

Eight Bells

Dr. Luigi Lang

1939 - 2019

With great sadness I learned that on April 13th, Dr. Luigi Lang passed away.

When it comes to classic sailing yachts in Europe, most of us have in some way been touched by his work. When it comes to classic yachts, here is a man who gave more than he took. He gave as that was his way of giving something back to the boats and sport he loved.

Luigi was profoundly influential in creating the classic boat and Metre boat scene as we know it today. A prominent member of Yacht Club Italiano, a founding member of A.I.V.E. (The Italian Classic Yacht Association), a 20 year vice-president of The International Twelve Metre Association, a key member of the 2001 America's Cup Jubilee Organizing Team, C.I.M. Technical committee member, a respected measurer, judge and jury. He was the creator and custodian of a rating rule which made the world's most diverse fleet of sailing yachts race as one. Luigi was the author of multiple books, a meticulous yacht historian, together with Dyer Jones he wrote the definitive book on the history of the Int 12-Metre Class, the list goes on and on. In short, he was a classic yacht aficionado in heart and soul.

Few understood the immense complexity of the challenge which he took on: How do you rate boats designed over a time spread of 125 years. How do you fairly rate a shallow draft 100ft cruising schooner against a thoroughbred metre boat? How do you fairly rate boats from 30 to 150ft designed to compete under at least 6 wildly different and unrelated rating rules? And if that task was not impossible enough, lets add the wish from the owners to reward authenticity and ban the use of modern materials, modern sails, rigs and hardware. Where do you draw the line? How do you weigh each variable and how do you quantify the affect? And when you think you have all the answers, who is confident enough to think that all owners and crews will unanimously agree that all rating certificates are a proper reflection of how the boats will perform on the water? Accepting that a rating rule will never be perfect is easy, but the ability to decide when a rule is good enough requires an uncommon set of skills. It requires a person with intimate knowledge of the diverse fleet in front of him, someone with unquestionable integrity, someone who is able to find the right balance between being permissive and restrictive and then decide to what's right and what's wrong: Enter Dr. Luigi Lang.

When it comes to the classic yachting scene as we know it today, there is not a shred of doubt that Dr. Luigi Lang was instrumental and more influential than anybody else in the world. He singlehandedly spent thousands of hours to build a library with drawings and photos documenting the original specifications of each yacht.

He worked tirelessly to remove the need for subjective rulings affecting the rating so that others could also measure the boats and reproduce a rating as objectively as possible. At no cost he made his work available to the owners and yards restoring the boats. His goal was simple: through his work old boats could be saved, would once again be treasured as a true piece of functional art.

For over 20 years I had the privilege to work with Dr. Lang. At that time, I was Executive Secretary and later president of the International Eight Metre Association. We worked closely to create the Rules for the vintage Eights racing for “La Coupe Cartier” and developed a box rule for vintage metre boats racing for the Neptune Trophy. We exchanged ideas and shared experiences, joined each other on committees, worked with the brightest of minds like Olin Stephens and Doug Peterson, men who guided us through the pitfalls of rating rules. We joined forces to create the first data base and registers for metre boats and helped organize events.

Few realize that when it came to funding the Mediterranean events, it was Luigi Lang who attracted and negotiated the early sponsor contracts with companies such as San Pellegrino and later of course Prada, whom he convinced to sponsor the entire circuit over a period extending decades. When it came to sponsorship his focus was not prestige or the spotlight, his focus was on finding ways to help reduce cost for owners and crews so more sailors could enjoy the boats and the events. And when others took credit for his success he quietly smiled and just forged his way ahead.

I know for sure that what I say here does not fully cover the extent of Luigi’s contributions and commitment to classic yachts. So thank you Luigi, thank you for the decades of dedication, hard work and passion for the boats we love. Thank you on behalf of the thousands of sailors who race the old boats under the scene you helped to create and protect.

And last but not least, thank you Laura for being by his side and lending us the man you loved. I know you will miss him dearly, all I can do is hope that Luigi will live on in the good memories of your time together. I wish you the strength and spirit to endure and recover.

He is no longer with us, but Luigi’s memories and work will live on. What a joy it was to work with him, what a privilege it was to have him as a friend.

Sail on dear Luigi, sail on.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a long horizontal stroke that ends in a small loop.

John Lammerts van Bueren
Former Executive Secretary and President
International Eight Metre Association