



Kong, at the top for 200 years





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*Vendita*  
fatta dal Sig. Giacomo Orzi ai Sigi. Giuseppe Bonajoli e Gio. Battista  
Radoni di un fondo in comune di Rancio detto Giambellino per prezzo di  
Mil. abrup. L. 3410, e un'ipoteca  
*Divisione*  
del sudd. fondo fatta fra i predetti Signori Bonajoli e Radoni  
*Istrumento*  
regato dal D. Carlo Maggi il giorno 9. Settembre 1837. —  
Copia autentica per Sig. Bonajoli



## 01 . Origins as Bonaitis

Traces of the Bonaiti family have been found in the baptism registers of Laorca from the 18th century, but the first purchase relative to the "Giambellino" fund dates back to 1827. The Bonaiti drawing mill, used for processing steel wire, was built in the Valley of Gerenzone at the outlet of the Valsassina road, known as the road of iron and lumber.

The first of the Bonaiti family's factories dates back to 1830, when the first buildings were purchased for use as a drawing mill, along with a "twelfths" ownership of the large forge known as the "Gallina" in Laorca, and the one in San Giovanni alla Castagna, known as the "Piana".

The central element of the local production structure was the large forge, where ingots and slabs for mallets were produced from cast iron, which through a process of beating, were reduced to round, square or flat rods. Then there was a series of workshops for secondary processing, specialised in the production of articles derived from iron wire, produced by the drawing mills: nails, buckles, chains, farm equipment and other articles of this kind.

The production processes of the Bonaiti drawing mill were the same as those used by the artisans of the Valley, who reduced the rods produced by the mallets, into iron wire. The wire rod was then used to produce several types of buckles and rings used in agriculture.

