

Stefano Pelingoa

by Tom Shaw

He sits in the car with his partner, watching the night owls of Rome, cruising up one street after another. The cackle of the radio breaks the silence and he quickly finds himself involved in a high speed chase through the winding street and traffic circles of the city and then into the suburbs, lights and siren going.

A day in the life of a pool player.

It is, anyway, if you're Stefano Pelingoa, who has been a member of the Italian State Police, trained in high-speed driving for The Flying Squad since 1985. Between pedal-to-the-metal chases and more normal beat patrol, no one can call it a dull occupation.

Pelingoa first picked up a cue at twelve years old, "because I wanted to emulate my all-time favorite singer-actor, Dean Martin. I never did get to meet the guy, but I sure learned how to play pool."

When he was a kid (he was born May 11, 1964) there were no pool



tables in Italy so they used to play pool games on the Italian billiard tables with their high wall cushions and small holes. "That definitely sharpened our aim," he said, "but hurt your position play. I love Straight Pool (14.1) and had a high run of 107."

Most Italian players rejected pool when it was introduced in the early '80s, feeling it was too easy. "They didn't understand its potential," Pelingoa said, "and I had the everyday problem of finding good opponents, even into the late 80s. On TV I saw Paul Gerni, who later became a friend, and who showed me trick shots. It was my solution, because I could do them by myself."

By 1989 he was a trick shot pro, giving exhibitions and traveling under the sponsorship of Longoni Cues. "Renzo Longoni is recognized worldwide as one of the greatest experts on woods, and his son Pierluigi is a smart, hard working



Italy's Stefano Pelingoa travels Europe, Asia and North America doing exhibitions and playing in tournaments.



young fellow. With their experience and my knowledge we made great playing cues for trick shots."

Pelinga is also "very happy with his relationship with the owners of the Tiger Products company – great people who make excellent laminated cue tips, along with many other valuable accessories. My other sponsor is Gorina Cloth, a Spanish company with ancient traditions and huge experience in weaving. I find their 'Basalt Cloth' to be very suitable for trick shots. By the way, I will perform at their booth at the upcoming BCA Expo in Las Vegas."

think that I still hold the ESPN 'Trick Shot Magic' record with 13 successful shots in a row."

After meeting Pelinga everyone comes away saying what a likeable guy he is. There's no arrogance or flaming ego, just a ready smile and a respect for the game and its players.

In Italy today the popularity of pool games breaks down to be roughly 70% 9-ball, 20% 8-ball and only 10% play Straight Pool. No other games like Rotation or One Pocket are normally played. Pelinga says gambling on pool is not legal but, like everywhere else,

pool could be more popular, in my opinion. In the last 20 years our federations and most of the manufacturers were not equal to their task with the consequent loss of popularity of the sport. In spite of that, a couple of years ago an unofficial source stated that in Italy, where the population is close to 60 million, 4-5 million people play pool or billiards occasionally and 1 million consistently. Among the various games, I'd say that 40% of the players play pool. Just as many play the 5-pins game (which is the traditional game that is now played on billiard tables). About 15% still play the hybrid game I

The Russian press highlights Mr. Pelingas recent visit.

For the last ten years Pelinga has been practicing exclusively at one of the nicest pool halls in Rome, the Laser Club. "I have my table always reserved so I never needed to buy one," he said. "I end up practicing about 2-3 hours every other day, less than half the time I need. Thank God so far it has proved to be enough!"

During Billiards International's Trick Shot Magic shows on ESPN Pelinga has demonstrated his considerable skills. "In our 40-shot Pro format a few times I scored 200 or more points," he said, "which is about 2/3 of the total score. I

about 30% of the players do put up a wager.

Between work, his wife Helena, and playing and practicing, there's little time for anything else. "I was a pretty good boxer when I was younger," Pelinga said. Now, relaxing means listening to a Dean Martin record or catching a movie. He travels often, doing exhibitions mostly in Europe and North America. "Twenty countries and fifteen states so far," he said with a smile.

His major disappointment is the lack of pool promotion in Italy. "Actually

mentioned earlier, using a regular set of pool balls on an old Italian table, in a game similar to the 8-Ball but in which the winning ball is the one ball, and the eight and the fifteen ball must be pocketed in opposite side pockets. The remaining 5% play billiards."

Having an internationally celebrated Italian pool Trick Shot champion can certainly help the game grow, both in Italy and abroad. When the artist has the skill and positive personality of Stefano Pelinga it just may take off at a very high speed.