

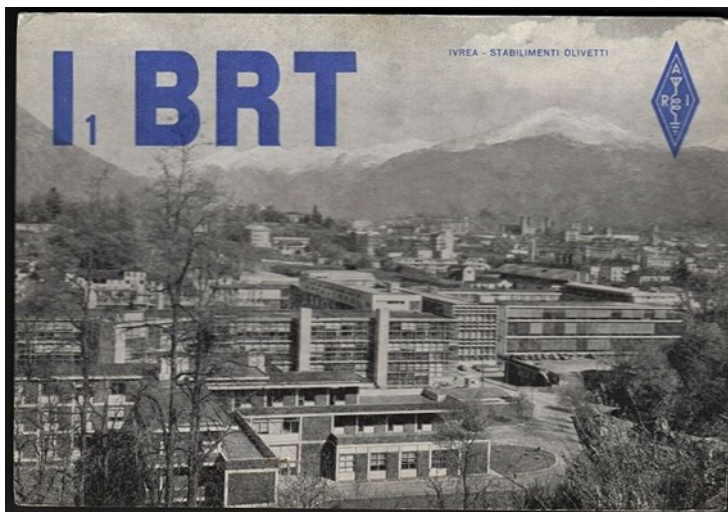
Olivetti Typewriter Co.

By Michele M. Bresso, PhD

Founded in 1908 by Camillo Olivetti about 20 years after the U.S. launched the Remington typewriter, the Olivetti Company introduced the M1, its first mechanical typewriter, at the 1911 Turino Exposition. This inaugural model typewriter consisted of some 3,000 handmade parts and weighed 38 pounds! The QZERTY keyboard, a configuration common to Italian typewriters, put the Z where the W would be positioned on the QWERTY keyboard in use in many other countries.



Left: 1911 poster stamp commemorating the Turino Exposition; Right: Belgium, circa 1940, 50 c Belgian centime—publibel postal card promotes the Olivetti Typewriter.



QSL radio card shows Olivetti factory in Ivrea, Italy

Trend Setter

The Olivetti factory, located in Ivrea, northwestern Italy, drove the town's reputation by changing the playing field for employee engagement. Olivetti built modern residences for workers, provided an onsite trade school, and offered free daycare for employees' children. As a result, Ivrea became known as a model community for workers' rights.

Italy (below, l-r) — 2008: 100th anniversary of the founding of Olivetti; 1973: Olivetti computer in Italian Work for the World series; 2020: celebrating Adriano Olivetti; 2020: the Leterra 22 with pictorial cancel.



Inevitable Changes

New models improved typists' ease of use and speed. In 1932, engineer Adriano Olivetti, son of the founder, helped create the company's first portable typewriter. Under Adriano, the company achieved 50% of all typewriter sales in Italy. That success was fueled by the highly popular 1950 Lettera 22. The typewriter's days were numbered, however. Preparing for change, Olivetti produced the Elea 9003 electronic computer in 1959. Olivetti stopped producing typewriters altogether in 1994.