# Ditta Giuseppe Bonaiti

FABBRICHE FERRAMENTA \* FORNITORE DEL R.R. ESERCITO E DELLA R.R. MARINA

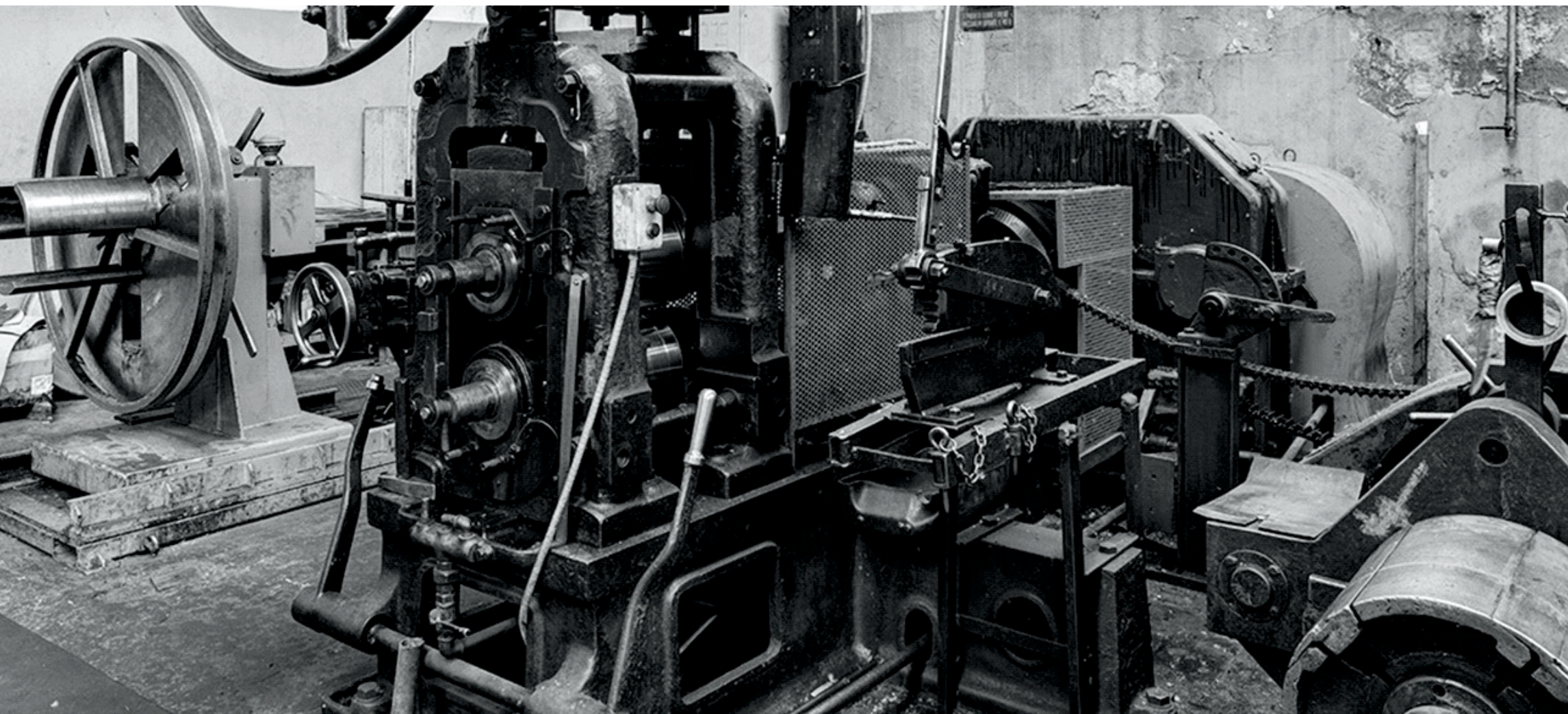
— \* SEDE IN CASTELLO LECCO \* —

TELEFONI:  
CASTELLO LECCO N° 23  
PADOVA N° 5-51 ...  
NAPOLI N° 2-78 ...

TELEGRAMMI:  
GIUSEPPE BONAITI LAORCA  
GIUSEPPE BONAITI PADOVA

*Filiali:* { PADOVA - Via Nicolò Tomaseo, 56.  
NAPOLI - Via della Libertà, 26.

*Castello Lecco, 24/11 1911*



## **01 . Origins as Bonaitis**

In the early twentieth century, the Bonaiti family, who had a strong cash flow, expanded their production department. The family became one of the leading steel groups in the Valley, controlling, with their direct and indirect holdings, 35-40% of the share capital of the Caleotto steel mill.

The Giuseppe Bonaiti company, using capital reserves accumulated during the years of the great war, and leveraging production synergies of the Caleotto group, introduced new types of products to offer to the market. By purchasing products from the Rolling Mill in Arlenico, the company began specialising in cold-rolled steel strips and steel strapping. Some of these processes were transferred to the new factory in Padua, where produced cotter pins, rivets and barbed wire were produced. The sales network was also expanded, opening in Naples, a branch with the function of a storage platform, for products destined to the markets of central and southern Italy.

In 1937 Giuseppe, Felice and Eros Bonaiti formed the company Giuseppe e Fratelli Bonaiti S.p.a., in Calolzio, about ten kilometres south of the Valley of Gerenzone.



catalogo  
**moschettoni**

s. p. a.

**giuseppe &  
f.lli bonaiti**

calolziocorte (bergamo)

