

FINNIES THE JEWELLER

TIMELESS

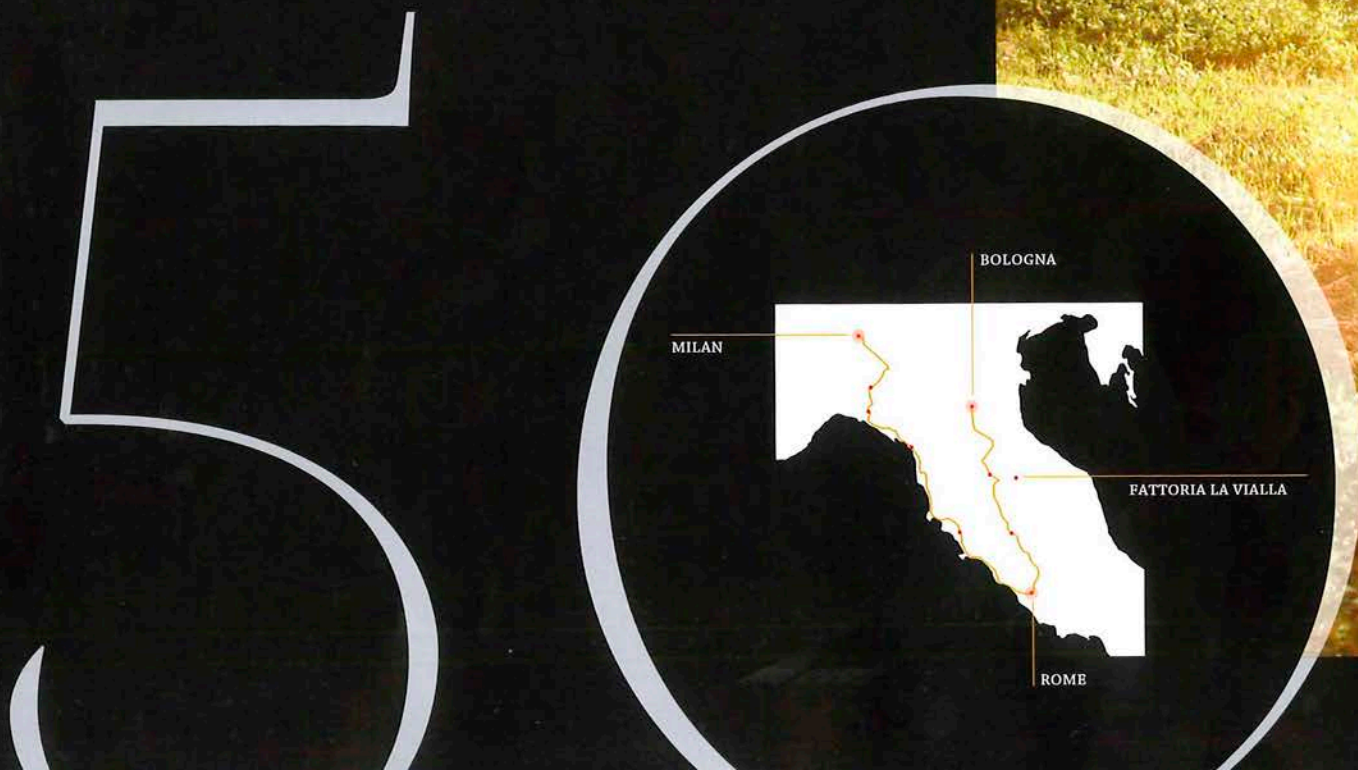
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IL **GRANDE** GIRO

LAMBORGHINI TURNS 50 THIS YEAR, AND IT WAS ONLY FITTING THAT THE WORLD'S MOST OUTRAGEOUS CAR BRAND CELEBRATED ITS BIGGEST MILESTONE YET WITH THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS GATHERING IMAGINABLE: SOME 320 CARS, FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE GLOBE, IN CONVOY FOR 3 DAYS THROUGH 1,200KM OF ITALY'S MOST BEAUTIFUL COUNTRYSIDE. ALLOW **STEVE HIGGINS** OF H.R OWEN LAMBORGHINI LONDON TO TAKE YOU THERE, WITH A ROLICKING TOUR DIARY SPICED UP BY HIS OWN V12 PERSONALITY...





When was the last time, driving over the speed limit, that you received some attitude from the law? That recently, eh? Well, when was the last time that attitude was total derision for not driving over the speed limit enough? Welcome to Italy. Or, more precisely, the Lamborghini 50th Anniversary Grande Giro. The police outriders first seemed a novelty, but soon after leaving Milan, we realised they would be a necessity. The first witness to this was an Aventador driver who missed the first intersection off the autostrada section. Deciding to drive as quick as he dared to the next junction (wherever that was) to somehow find his way to rejoin the route, he saw blue lights in his rearview mirror. Slowing, not believing his luck just 15 minutes into the tour, he awaited the inevitable Latin altercation.

