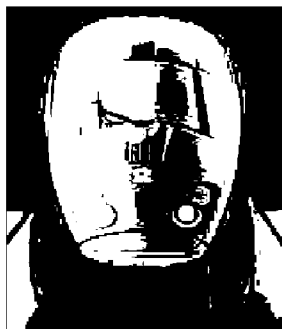


Italian trains fast-forward into the future



The AGV: capable of 356mph

British holidaymakers will soon be able to travel throughout Italy on a network of high-speed trains, run by the chairman of Ferrari.

Nuovo Trasporto Viaggiatori (NTV), the first privately owned high-speed train operator in Italy, is to operate a fleet of 25 futuristic-looking trains, travelling at speeds of up to 225mph.

The new services, called Italo, will launch in early 2011 linking cities such as Turin, Milan, Bologna, Florence, Naples, Bari and Rome and will reduce journey times by up to a third. The journey from Rome to Milan will fall from more than four hours to three hours.

It will represent a new development for Italian trains, which have a

reputation for a lack of punctuality and comfort, and will bring competition to both the state-owned railways and the national airline, Alitalia. Giuseppe Sciarone, the chief executive of NTV, said: "Passengers will now have

the opportunity to choose not

only between air and railway transport, but also between different railway companies."

The fleet of 25 trains, called Automotrice Grande Vitesse (AGV) and made by a French manufacturer, Alstom, cost €650 million (£580m). The train is a modern version of the French TGV. It has reached a speed of 356mph.

SNCF, the French rail company, has also invested in the project – a move that Luca Di Montezemolo, the chairman of Ferrari (and now of NGV), believes will bring opportunities to expand the Italo services further afield – to Paris, Brussels and beyond.

The trains' Ferrari connection does not end with Mr Montezemolo – the interiors are to be designed

by Giorgetto Giugiaro, the Italian car designer, who has produced supercars such as Ferraris, Maseratis and Lamborghinis. The company promises plush furnishings, bigger windows and more space.

The company claims that its environmental credentials are better than those of its rivals – the AGV trains will consume 15 per cent less energy than any current high-velocity trains in operation and 98 per cent of the trains will be made from recyclable materials. The AGV produces 2.2g of CO₂ (per passenger, per kilometre) – which is 70 times less than is produced by a standard passenger aircraft (153g).

Charles Starmer-Smith