GARICO MIN. ROTT. KG. 2200

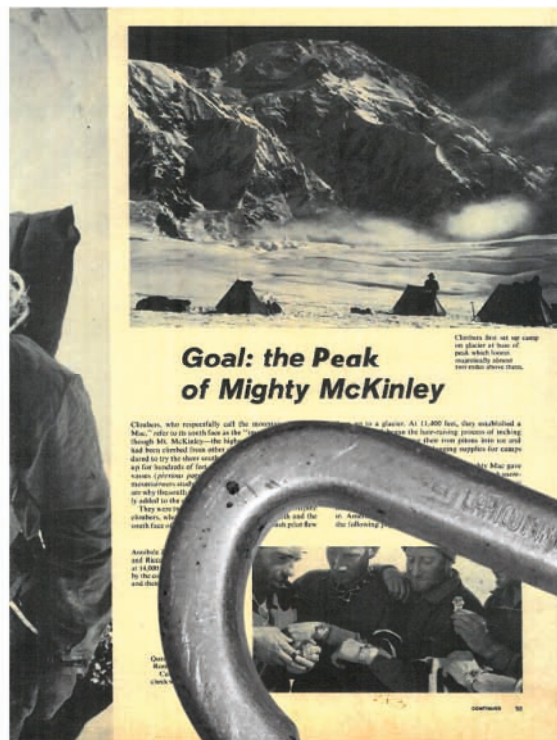
CARICO MINIMO DI ROTTURA Kg. 18



## **01 . Origins as Bonaitis**

In the fifties Giuseppe e Fratelli Bonaiti S.p.a. began producing steel carabiners used for mountaineering. In collaboration with R. Cassin, the first D-shaped carabiner for mountaineering was created. It was built by the department that produced buckles, and was intended for a new sector, in which Giuseppe e Fratelli Bonaiti S.p.a. remained the only domestic producer until 1986.

The corporate restructuring of Giuseppe e Fratelli Bonaiti S.p.a. in the 1970s led to the development of three strategic business areas: strip and wire, locks, and carabiners, which ensured economies of scale, in the procurement phase and primary processing of the product.

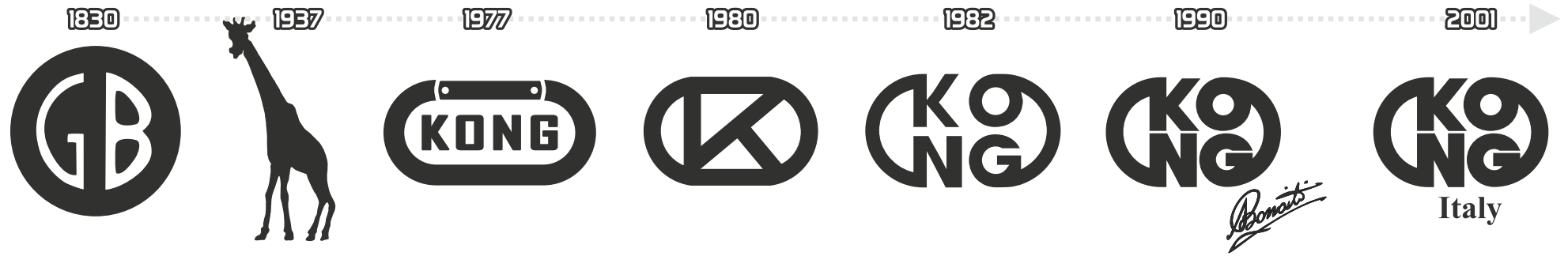


## **02 . The birth of mountaineering**

Mountaineering became a sports discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the most difficult summits were conquered; even those hitherto considered impossible. The first mountaineering manuals described the equipment that climbers should carry with them to face the climb safely. The use of carabiners to overcome the difficulties of ascents dates back to 1914, when O. Herzog, and his brother Willi, climbed the south face of Schüsselkarspitze, with the aid of pear-shaped hooks used by firemen in Munich.

In the domestic market the Bonaiti company was the only one to produce a specific carabiner for mountaineering. The technical and practical advice of R. Cassin was instrumental in improving the D-shaped carabiner for sale in Europe, and the name of the famous mountaineer made the Bonaiti name well-known to foreign importers of mountain equipment. National distribution was ensured by the same representatives that dealt with buckle products, who sold the product to hardware stores.

In the 1960s the first light alloy carabiners for extreme mountaineering were manufactured, and this new material reduced the product's weight from 200 to 65 grams. These carabiners were highly appreciated by rock climbers due to aesthetic matters, since the different colours, obtained through an anodising process, linked to the rest of their equipment.



