

# The History of Callegari Inflatables

Herm Hoops 2015

Italy's Callegari has been producing pneumatic boats for recreational use and military navies of the world since the early 1950s, and they are well-known in Europe.(#h.) In 1992 Eurovinil, of Genoa acquired Callegari.(7) and in 2001 Callegari was purchased by the Plastimar Company which was founded in 1977.(#f.) In the early 2000s Callegari discontinued its line of whitewater river inflatables, but they continue making a variety of recreational and work inflatables and have moved into the R.I.B. market. In 2010, partnering with Acta Energy, Callegari unveiled a hydrogen powered inflatable tender - an industry first.(#k.)

In 1982 Vladimir Kovalik went to Caligari with designs of three prototypes: the Falcon, Eagle and Condor, and had Callegari build some prototypes.(2,9,10)(#m.)(#i.) Vladimir liked the material Callegari was using. The prototypes were great boats and in 1983 ordered 100 boats costing around \$200,000 for this initial purchase. The boats, though non-self-bailing, had a nice curvature similar to Vladimir's Campways Havasu design, they were a very nice gray color and made of Hypalon.(9,10) Kovalik's Wilderness World (WiWo) used the Falcon in its Middle Fork operations. WiWo used 18' Condor in the Grand Canyon operation, then run by Vladimir's son Kyle, in 1983 and possibly until 1985. By 1985 the WiWo Grand Canyon operation returned to using Avon's.(2,3,10,11)(#a.)

Kyle Kovalik remembers; "On the first rig day at Lee's Ferry it became apparent that the floor material was not waterproof! I'm sure they had the same result in Oregon. Vladimir contacted Callegari about this and they refused to do anything about it.(#n.) It was obvious they had changed the floor material from the prototypes."(10) Vladimir and his staff tried using all kinds of paints and coatings to attempt to solve the problem. He sold the boats off at cost, or even a loss and he very nearly went bankrupt as a result.(10) Vladimir continued his Wilderness World operations and he went back to working with Dan Baxter and Riken for a while, but his enthusiasm for boat design had waned considerably at this point and within five years or so he went on to other pursuits.(10) Dan Baxter sold a few Callegari rafts in his retail store in Portland, Oregon. They were manufactured for only a brief time. They were quite expensive and never really took off. The lower prices of the Japan manufactured Rikens probably doomed the Callegari river boats.(9)(#o.)

Around 1983-84 OARS purchased and ran about 5 Callegari Condors in the Grand Canyon.(3) Vladimir Kovalik sold George Wendt a Callegari at a boat show (probably a W.R.G.A.(#b.) and O.A.R.S. tried it.(#c.)(#m.) Wendt liked the boat and bought four or five more to create a small fleet of Callegari rafts.(5) The Callegari material was light, and although they were easy to row they had problems."(1) Mike Walker recalls: "Everyone liked the boats, but after running Green River boats for so many years the Callegari boats seemed a bit delicate. A single person could lift one rolled up and get in to the back of the truck, it took three 3 boatmen to get a Green River raft in the truck. I recall that we had floor issues with the Callegaris. But the general design, larger tube diameter and more pronounced bow and stern kick was really nice and subsequently became the genesis for early Domar designs."(5.)

{Numbers in parenthesis (1) are REFERENCES; letters in parenthesis (#a) are described in SIGNIFICANT NOTES.

The Callegari boats were used by various outfitters and private boaters.(1) John Bachrach purchased one of the O.A.R.S. 18' Condors built in 1983 and used for 5 years in the Grand Canyon. He bought the boat in 1987 from Mike Walker and used it on the San Juan River that summer and was hooked on the boats. John had Walker's Canyon Inflatables put a new floor in the boat and John painted it with Gaco Flex a few years later. As of 2014 the boat is still in service and Bachrach wrote: "and I'd take her anywhere."(8)

Callegari inflatables were made with nylon polyester coated with neoprene in the inside of the air chamber and Hypalon on the exterior and they came with a 5 year warranty on the fabric. They were cold cured with adhesive and came with heavy duty d-rings, recessed Bridgeport valves(#1.), inflatable thwarts, rub strake, and a repair kit. The standard colors were gray, orange and yellow. The following models were primarily used in the United States after 1982:(13)  
 {^ = estimates from John Bachrach (12)}

<u>MODEL</u>	<u>LENGTH</u>	<u>BEAM</u>	<u>TUBE DIA.</u>	<u>WT.</u>	<u>CAPACITY</u>
Falcon	14'	82-88" ^	21-22" ^	100+ # ^	{ 2 Thwarts }
Eagle	16'				
Condor	18'				

