

# The steely heart of a lioness

A portrait of Gabriella Pasotti, a Brescian entrepreneur who has carved out an entrepreneurial and social role embracing global challenges and with an unbreakable bond to her land

There are entrepreneurial stories that cannot be simply measured in turnover, but in the type of values they convey. That of Gabriella Pasotti, president of La Leonessa in Carpenedolo, Brescia, is a journey of passion, dedication and pride that spans more than half a century of industrial experience. At 76 years of age, 58 of which have been spent in the company, Gabriella embodies the essence of the “lioness of Italy”: tenacious, pragmatic and outward-looking. It all began in the early 1950s with Fad, founded by her father, Ferdinando Pasotti, manufacturing wheels and axles for agricultural machinery. It is worth making a slight digression to talk about her father: a man who was the most perfect symbol of the best of Italy after the second world war, a time he lived through with wise optimism and hope for the future, by building a model company. Young Gabriella thinks about going to university, but the call of duty is stronger, her father wants her by his side. Thus began a journey that led her to knowing every aspect of the family business, absorbing the atmosphere of factory work. That university dream, however, did not fade away, it remained hidden deep inside and

## LEADERSHIP AND ENTREPRENEURIAL HUMANISM

“Know what you do and act without fear”. It is with this conviction that Gabriella Pasotti, president of the Leonessa Group, has worked to build an industrial group that is now among the European leaders in the manufacture of large slewing rings, with production plants in Brescia and China, and sales branches in the Usa and Poland. A quiet approach, typical of Lombardy’s humanist entrepreneurs, leading them to achieving great success.

was taken up years later. So, taking time away from the business and her family, she enrolled at university to study Pedagogy. In 2004, she graduated, writing a thesis on generational transition dedicated to her father, with the title “The pleasure of work is the reason for life”, which sealed a pact of honour with her origins, the factory, and social commitment. But in that window of time between youth and adulthood, the family business grew rapidly, until something unexpected happened. In the mid-1990s, Fad was the European leader, producing 9,000 wheels per day, reaching a turnover of 300 billion Italian liras. An organisation that, in 1996, fell under the radar of British multinational, Gkn, leading the family to selling it outright.

But the desire to do was not satisfied by selling. Gabriella focused on the Group’s “smallest”, La Leonessa, founded in 1971, manufacturing large slewing bearings. Under her leadership, what began as a small business with around 20 employees, grew, through hard work and dedication, to become an industry leader with 400 employees and a 100-million-euro turnover. Once again, her connection to her roots came back to light in 2010 when, contrary to what many other entrepreneurs do, Gabriella, with approval from her children, Tommaso and Susanna Ghirardi, made a symbolic and strategic gesture, by buying back the axle division of Fad from the English giant.

And with the slogan “the axles have come back home”, she wants reaffirmed her rediscovered identity. Today, the Group, composed of La Leonessa, Fad Assali and other brands, is the only one in Europe to boast an integrated supply chain, starting with the steel bars and ending with a finished product such as slewing rings and ball bearings used in handling machinery, supported by the investment in an innovative ring mill opened in 2008 in Carpendolo. A leading company serving international markets, supported by the manufacturing site in China,



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Gabriella Pasotti, president of La Leonessa

opened in 2012, and sales branches in the Usa and Poland. But Gabriella Pasotti is not only a successful entrepreneur, she is an institutional landmark. In 2022 she was awarded the title of “Knight of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic”, and has had important roles, such as two terms as president of the Mechanicals sector of Confindustria Brescia, and as a councillor of Federmeccanica, and is now a member of the

General Council of Confindustria Brescia, and a councillor on the Board of Directors of Aqm. However, there is one aspect that defines Gabriella in addition to her work, and that is her relationship with people. Educated by her father’s example, she still sees the company as a community with responsibilities that go beyond the confines of the factory. She is also constantly working on social commitment, often silent, aimed at supporting the area that has given so much to her family. She promotes numerous initiatives in favour of the local community, from building houses for workers to supporting welfare institutions, from scholarships for deserving students to restoring places of art. ■