### **03 . The birth of Kong**

The growing demand for carabiners, together with the issues of interior space, drove the management to decentralise certain processing stages.

In the 1970s, the department that produced carabiners, which was confined in a small space, needed a larger area for the cohesiveness of operations, and for its development. The warehouses of Giuseppe e Fratelli Bonaiti could not be extended due to the administrative constraints imposed by the Regulatory Plan of Calolzio. In 1977 the company purchased a plot covering 30000 m<sup>2</sup> in Monte Marengo, so that they could build a new production site, to which they would transfer the manufacture of carabiners. 1977, right here in Monte Marengo, saw the launch of Kong S.p.a., the only production plant where still today over 3000 products are distributed and sold all over the world.

In order to create a corporate image that was recognisable in the countries to which it exported its goods, in 1982 the company registered the name and trademark Kong in various countries: the current and well-known oval that recalls the outline of a carabiner.



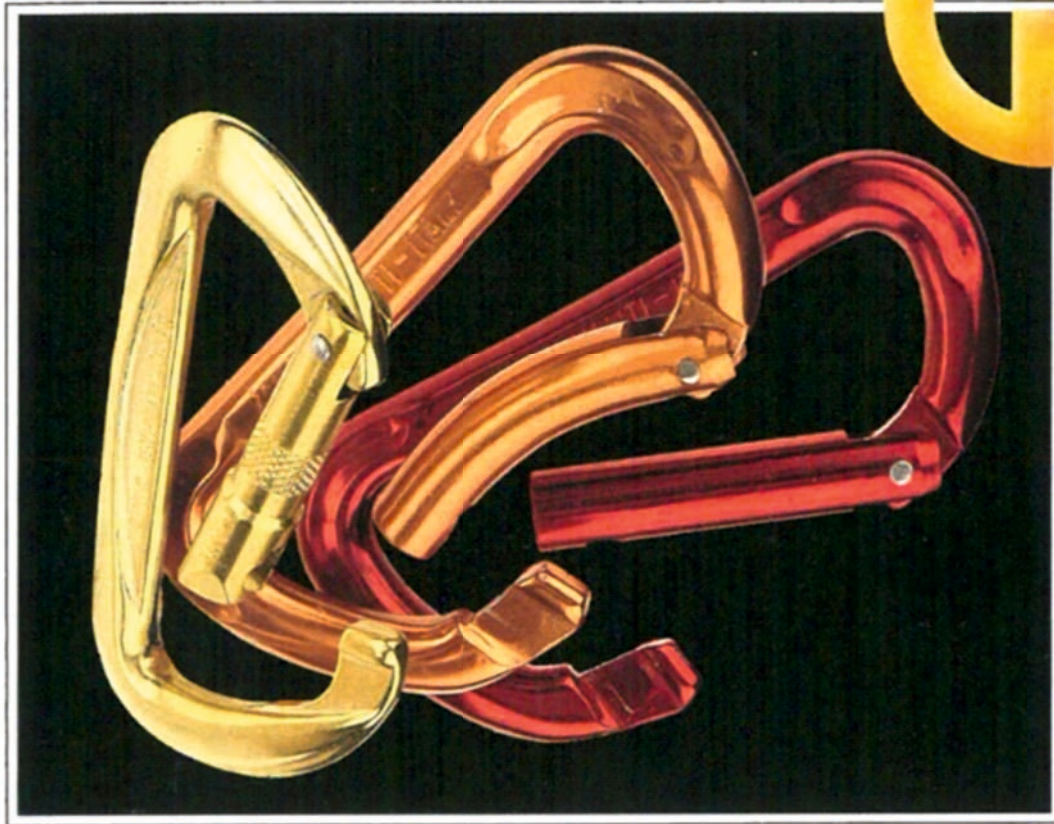
## **04 . Market expansion strategies**

At this point the development strategies of Kong involved a change of image in the eyes of the consumer, not only offering connectors, but above all safety.