The 1979 Callegari Catalog also lists the following river boats: (#i)

<u>MODEL</u>	<u>LENGTH</u>	<u>BEAM</u>	<u>TUBE DIA.</u>	<u>WT.</u>	<u>CAPACITY</u>
Sea Rider(#d.)	14'	6'8"	19"	70#	2700#
Nantahala	11'	5'5"	15"	88#	1400#
Chattooga	13'	6'	18"	113#	2340#
Piute	11'	5'5"	15"	52#	1470#
Hopi	12'	6'	17"	66#	1800#
Apache 12	12'	6'	16"	98#	2000#
Apache 15	15'	6'6"	18"	141#	3400#
Miwok II	13'6"	6'7"	19"	130#	2660#
Shoshoni 16	16'	6'9"	19"	154#	3000#
Shoshoni 17	17'6"	7'8"	21"	197#	4200#
Havasu	18'	7'8"	21"	203#	4300#

It is likely that because of the problems with floor material, import duties and high foreign exchange rate the Callegari whitewater boats were only manufactured and market for a short time. While Callegari continues to manufacture boats, they are primarily marketed in the European market.

## **REFERENCES**

- \* - University of Utah, J. Willard Marriott Library, Special River Archive, Herm Hoops Collection
- (1.) Paul (Zeke) Lauck III email to Herm Hoops; 10/20/2012;\*
  - (2.) Dirk Pratley email to Herm Hoops, 8/28/2013;\*
  - (3.) Mike Walker Telephone Interview (Revised & Corrected - 9/8/2013); page 2 @ 8 minutes; Interview by Herm Hoops;\*
  - (4.) Po Chang, U.S. Coast Guard, Office of Auxiliary & Boating Safety Branch, (CG-BSX-23) ([Po.L.Chang@uscg.mil](mailto:Po.L.Chang@uscg.mil)) email to Herm Hoops; 9/27/2013;\*
  - (5.) Email from Mike Walker to Geroge Wendt to Herm Hoops; 12/21/2013;\*
  - (6.) Plastimar web site;
  - (7.) Eurovinil S.p.A. web site;
  - (8.) Email from John Bachrach to Herm Hoops; 6/14/2014
  - (9.) Communication from Dan Baxter to Herm Hoops; 10/22/2014;
  - (10) Email from Kyle Kovalik to Herm Hoops; 10/22/2014;
  - (11) Email from Kyle Kovalik to Herm Hoops; 10/23/2014;
  - (12) Email from John Bachrach to Herm Hoops; 11/11/2014
  - (13) *The Complete Book of Inflatable Boats*; Hubbard, Don; 1980; Western Marine Enterprises, Inc. Page 206-207

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

- U.S.C.G. Hull Serial Code: TIO (4.)
- Callegari USA 8133 NW 67nd ST. Miami, FL (Out of business as of 2013)
- British Motor Car Distributers, Ltd.; 19100 Susana Road Compton, CA 90221 (213) 774-9831
- Callegari inflatable boats were distributed in Greece By Zois Efstathiou S.A. and paved the way for the company to become one of the main suppliers to the Hellenic Armed Forces.

## **SIGNIFICANT NOTES:**

(#a.) "In '84,'85 (we used) 14's Falcons on Middle Fork...Vladimir Kovalik got the 18' self-bailing Riken "Aztec" in '85 in Grand Canyon and most of the boatmen hated them, especially after the (Avon) Spirit. We retired the Avons by '86 so the Rikens were it in '86 for WiWo. Called them the surf pigs - still on 40k (cfs) so Crystal was the crux, and these boats were spooky. WiWo sold winter of '86. Callegari models are, I believe, Falcon-14'.Eagle-16'.Condor-18'." - Dirk Pratley(3) Pratley and Lauck also believe the Falcon was used on the Idaho Middle Fork of the Salmon operation.

### **(#b.) W.R.G.A.**

In the winter of 1954, a small group of Utah river outfitters gathered in Salt Lake City and formed the Western River Guides Association. The name "western" was probably decided on over "Utah River Guides Association" because several of the founders had ties to and experience in running some of the rivers in Idaho, but it is doubtful if many there that day had a vision of what recreational river running was destined to become. Utah was just the beginning! (Richard Quist, [www.utah.com](http://www.utah.com))

### **(#c.) O.A.R.S.**

O.A.R.S. stands for Outdoor Adventure River Specialists. Pam Wendt came up with the name O.A.R.S. in 1971. They were originally under the name Gooch-Wendt in 1969 -1971 and they first used the name O.A.R.S. in 1972. O.A.R.S. had fleets of three different manufacturers in the early years: Green River models, Avon and Callegari.

