

A FULLY ITALIAN GILLETTE FACTORY

Ferdinando Frega — Nando the Scribe

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Everyone knew that GILLETTE's production plants were spread across Europe — Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain — and later, only many years afterward, it came out that there were also plants in some Eastern European country, serving the Russian markets. But no one ever knew there was a factory in Naples producing GILLETTE BLUE II X 10 RAZORS, complete with EAN code, product code, and even a batch number.

It also ran seasonal promotions, with 10+2 free and 10+4 free promotional formats — a genuine branch operation, except the official offices were in Milan, first at Via Baldissera 5 and later at Via G.B. Pirelli 18, and no one had any idea that Naples factory existed.

It was the NIELSEN data that blew the whole thing open: cross-checking revenue against units sold, money that should have been collected was missing — yet GILLETTE EUROPE's finances were managed internationally out of Geneva, and Italy had no cash office of its own.

Revenue kept coming up short, and once the numbers became significant enough to matter, our Managing Director walked through the doors of the Milan Public Prosecutor's Office to file a criminal complaint against persons unknown.

Telling the unofficial product apart from the official one wasn't easy, but one detail stood out immediately: opening the package, the razors were branded GILLETTE — but they belonged to the competition.

The manufacturing signatures gave it away — in the blade characteristics, the blade positioning, and the quality control.

The investigation traced it to a basement in Naples, where a Piaggio motor-cart left regularly, once an hour, carrying a single pallet of 84 packs of 20 — the standard GILLETTE format — complete with a company delivery slip, making the rounds to most of the wholesalers in Naples, who mixed it in with the official product.

The curiosity was strong enough that the area was watched with cameras for seven days, and there, the counterfeit's people turned out to be serious professionals: on deliveries and production, nothing to complain about — it felt like being in East Berlin. Ha ha ha.

When the Guardia di Finanza decided to move in on the site and arrest everyone, they found entire families at work — in packaging, stock, sorting, graphics, invoicing. It looked like a Boston branch

office on Main Street.

About 38 people were arrested, but to avoid panic on the market, the investigation was never made public: it would have created distress and damage to customers and consumers, and the prosecutor decided to seal the whole thing.

But two things really made an impression: first, the organization and quality control combined with logistics and delivery; second, that after the interrogations, the women in the group asked whether they could be hired to work at Gillette Italia.

The Managing Director, a man from Puglia by origin, never smiled once: he was troubled — not only by the criminal act and the damage to the company, but by the fact that, as President of the Italian-American Chamber of Commerce in Milan, he had just recognized real talent and quality — talent he would never be able to put on the payroll.

Ferdinando

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