The range of products grew considerably, and now included pulleys, descenders and ascenders for ropes, helmets, harnesses, but mostly they began to produce specific articles for mountain rescue such as stretchers, fishing poles and various other specific tools needed for mountaineering use, adapted to the needs of those living the mountains not only for leisure but for professional reasons.

In the early 1980s, Kong was the only Italian company that manufactured carabiners for mountaineering, while in the worldwide market there were five manufacturers: Simond and La Prade (French), Faders (Spanish), Stubai (Austrian) and Chouinard (American).

On the world market there were about eighteen different brands of connectors for rock-climbing, but ten of these were produced by Kong.



KNO

dal  
1830

*Bonatti*





## **05 . The Key Lock system**

In 1986 the company Aludesign was founded and began producing climbing carabiners. The competition from a new manufacturer led the company to introduce highly sophisticated carabiners.

The product's convenient and economical image was abandoned, in favour of a high-tech article.

In 1987 Kong filed the patent for a new carabiner fastening system, to eliminate any point that could entangle the rope. This particular system, called "Key Lock", drew its name from the shape of the joint between the lever and the body of the connector, which resembled a keyhole. Its purpose was to eliminate from the body and from the finger any bumps that might wear down the rope or impede its insertion and removal.

This fastening, in comparison with other carabiners, offered the advantage of sufficient security, even with the lever open up to 2mm.



## **06 . The Frog**

A few years later, with the same spirit of innovation, FROG was born; a revolutionary unidirectional connector with an automatic clamp, for specific anchor points.

Designed in collaboration with the Politecnico di Milano, FROG is an absolutely new connector in terms of both form and operating mechanism: FROG completely changes the concept of a "carabiner" in its capacity as a hook.

Insertion is extraordinarily fast and safe, even in anchor points that are not easily reached with classic connectors.

The FROG has been patented and to this day is known the world over as a symbolic product manufactured by Kong.



## **07 . Boating**

Meanwhile Kong began to also make its name in the nautical sector, thanks to the supply of metal accessories, shackles, rings and carabiners, required for finishing off the equipment of a vessel.

The most famous and valued products were the famous revolving or fixed joints, in carbon steel or stainless steel, that are used to connect the chain to the anchor; the range of these articles was implemented with new measures and versions and is still available in the company's catalogues.

In the late 1980s a special shackle was patented, the chain gripper, which was used to join together the chains that were used on boats, having a size ranging between 5 and 12 mm. Also complementary articles to those already in production were produced: a support for powerful outboard motors, which was an accessory already known in the U.S. market, while in Europe there were no manufacturers of this component; and a special carabiner for towing water skis equipped with quick release mechanism.

Marine production technologies specialising in anticorrosion treatments were then also applied to the rings and carabiners sold to the chemical and food industry, where the product must have a high surface resistance.



## **08 . Rescue**

Meanwhile, the production of carabiners and personal protective equipment was flanked by more complex articles intended for mountain and sea rescue operations.

With the collaboration of the emergency corps, the fishing pole "Stelvio" was created, along with the "Cevedale" tripod and innovative stretcher, "Lecco", which thanks to the unique feature of being able to be disassembled and easily transported over the shoulders, became the standard for all emergency situations where a helicopter could not reach due to bad weather conditions.

Thanks to this intuition, within a short time Kong became a reference point for the development and production of articles devoted to emergency and rescue operations, opening up the road in an area that was still fertile, and very satisfying both in economic and moral terms.





## **09 . Golf**

Alongside these new areas, towards the end of the '80s a new sports discipline was identified, to diversify production.

The decision to produce golfing items, which were not in competition with those produced by Kong, retraced one of the Bonaiti family's expansion strategies: differentiating production into an independent sector, which could then be detached from the company.

