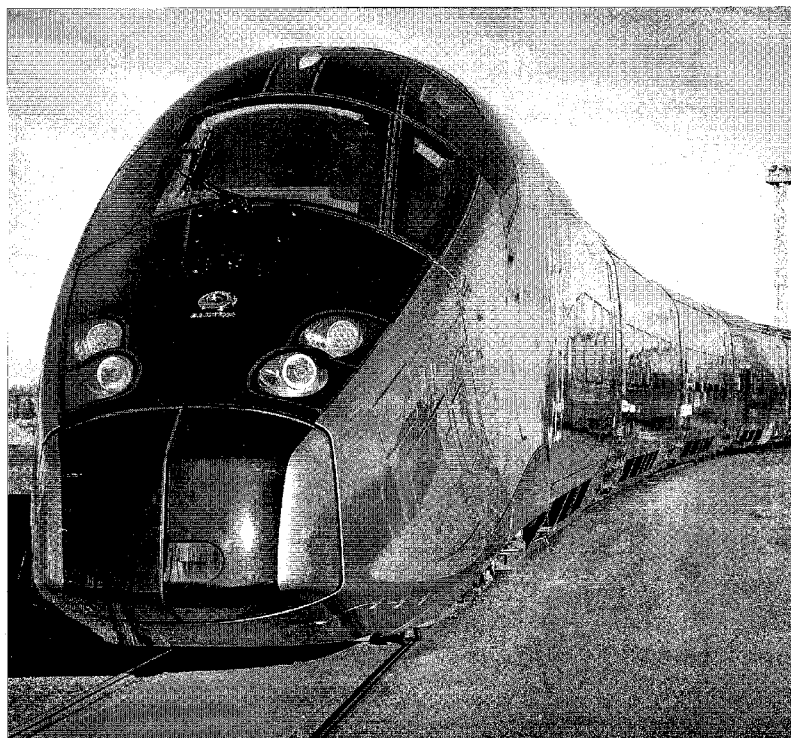


Private high-speed rail for Italy



On track: NTV will be the first operator of Alstom's AGV train, initially between Rome and Milan

Bloomberg

TRAVEL & LEISURE

By Robert Wright in London and Guy Dinmore in Rome

Europe's first privately owned high-speed train operator will launch services in September next year in a "historic event" for Italy's rail system, the company's chairman has announced.

Italy's NTV will launch its services between Rome and Milan before gradually introducing services on all its routes, which stretch from Salerno in southern Italy to Venice and Turin in the north, by the summer of 2012.

NTV will also be the first operator of Alstom's new AGV train, the French company's successor to its TGV high-speed train design.

The first of 25 Italos - as NTV calls its version of the train - was completed on May 10 and is undergoing

testing at Alstom's plant at La Rochelle on France's Atlantic coast.

NTV is chaired by Luca di Montezemolo, chairman of Ferrari, the sports car maker, and Fiat.

Mr Montezemolo, along with two other Italian businessmen, controls 33.5 per cent of NTV. Intesa Sanpaolo, the bank, and SNCF, France's state-owned train operator, both own 20 per cent, while Generali Insurance holds a further 15 per cent.

Giuseppe Sciarone, a former head of passenger services for Trenitalia, Italy's state-owned train operator, is chief executive of the new venture.

Mr di Montezemolo said the Italo was the result of a passionate effort by a group of private investors.

"The opening up of rail transport to competition is a historic event that will bring great benefits to

travellers and will be a positive stimulus for the country's transport system," he said.

The launch of NTV's service follows Italy's introduction of legislation allowing for competition between operators on domestic long-distance routes. Another group, founded by AirOne,

'The opening up of rail transport to competition is a historic event'

Luca di Montezemolo, chairman of NTV

the airline, was considering a rival service but it dropped the plans after its 2008 merger with Alitalia, the struggling Italian flag-carrier.

NTV aims to exploit the completion last year of much of Italy's high-speed

rail network to win over passengers from air travel.

The company's initial Rome to Milan services will take about three hours - which is usually the maximum journey time over which high-speed rail can compete well with air.

The Italo trains will offer far greater luxury than the ETR500 trains built by Italy's Ansaldo Breda and used by Trenitalia on the same routes. The trains will offer continuous WiFi internet connection, television and, in one coach, cinema-standard film viewing.

A successful debut for the AGV could be vital to the project's success. The AGV's motors are distributed along the train, with all electrical equipment hidden beneath the floors, as on Siemens' successful Velaro train model. TGV-type trains are driven by two heavy power cars at either end.