The bike arrived and indicated that the lost Lambo follow him. After a time, it halted both the LP 700 and the following traffic across the three-lane motorway. The rider dismounted and ran to a gap in the central reservation bridged by a chain. He unhooked it, dropped it to the floor and calmly stepped into the opposite carriageway and stopped the traffic. He guided the Lambo through the gap and waved it on its way in the return direction.

After the cop had reopened the motorway, he caught up and came upon a truck that was refusing to pull out left. This would take a little more direct, hands-on policing. Keeping a grip on his throttle, the cop threw his right leg under his torso across the tank. Now, riding sidesaddle, he undertook the truck on the hard shoulder until he was directly facing its passenger window and banged on it with his left fist. Once the truck had moved, the road had cleared and his leg was back on its correct foot peg, our hero lay on his motorbike and casually took it up to 140mph and on to the required junction.

Before then though, 11 cars including a demo 570 Superleggera – driven by my colleague Sophie Atkins and me – had 1,200 or so kilometres to cover over 3 days through some of the most breathtaking parts of Italy, in amongst a convoy of epic proportions. The drive into Milan to the parc fermé in the Piazza Castello slowly began to reveal just what 320-odd Lamborghinis actually represent in sheer area alone. In length, it would bridge over three miles, with a combined power of 190,000bhp. Sophie and I couldn't help but consider what could go wrong during this event. Just feeding, accommodating and administering the 700 participants and support crew was going to be a mammoth task.

The first stress test on hospitality was the welcome dinner at the Hangar Bicocca the night before the start. A vast factory complex, recently converted into an art space, it certainly possessed the required volume even with half of it occupied by an immense installation by Anselm Kiefer.

The dinner itself didn't fail, as the food, as it often is in Italy, was perfect and the wine not in short supply. If this was how hospitality was to continue, we'd be fine. Speeches over, glasses drained, it was an early trip back on the coaches to the Westin Hotel. As I weighed the immeasurable amount of high-octane fun I could have over the next three days (along with the downside potential of wrecking a £200k Lamborghini in a heartbeat) I declined the nightcap, and for once, I took the sensible path to an early bath. The real pulse of the event started on the first B road blast to lunch at the 7th-century San Colombian abbey in Bobbio, a charming village in the Trebbia river valley, which Hemingway described as 'the most beautiful valley in the world'.

The first half of the drive was from Bobbio to Forte dei Marmi, via a winding ascent through mountain villages so small they don't even show up on a search engine, let alone maps. The arrival of a few hundred Lamborghinis in Rezzaglio, with a significant percentage deciding they needed fuel, led to a bonanza for the local petrol station which we drained dry.

Gathering pace, our tight pack of six or seven assorted late model Lambos started to get into the groove. Drives like this bring out the hero in all of us, but are often like running marathons. You think you're doing great at mile 21 then someone overtakes you dressed as a giant squirrel. Our red squirrel today was a Rosso Jalpa drifting in the wet before us after we'd caught him in our 4WD, EBD, ESC, AC kit. An Aventador directly behind him (an experienced and successful karter in his day) called and told us on speaker what a legend this guy was. Tufty, whoever you are and wherever you are, we salute you.

Another evening, another spectacular dinner, notable for the president's announcement that two cars, one Brit and one Belgian, were in deep trouble with the off-piste police when they'd taken a wrong turn...

Meanwhile, back at the club, a woman had passed out at the upstairs bar. An ambulance was called and whilst waiting for help to arrive, fellow patrons of the restaurant did the right thing and took pictures of the reclining Venus with their smartphones in one hand and a glass of Rosso di Bolgheri Donne Fittipaldi in the other and got on with the rest of the night. As did I...

The next thing I knew I was waking up in my room at the Hotel Goya. Pretty annoyed with myself, I remember looking out at the beautiful morning shot to shards by a cruel hangover. A lot of water and a couple of Nurofen prepared me for the (oh-so-very slow) 215km drive to Grosseto air force base for lunch and the following 188 km drive to Rome.

The salt fortress of Albinia, the beach of Fonteblanda, the necropolises of Tarquinia all sound like something out of lost 1970s episodes of Dr Who but all appeared en route along the Tuscan coast before we turned inland towards Rome via the Vatican City. The junction off the autostrada to Rome was a logjam of Lamborghinis – a half-kilometre stretch at a complete standstill. We had had the privilege of driving through some of the best Italy has to offer. Now, it was a hot grind. The pitiful sight of Miura after Miura laid up at the side of the road, clamshells open and adding to the city heat wasn't a nice way to end the day, but a reminder to anyone looking back to 'better' times to take the rose-tinted spectacles off.