In 1989 Kong began producing all the necessary equipment for golf with a new brand named MC Creation Made in the Principality of Monaco, or more simply Monte Carlo. Some articles, such as golf clubs and bags, were assembled as made-to-measure items for customers who made specific requests for certain technical and aesthetic needs.

To publicise the new product range, sponsorship contracts were entered into, with professional players, including the well-known player Costantino Rocca.

This venture continued until the first years of 2000, when the company decided to abandon it permanently to devote itself to new areas.

**ATTACCATI AL KONG!**



## **10 . Boom years**

At this point, thanks to a range of innovative and unique products, a very aggressive sales and marketing policy was implemented.

The company participated in a series of exhibitions throughout the world, related to different sectors, from mountaineering to rescue, sailing to industry.

Between 1982 to 1990 advertising costs went up by 400% and served to consolidate the company's image worldwide.



## **11 . Interesting facts**

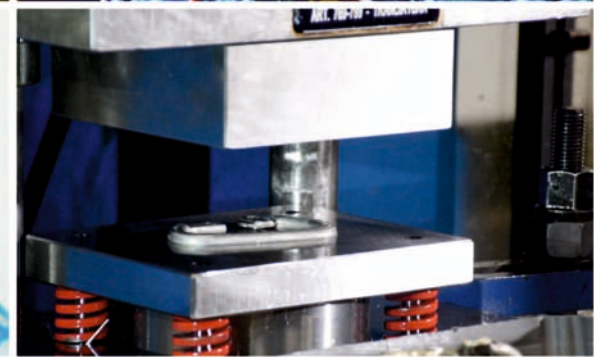
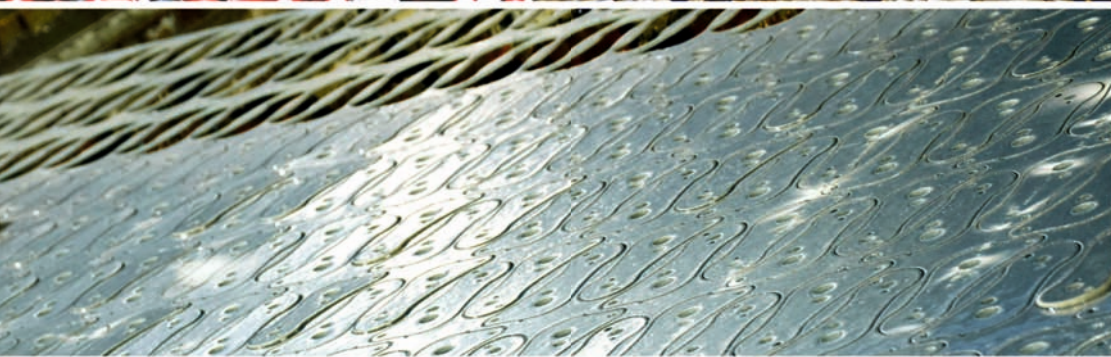
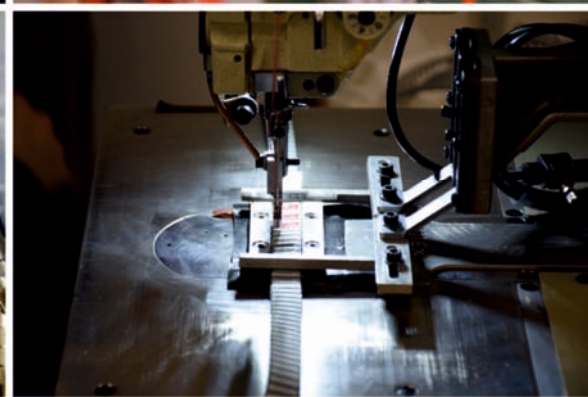
In 1978 the gravel that was used during the construction of the new factory to settle marshland, was massed downstream of the factory to create a dynamic push that would balance the structure of the buildings.

In 1986, this 300-metre long embankment was paved, and legalised as a non-sloping airfield, recognised by the A.N.P.S. (Associazione Nazionale della Polizia di Stato - National Police Association), as a section of Malpensa airport.

