



## Wood never goes out of fashion

The Po Plain is the area that provides most of the timber that allows this long-established company to produce top quality poplar plywood, used predominantly by manufacturers of caravans and motorhomes designed to meet the requirements of the most demanding clients.

Words **Andrea Cattaneo**

Soon, Brivio Compensati will celebrate 90 years in business. This is no small feat for a medium-sized enterprise, and a milestone that many would love to reach. Founded by Attilio Brivio back in 1929, the company is based in Northern Italy and has always worked in the wood sector, focusing in particular on the production of plywood. Brivio Compensati specialises in poplar plywood, a premium ply made primarily from Italian timber. The founder of the factory began producing poplar plywood back in 1929, and right after the Second World War succeeded in exporting large quantities of product.

"My grandfather launched the business in the Twenties", explains Susanna Brivio, co-owner of the company alongside her

brother, Attilio, "but the real turning point came in the post-war years, when my father, Massimo Brivio, was determined to compete on markets that were more advanced than ours, and so he began exporting part of the company's products. I still find it amazing to think that the first big contract with the United States, which was worth a million dollars, was for the supply of wooden cabinets for TV sets. My father was brave, but the choices he made back then are the same ones that we, the third generation of Brivio Compensati, make today: we always try to cater to the most demanding customers, those who insist on quality products and impeccable customer service, because that's how the company can grow".

Brivio Compensati, which employs 95 people



Massimo Brivio with his sons Susanna and Attilio

and exports over 70% of production, operates as a supplier in various sectors, including that of pleasure boats and the automotive industry (above all buses and coaches), but it is the RV sector that generates over 60% of turnover. Poplar plywood by Brivio Compensati is used both for structural parts, such as the floor panels of motorhomes, and for furnishing elements in the vehicle interior. The qualities that are most appreciated are its lightness and strength, essential for next-generation motorhomes. But its superb workability is another factor not to be underestimated: cutting poplar plywood, inserting screws and gluing it are all operations that reveal the difference.

"In the Sixties, Brivio Compensati began developing a product specifically for the caravan

## Poplar tree plantations

**B**rivio Compensati has been producing its panels from poplar wood since the '30s: this is a conscious choice from which the company has never strayed, because poplar wood is strong, lightweight and very workable. But poplar also offers environmental advantages, helping to improve the air and the soil and preventing soil erosion. In addition, using poplar wood prevents tropical forests being cleared: let's not forget that poplar trees are grown with harvest cycles of around ten years. 75% of the raw materials used by Brivio Compensati is sourced in Italy, from poplar tree plantations on the Po Plain, not far from the company's headquarters, while the remaining 25% comes from France.

"We still firmly believe that poplar is the best choice", explains Attilio Brivio, "and we've invested accordingly. In recent years the economic crisis has led, unfortunately, to a shortage of this raw material: with the drop in the price of poplar wood, many farmers simply didn't plant new trees. We took a pro-active approach by forming collaborations with farmers, reaffirming our faith in our long-standing suppliers and extending the terms of purchase to one full year. This enables us to offer our clients guaranteed delivery of materials in the future too, giving us greater peace of mind which we can, in turn, pass on to our clients".

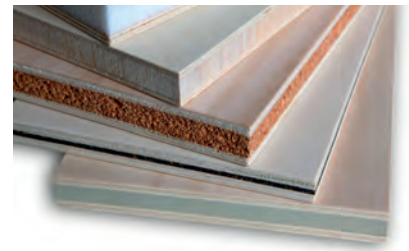


sector," explains Attilio Brivio, named after his grandfather who founded the company in 1929, "with a supply agreement with Elnagh: the contract was for floor panels, structural panels which needed to guarantee excellent strength without being excessively heavy. Today structural panels in poplar plywood represent an excellent solution for motorhome floors, because with a very reasonable weight they ensure excellent performance in terms of bonding and vehicle safety in general. Operating in the motorhome sector today is not easy, requiring constant attention to customer needs and a willingness to work to the highest standards, but with short turn-around times too. What makes the difference is continuity of supply and on that score, I am proud to say, Brivio Compensati always manages to guarantee delivery of goods even when customers request a very tight delivery time. As we all know, the economic crisis changed the way that European motorhome manufacturers work, many work exclusively on items sold. We on the other hand, at least for key clients, always have enough stock for at least one month, so we are always able to meet the needs of manufacturers".

That's why, catering to market demands, Brivio Compensati has a company organisation designed to guarantee maximum production flexibility, so it can increase supply as and when necessary. But in the last ten years the RV sector in Europe has undergone changes also as regards vehicle interior furnishings: the market demands top quality wood panels that are smooth and free of imperfections, both because of an increase in the overall quality of products and because thinner decorative papers with uniform colours are now being used. Having identified this essential requirement, Brivio Compensati, which works with panel coating companies that supply the sector, as well as with a number of RV manufacturers directly, made sure the com-



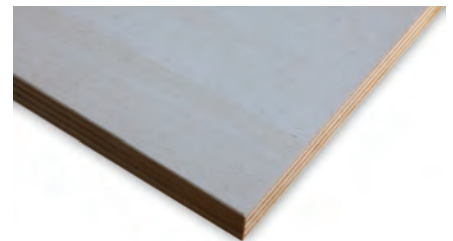
Flex From



Special laminated panels



Faced plywood panel



Poplar plywood

pany has the latest modern machinery that guarantees perfectly smooth plywood for furnishings, offering a "super smooth" finish that is perfect for painting or varnishing (the subsequent step in other sectors) as well as for covering with decor papers. On this basis, Brivio Compensati looks to the future: bolstered by long experience and the ability to

modernise its production to suit market demands, the company is in safe hands with the founding family at the helm. And the fourth generation is also preparing to join the family firm: the children of the current owners have almost completed their education and are set to join their parents, eager to develop new strategies.

