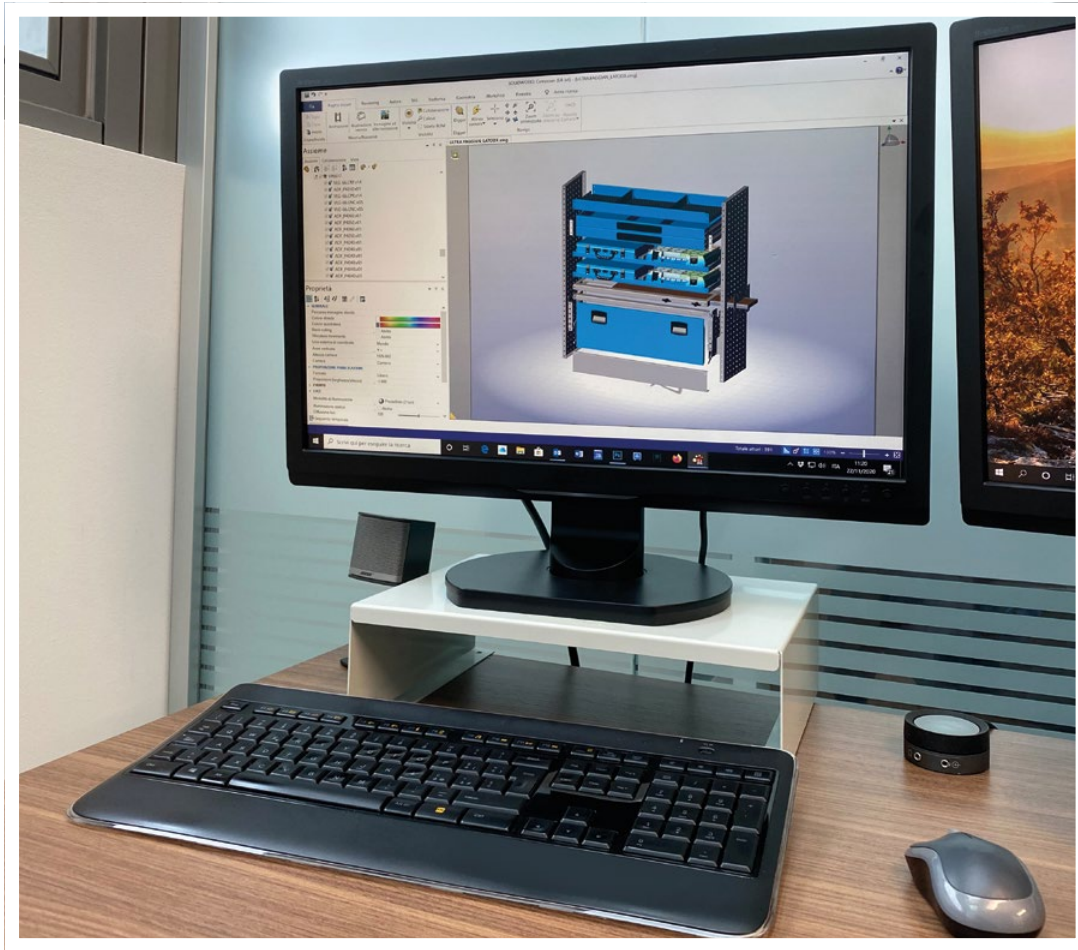
2019



- A complete redesign of Syncro van racking led to the development of Ultra, a lighter, stronger system offering far greater modularity and numerous new products too. Thanks to Ultra, van racking installations can be tailored exactly to meet the customer's needs, optimising the use of space and significantly improving the user's productivity!



2019



- The success of the Syncro Group is partly due to an extensive use of ICT. Integration between production and enterprise resource planning began in the mid-1990s with the arrival of the first evolved CNC machines.



- Over the years, dedicated software for accounting, administration, sales, production and procurement has been developed and seamlessly integrated. Today, Francom's ICT system controls all company processes, accelerating workflows, adding value, promoting continuous improvement in the quality of products and services and minimising wastage of materials and effort.

2019



- The Syncro Group is committed to continuous improvement. In keeping with this commitment, workforce meetings are seen as opportunities for exchanging information, ideas and suggestions. These photos were taken at a meeting in the group's Rezzato premises (Brescia).

Syncro System statistics

- 80,000 vans fitted out since 1996, accounting for sales worth 150 million euros
- 30,000 listed articles
- 100 employees in Italy and Germany
- Over 50 dealers around the world
- A van is fitted with Syncro System racking every 13 minutes!
- Over 23 years of activity, the Syncro Group has saved customers 70 million man-hours for a value of 20 billion euros!

From Francom to Syncro System 38 years after his death

Dedicated to the memory of Francesco Comunello 1933-1982. You will always be in our hearts.

Maria, Luca, Bibiana, Adamo



FRANCOM S.P.A. - Syncro System Group

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