Today this runway is also used by the Civil Defence and Mountain Rescue helicopters for exercises in lowering and recovery using stretchers.

Currently, in addition to the Volo Club Lecco Kong, with about fifty members and around twenty aircraft, there is a very active ULM flying school which trains a few dozen new ultralight pilots every year.

Since 2017 it has also been home to the first Italian school of ENAC certified drones.



## **12 . Commercial decentralisation in strategic countries**

From the early '90s Kong began to set up companies with commercial and non-productive objectives in emerging countries. This was in order to have control and a direct presence in countries that were beginning to offer some very interesting developments and opportunities.

Kong Deutschland (1992), Kong Russia (2007), Kong USA (2009), Kong America Do Sul (2013) and the latest Kong Far East (2017) are realities that within a few years led Kong to have a global approach, with the dynamics of a "multinational".

There still remains only one production site, that of Monte Marenzo in Italy, which in a covered area of 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> employs about 80 people, including labourers, planners, designers, administrative staff and salespeople.

The role carried out by the planners and designers is particularly important; they carefully analyse, interpret and anticipate market needs.





### **13 . Future strategies**

Today Kong's core business is safety and rescue. Mountaineering techniques have been adopted in construction, where, in order to observe accident prevention regulations, workers use suitably-modified equipment, originating from the world of mountaineering. The range of products has been adapted to the standards required for work at height.

In the 2000s an area of the factory area was equipped to provide professional training; no longer just a product, but also pre and post sales support and training.

In 2014 Kong s.p.a. became enrolled in the regional register for accredited subjects due to its professional training and education services.

In 2016 it was accredited as an IRATA training company (Industrial Rope Access Trade Association), member n°5058/T.

Today there are several tens of thousands of hours of training provided regarding personnel from the armed forces, emergency first aid (FIRE BRIGADE, civil protection, etc.) and ordinary and extraordinary medical assistance (118, Red Cross and miscellaneous assistance works) as well as operators of acrobatic parks, freelancers and employees of private enterprises.



## 14 . Case History, some innovations that became benchmarks

The ability and willingness to innovate, to find original solutions to common problems, is synonymous with the good health of a company. At Kong this has always been a cornerstone for approaching the market, and over the years there have been many examples:

- the first asymmetric "D" shape carabiner
- the use of cold-forged aluminium
- the two-pins latch
- colour, plastic coated or anodised
- the first pre-assembled via ferrata kit
- the Gi-Gi plate
- the simple but ingenious KEY-LOCK System
- the CLAMP SYSTEM of the FROG connector
- the first carbon fibre spinal board X-TRIM
- the first ascender handle, FUTURA, that works in line with the rope
- the first floating stretcher designed for river Rescues, 911 CANYON
- the first electronic stabiliser for helicopter rescue stretchers KARS

In 2016 in the company created a small museum and an exhibition hall with the aim of collecting these memories and keeping them alive as a stimulus and a source of pride for employees in front of customers and visitors.

"The higher you climb, the wider you see;  
the wider you see, the longer you dream".

di Prunoti

## **15 . The link with the territory and entrepreneurial choices**

The economic crisis of 2009 crippled many national entrepreneurial companies, and also the rich territory of Lecco suffered greatly. Kong coped with the harsh blow with a number of notable business choices, especially the choice to internalise some processes previously contracted to external companies.

A new textile department, new machinery, training centre, and new sales offices gave work to internal staff, avoiding retrenchment of employees.

Today, after almost ten years, we can look back on a situation of steady growth, both in terms of turnover and the number of new recruits.

A mountaineering approach has always been part of the company's philosophy, even in terms of business development; a slow but steady climb, which for nearly two hundred years has led Kong to the summit.

As Marco Bonaiti wrote in an old catalogue:

"The higher you climb, the wider you see; the wider you see, the longer you dream"