**(#d.) Callegari Sea Rider**

The catalog indicates the Sea Rider 10 & 12 dinghies are adaptable for river running.

**(#f.) Plastimar** operates two manufacturing plants around Cesena, Italy. They employ about 20 people and produce around 1,500 inflatable boats annually with emphasis on the recreational boat tender, military and survival markets.(6.)

**(#g.) Eurovinil S.p.A.**, based in Grosseto, Italy near Rome, was established in 1958 and has 150 employees. In 1992 Eurovinil acquired the brand Callegari, one of the most well-known brands in the field of the pneumatic boats.(7.) In 1977 Eurovinil produced the first liferaft for the Italian recreational market. Then, in 1984 Eurovinil started the production of professional liferafts approved by the Italian Ministry of the Merchant Navy. Later on, the range was extended with the production of specific models manufactured in compliance with the regulations of the different European and extra-European countries, both as far as the leisure and the professional models.

The company manufactures inflatables from materials such as the E.M.C.® (EV Marine Compound), an EV plastomer reinforced by a polyester fabric which is easy repair. Eurovinil used high frequency welding to avoid the negative environmental aspects of glue or adhesives.

**(#h.) Callegari** is the occupational name for a maker of footwear and leggings, from a derivative of Italian callega 'shoe' or and/or "shoemaker" ("caligario) and the Latin meaning "military boot."

**(#i.)** It is interesting, that with Vladimir Kovalik's influence, these models have the same names and specifications as Campways models that he and Campways had been designing.

**(#j.) R.I.B.**

The RIB is a development of the inflatable boat. It is a rigid-hulled inflatable boat, (RHIB) or rigid-inflatable boat (RIB), a light-weight, high-performance and high-capacity boat constructed with a solid, shaped hull and flexible tubes at the gunwale. The design is stable and seaworthy. The inflatable collar allows the vessel to maintain buoyancy even if a large quantity of water is shipped aboard. Uses include work boats (supporting shore facilities or larger ships) in trades that operate on the water, lifeboats and military craft.

**(#k.) Acta Energy**, is an Italian research and development company for hydrogen production and Marine Supply (Callegari and Shadow) in the manufacture of tenders and dinghies. The goal of these Tuscan companies, is to use cleaner source of energy for the marine sector, and they have produced the first tender with zero environmental impact. The tender, called HIDRO, exploits the silence of electric propulsion, cost savings and the zero environmental impact of hydrogen, which can be produced directly on board through an Acta Energy hydrogen generator.

**(#l.) Bridgeport Valves:**

Bridgeport was founded at the beginning of the Second World War as "Industrie Meccaniche Donatini S.p.a." At the end of the war they began the manufacture of tire valves. In 1960 it became the Italian branch of Bridgeport U.S.A. Bridgeport valves are an all metal (stainless steel or aluminum) construction, less prone to rubber degradation and leaks. Two tabs inside the valves (see photo page) are used to open the valve for inflation/deflation. The small tabs were difficult to position. They came with a press fit cover plug that was hard to press on and was often cut off. (20) The Bridgeport valves were generally good valves but when deflating and rolling up the boat the fabric would cover up the valve and prevent air from escaping.

**(#m.) Vladimir Kovalik and Callegari Boat Design**

Dan Baxter (9) thinks Kovalik designed 14' to 17" boats in the 1970s. Dirk Pratley(2) Puts Vladimir's design to build Callegari inflatables around 1983 which is similar to the dates provided by Kyle Kovalik. Mike Walker & George Wendt (O.A.R.S.) Believe they also bought Callegari boats prior to 1983.(3)

**(#n.) Italian Manufacturers**

To understand some of the difficulties working with foreign manufacturers, and especially those from Italy see: The History of Domar and Canyon Inflatables, University of Utah, J. Willard Marriott Library, Special River Archives, herm hoops Collection - or contact Herm at [hoops@ubtanet.com](mailto:hoops@ubtanet.com)

**(#o.) Dan Baxter**

Dan Baxter sold Callegari inflatables in his Portland, Oregon store. Dan thought the boats had a nice sweeping curvature, and gray color but they expensive and only manufactured for a short time.

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**FOR INFORMATION REGARDING THIS DOCUMENT CONTACT:**

**The University of Utah; J. Willard Marriott Library; Special Collections Department;  
295 South - 1500 East; Salt Lake City, Utah 84112-0860 ([www.lib.utah.edu](http://www.lib.utah.edu))**

{ 1<sup>st</sup> draft 09/29/13 - 200 words; 12/31/2013 - 1346; 10/20/14 - 1954; 1/5/2015 - 2030 }