

Schoolship Amerigo Vespucci

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"You are the most beautiful Ship in the world", this was the message once radioed to the bridge of the "Amerigo Vespucci" Italian Navy schoolship. A three masts sailing ship, with square sails and jibs, the "Vespucci" is for sure one of the most well known Ambassadors of Italy in the major foreign harbor towns.

Representing Italy and its Navy is only one of the ship tasks, her main role being training: helmsmen and, at the end of the school year, Officer Cadets who conclude their first year at the Livorno Naval Academy, embark on the "Vespucci".

Maneuvering sheets and halyards made with vegetable ropes and hemp sails, sleeping in hammocks arranged every night in classrooms, some 100 young men every year learn to love and to respect the sea. They are the same that a few years later we will find in combat and information centers equipped with the most sophisticated electronic instruments, or as pilots in jets and helicopters, dipped in the reality of the most modern technologies which seem thousands of miles away from the slow sailing of the "Vespucci", but which have in common the main factor: the scenario in which they operate, that is the sea.

Future Italian Navy officers start their sea life on board the "Vespucci" since the early thirties: the ship was launched in 1931 at the Royal Arsenal in Castellamare di Stabia, near Naples. 82.38 m (270.28 ft.) long, 100.5 m (329.72 ft.) considering the bowsprit, 15.56 m (51.05 ft.) wide and 6.65 m (21.82 ft.) tall, with a seven meters (22.97 ft.) draught, the "Vespucci" has a full load displacement of 4,145 m.tons.

Her hull is build with steel planking riveted to the ribs while the deck is covered in teakwood planks. The ship has three main decks, plus bow quarter deck and stern bridge deck; the latter hosts Officers living spaces as well as the Captain's "Council Hall" which doors open on stern balcony on which we can read in golden letters the ship name. Details are particularly well cared of, and the same applies to the sail rigging: propulsion is insured by the 27 hemp sails which total surface is of about 3,000 sq. meters (32,293 sq.ft.), while some 30 km (18.6 miles) of vegetable cables of different diameters are used for current handling.

When sails are in use steerage is normally provided by the stern

manual rudder station, equipped with four steering wheels activated by eight helmsmen; on the bridge we find the electro-hydraulic bow rudder station, used when sailing on engines, while in the same structure we find the chart-room used for Cadets training.

The "Vespucci" has 11 rescue boats, four of which powered by rows or sails, known as "palinschermi"; by time to time Cadets carry out competitions with them or, following an old tradition, they tow the "Vespucci" with arms-power! There is obviously an engine power plant, in the form of two diesel engines of 1,500 hp each linked to two generators which power an electric motor linked to a four-blade propeller.

Between tradition and electronics - the ship does not lack the most updated detection and navigation systems - the "Vespucci" complement of 276 men, augmented in summertime by some 100 Cadets from the Naval Academy, bring each year the "old lady" and the Italian flag, with the symbols of the four Marine Republics, on the seas of all the world.

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