

INTERNATIONAL BOWLING INDUSTRY

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Steltronic's North American headquarters in California



Steltronic's worldwide headquarters in Italy

STELTRONIC: 40 YEARS STRONG

The company passes a major milestone

By Paul Lane

Brescia, Italy-based Steltronic, founded in 1980, celebrates its 40th anniversary as a well-established, independent leader in the field of automatic scoring systems that include a wide variety of computer-based business management related features.

The company was founded by Roberto Simeone and his two brothers, Claudio and Mario, all three of whom have degrees in electrical engineering. The partnership between the brothers continued until 2000 when Roberto purchased Claudio and Mario's shares and became the sole owner of Steltronic.

The name of the company Steltronic is very unique. Roberto says he created the name by selecting letters from Simeone Technology Electronic, as follows (in RED)

SIMEONE TECHNOLOGY ELECTRONIC

For the first two years, Steltronic was operating in a variety of electrical fields related to the mechanical industry. The introduction to the bowling industry came when a proprietor in Roberto's hometown of Brescia contacted him asking if Steltronic could

develop a cash control system to better manage and enhance the business operation.

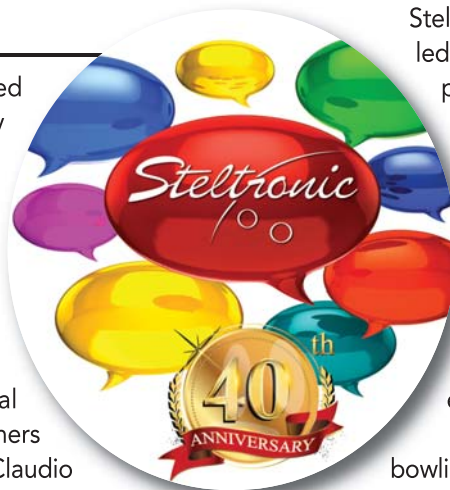
The original system was not an automatic scoring system. It was designed to automatically detect bowling balls, charge a tariff, preset and automatically apply different time zones of the day and different days of the week. There was also a complete reporting system using a magnetic card for granting special discounts, the ability to control timed bowling, and many more business enhancing features. The brothers developed this system in a DOS environment.

Remember that this was in the 1980s.

Steltronic's introduction to bowling soon led to other bowling related electronic products before the company developed and entered the automatic scoring arena. These included a microprocessor-controlled chassis (control system) in 1982 for AMF 82-30; 82-45 and 82-70 pinspotters; plus foul detectors, electronic motor starters for 82-70 pinspotters; and a variety of additional smaller electronic products.

"Thanks to the great interest of many bowling proprietors," Roberto remembers, "within a few years the chassis for AMF pinspotters, which incorporated the new microprocessor systems that were introduced in 1982, we started to grow the company, focusing on products that would make the bowling industry more efficient and modern. This led to the logical conclusion that developing an automatic scoring and management system would be next on our agenda."

The first Steltronic automatic DOS-based scoring system was introduced in 1988 and was a complete system; it included features like statistical reporting,



tournaments, time-bowling, magnetic cards, the first dynamic spare maker, etc. The first Steltronic graphics displayed a static image of either a strike, spare, foul, or gutterball. This was far more enhanced than systems offered by the competition.

"Within three years the company grew so fast we had to hire more than ten additional technicians to keep up with orders," said Roberto. "In fact, we gained over 50% of the European market in less than five years." In the early days of Steltronic, Roberto's friends Hans Krol and Nick Keppe at Bowltech in the Netherlands installed the scoring system throughout Europe. During that time, Steltronic had the automated scoring market cornered in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Germany and France. Bowltech became a competitor to Steltronic in more recent times. "Happily," Roberto reports, "Hans and Nick remain good friends of mine and have been an important part of Steltronic's growth and success for more than 20 years."

While Steltronic was continually updating and redesigning their scoring system, they clearly understood that they already had a unique product and saw no reason not to broaden their international horizons, starting with the U.S. market.

The first distributor for Steltronic in the U.S. was Dave Selzler's American Bowling Corporation (ABC), who exhibited the Dacos scoring system at Bowl Expo in San Francisco in 1995. A young Jim Osdale — who had DOS-based computer programming experience, and later a Windows 95-driven inventory management program for mechanics — also attended that show, his first Bowl Expo experience. Osdale met and spoke with Selzler, who told him he was looking for some help in Eugene, Oregon. It was a good fit, so Osdale was hired and relocated from California to Oregon to join ABC in 1996.



Jim Osdale

That same year, Roberto visited and made an agreement with Selzler for ABC to become the main distributor of Steltronic scoring in North America. Jim Osdale was put in charge of taking care of the Steltronic automatic scoring that ABC sold both directly and to distributors throughout the U.S., including Steve Raasch's Great Lakes Bowling in Wisconsin. Great Lakes was the first U.S. distributor to purchase Steltronic scoring from ABC. And that was the start of Jim's 24 year working relationship

with Roberto and the Steltronic product line.