Rome to Bologna via San Guistino Valdarno was the longest day's drive of the tour at 440km. Sophie got in an autostrada groove before turning off for a great uphill section to the stunning, once impregnable, clifftop city of Orvieto. The procession through ancient streets, that had become the norm over the last few days, took us along an anti-clockwise circuit of the city Thomas Aquinas once taught in, and now the descent was to become one of the best sections of the tour. Reading the

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road well, allowing the car to run wide through safe corners, on the brakes earlier, back on the accelerator sooner, Sophie's performance was starting to rock a few boats. I was loving it and not just because of the quality of the drive: I also got a chance to witness the beauty of Umbria as a spectator.

Lunch was at the thousand-year-old Il Borro estate (as I said earlier, Lamborghini doesn't disappoint for venues), but knowing the quality of the final 174km stretch thanks to years of reading Ducati road tests, I was keen to drive one of the region's finest cars on these roads. We left in a convoy of ten cars with an outrider at each end. This was a spirited and enjoyable drive, wannabe heroes throwing their cars around as ragged and messy as you like, forgetting that there were two guys leading us expertly on just two wheels, in the wet.

The polizia casually and without warning peeled off at the viewpoint. We were now left alone to descend the legendary Futa Pass. Our 570 in front, a 560 behind followed by a 670 and finally an Aventador. The four of us throttled back and pushed the sticks forward. Everything had been saved up for this: nothing but tight lefts, tight rights, followed by flowing curves, straight dashes and hairpins, putting more demands on the 570 in these last 70 kilometres than it had endured for the last 1,100.



That night in Bologna, the drinks went from small beers at a quiet Italian bar to Jägerbombs at a backstreet reggae bar. We found it hard to work out if this was a fitting end or not to our last day. We concluded it was 50/50, so moved on again to one of our favourite bars, Le Stanze, in an old converted church. It was going so well until... Vecchia Romagna Etichetta Nera. A free day in Bologna with the option of seeing the concourse evaluation at 8.30am? Yes, well, missed that one... The procession to the factory at 4pm, however, was a true homecoming for all the cars participating and a spiritual one for many of the people who have had a relationship with Automobili Lamborghini for many years, me included. Tears were shed by more than one person at the biggest, most exclusive party in town for the last decade. Amazing fireworks afterwards, a gig by Paul Young (Paul Young?) Midge Ure (Midge Ure?) Howard Jones (Howard Jones?)... OK, so it wasn't perfect but it was as near as it could be with a new model announced (the Urus SUV) a one-off celebratory creation by Walter De Silva (Egoista) and that was that for another ten years. The Giro viewed as a whole event? Lamborghini pulled it off, wholesale.

In ten years' time, I don't believe you will be able to get away with what we just had. It was exactly what Lamborghini is about: extreme, uncompromising and oh-so Italian. Manufacturers talk about customers buying lifestyles when they acquire their products. With Lamborghini, that is exactly what you get. A lifestyle. But there is a cost. To get the best from it, like in life, you get what you bring to it. Just being born ain't enough. Writing a cheque for a great car just ain't enough either I'm afraid.

So, if you're thinking of buying a dream and you don't get that, then, fratello, you're looking to join the wrong family. Capiche?



LA DOLCE VITA

STEWART AND SARAH DAWSON OF FINNIES ARE FREQUENT VISITORS TO ITALY, A DESTINATION THEY SIMPLY ADORE. WHEN THEY RETURN TO THEIR HOME TURF, THEY LOVE NOTHING MORE THAN TO BE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO SAVOUR THE ITALIAN DELIGHTS OF FATTORIA LA VIALLA

La Vialla is a family-run eco-sustainable farm, and is one of the oldest and largest in the Chianti area. Since 1978, it has belonged to the Lo Franco family who have implemented organic farming techniques from the very beginning. Its picturesque location covers 1,342 hectares, of which half is made of vines, olive trees, pastureland and arable land, whilst the other half is dedicated to woodland.

Wine, oil, sheep's milk cheese, pasta, sauces – products full of genuine, long-forgotten flavours and fruits of passionate labour, cultivation, craftsmanship, research and expertly managed processing – are available for home delivery, both in the surrounding area and internationally.

Tantalizingly tasty gourmet hampers made up of traditional, authentic food is the farm's specialty. Each hamper is a treasure trove of delicious and delightful treats, brimming with luxuries and surprises chosen for their unique and outstanding qualities. Whatever the occasion might be, a hamper is always the perfect gift – and with the festive season fast approaching, this decadent cornucopia of goodies is ideal for treating seasoned gourmants to the finest fare that Fattoria La Vialla has to offer.