ABC was also selling a full line of bowling capital equipment to China, including scoring, representing 75% of ABC's business. Unfortunately, China imposed a 55% import tariff on bowling equipment which caused the dissolution of ABC in 2000.

"Since Steltronic sales were just beginning to take off in the U.S.A.," Osdale remembers, "Roberto asked me to run Steltronic in the U.S.A, which I did from 2000 to 2006."

In 2006, a new distributor partnership between Steltronic and US Bowling was formed. Osdale returned to California to head up what was called US Steltronic. US Bowling, much like Bowltech in Europe, helped Steltronic advance the company's global market share.



Roberto Simeone

In 2011, Roberto decided to dissolve the partnership with US Bowling, a mutually agreeable and amicable separation. Osdale continued to run the U.S. operation as an employee of Steltronic, with Roberto being the sole owner. "I later concluded I wanted to offer investment opportunities to a group of men that had always been loyal and key [people] to the growth of Steltronic in the U.S.A., men with a long and successful history and familiarity with the Steltronic brand," said Roberto.

Osdale became one of those investors, along with Steve Raasch, the owner of Great Lakes in Wisconsin, who had been purchasing Steltronic scoring from ABC, yet continued to purchase Steltronic scoring as a distributor in Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Michigan.

Rick Woodward of Mountain West Bowling, who has been in the bowling business since 1984 and managed Steltronic sales in Utah, Colorado, Wyoming and Idaho, became the third new investor in the company. Rick is also the owner of the 16-lane Miracle Bowl in Orem, Utah. The four partners — Osdale,





Steltronic recently installed their system at Strike City

Raasch, Woodward and Roberto — formed a new corporation called Steltronic North America, Inc., in August of 2014 with Osdale as CEO.

Steltronic's scoring system is light years away from its modest beginning where they succeeded in producing a high-tech system while accepting the challenges of the limitation of being DOS based; WINS was not introduced until 1996. The bowler consoles on early models were just joystick driven until a few years later, they developed an alpha-numeric membrane keypad.

Before it became fashionable they started with a camera designed for the industry, not the consumer which was used for each lane. A two-lane camera came later. Roberto's younger brother, Claudio, developed sophisticated software that would detect every pin in its nominal position, allowing for pins being off-spot, dirty, or scratched. The cameras also automatically adjusted to fluorescent pindeck lights and any other form of ambient light that could affect scoring accuracy.

"This was no easy task, believe me," said Roberto, "and no other system was based on actual pin images to be digitalized and analyzed via software at the time. Amazingly, today, some 32 years later, there are still about 1,000 of these original Steltronic Automatic Scoring (SAS) systems still installed and still fully operational."

Steltronic's Scoring System (combining Focus•NEX and Vision•NEX), was developed utilizing the latest Microsoft SQL Server technology. It's a user-friendly scoring system with interactive 3D graphics, time-game capability, point of sale (POS), online reservation system, and reporting capabilities to help manage every aspect of the business. A proprietor simply logs in and center operations are up and running.

The Steltronic team never rests on its laurels or accepts the status quo: imaginative and creative enhancements, improvements and updates designed to make all aspects of managing the business easier and more efficient and more enjoyable for customers, are

simply a way of life for the R & D technicians in Brescia.

In terms of marketing the business—in addition to a website, extensive print advertising in various industry trade publications, collateral material and the occasional email blast— Steltronic has been an avid proponent of participating in industry trade shows. Roberto says, "Exposure through industry trade shows has maximized exposure for the Steltronic brand." Shows such as Bowl Expo in the U.S., the Bowltech European trade show in the Netherlands, numerous shows in Germany, Moscow, Dubai, Shanghai, and the annual ENADA show in Italy (an exhibition for the entertainment and gaming industries) have been critical to the growth of Steltronic. Typically taking eight or more booths at a trade show, they display their complete system for live, hands-on demonstrations.

Roberto hasn't considered adding products such as lanes and pinsetting machines to his business. "It has always been my decision to stay away from pinsetters and machinery," he said. "We plan to maintain our focus on developing systems that enhance a proprietor's business from the front desk to the back office, from league to open and party bowling, to taking reservations, managing sundry items such as shoe rental, special promotions, and to promote customer satisfaction which generates added revenue and profit."

Steltronic's reach is global with more than 23,000 lanes installed in 91 countries. Steltronic has come a long way since they started in 1980 with just one employee, Claudia Ghidina, who is still with the company today handling the warehouse, logistics, and production lots. Presently there are 15 employees in the Bescia, Italy, headquarters and manufacturing facility. Steltronic North America, Inc. has a total of eight employees in its office/warehouse facility in California.

One thing is for sure: a 40th anniversary celebration is well deserved for the Steltronic team. When you reach such a milestone, you know there's a close-knit team of dedicated professionals all pulling together for a common goal. Congratulations. ❖



Paul Lane is former Director of Marketing and Marketing Services for AMF Bowling, Inc. He has been the director of 18 AMF World Cups, an officer in national and international trade associations, and a pro bowler during a career that spans more than 60 countries and 50 years.