



# Out and about

# Italian CHALLENGE

RICHARD GUNN takes part in the very first Terre di Canossa International Classic Cars Challenge in a variety of different machines

If you haven't heard of the Terre di Canossa International Classic Cars Challenge, that's not too surprising. This exciting blast through northern Italy is brand new. However, if its successful first staging is anything to go by, we reckon it has the potential to be one of the more prestigious of the European historic car runs.

Classic Car Weekly's introduction to the rally was at the Techno Classica Essen show in Germany, when news editor Dan Powell happened across the stand promoting the event. He must have said something extremely nice because, a few weeks later, Luigi Orlandini, president of organising body Scuderia Tricolore di Reggio Emilia, contacted CCW Towers to ask if we wanted to cover the run. Naturally, Dan jumped at the chance. Unfortunately, on the way up, he hit his head on CCW's tight schedules – made even more extreme by all the recent bank holidays – and came back to earth with a bump. With little chance of him being able to escape, he handed the invitation over to me.

Thus I found myself bound for Bologna's Marconi airport. Because of the last minute nature of the trip, it hadn't been possible to arrange a car to bring over from England. I was tempted to try and nurse

my Allegro over there, to see how well Austin's Italian-titled saloon would blend in with the Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Alfas and Lancias. And also to see if anybody could figure out why, when the Italian firm Innocenti built Allegros, it called them by the very English-sounding Regent title instead. But lack of time meant that there wasn't the opportunity to prepare it. Instead, a car would be available for me when I arrived. But I had no idea what it would be.

The answer to this mystery became clear once I'd reached the start of the event, in the ancient old town of Reggio Emilia. En route, we'd passed close by Modena and Sant'Agata Bolognese, homes of Ferrari and Lamborghini respectively. No wonder this part of Italy refers to itself as Motor Valley. Perhaps the proximity of these two sports car legends might hold a clue as to what would be awaiting me?



1927 Lancia Lambda attracts much attention en route



Maurizio Farace & Anna Maria Calabrese in a 1969 MGC



Giordano Mozzi & Stefania Biacca in a '33 Aston Martin



Derek Kemp & Phil Audley in a BRG '66 Triumph Spitfire

## NORFOLK'S FINEST

Actually, no. Instead, I found something that had originated just down the road from CCW's home city of Peterborough. Fresh from East Anglia was one of Norfolk's finest in the sleek white shape of a new Lotus Evora, Hethel's current 3.5-litre V6 mid-engined offering and, to my eyes, something of a successor to the iconic Esprit ahead of the intended revival of that name in 2013. With Lotus as one of the main sponsors of the Challenge, it had provided a fleet of its current range as press and support transport. Of course, this classic motoring journalist with a 007 fixation would have preferred an original Esprit – especially in white – but a borrowed Lotus of any sort is not to be sniffed at. And it would give me a good opportunity to see how well the Evora compared with its illustrious predecessors sprinkled with the handling magic of Colin Chapman.

Proof that this was being regarded as a major event came from the fact that the arriving cars were displayed in Reggio Emilia's main square, the

Piazza della Teatro, with overnight patrols by both private guards and the local carabinieri. This rather flamboyant military police force, not wanting to be outdone by all the expensive and impressive classics surrounding them, had brought along their only Lamborghini Gallardo patrol car. Well, if somebody had attempted to nick one of the participating Ferraris, a Fiat Panda, um, panda car might not have quite cut the mustard giving chase. The CSAI – the Italian equivalent of our Motor Sports Association – had also honoured the Challenge with the title of 'Grande Evento', an accolade that is only bestowed on four events in Italy.

The 57 cars competing were quite the Heinz variety, ranging from a 1927 Lancia Lambda through to a 1974 Porsche 911, by way of two 1933 Aston Martin Le Mans, a stylish 1938 Lancia Aprilia, two Jaguar XK120s and a 1965 E-type, a million Euro Ferrari 275 GTB/2, Maserati Mistral, Lamborghini Espada and enough Alfa Giuliettas

to keep any Romeo happy. MGs also featured surprisingly strongly, with two MGAs, an MGC, an MG SA and a PB Midget, while rival British marques Austin-Healey and Triumph were represented by a 100 and a TR2 and Spitfire. There was even a Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud III – perhaps not the most obvious of vehicles for a competitive event, but what a terribly civilised way to take part. Most of the teams were Italian, although Russians, Germans, Swiss and a handful of Brits were also present.

While the International Classic Cars Challenge styles itself as a race, it is actually more a regularity trial, with navigation by tulip diagrams and certain timed sections to test the skills of the teams and work out overall winners. However, the schedule allows for gentle driving if you prefer, with a chance to stop and admire the stunning scenery. And it also means that something like a 1950s Fiat 1100 has as much a chance of 'winning' as a Ferrari 365 GTC, examples of which also took part.



## Classic Gatherings in the UK and worldwide

### THE KING OF CHEESE

With technical and licence checks and the main briefing out of the way, it was time for the opening dinner in the Teatro Municipale Romolo Valli, overlooking the square with the cars and an illuminated fountain displaying the green, white and red of the Italian flag. A formal affair with food overseen by a Michelin-starred chef, it was a chance for the crews to get to know each other and overdose on cheese. With Reggio being the centre of Parmesan production – known as the King of Cheese in a country obviously unfamiliar with Graham Norton – there was a lump the size of a Fiat 500 for diners to chip away at. Dial in the free-flowing Ferrari Trento sparkling wine, and there were probably some interesting dreams that night.

The following day saw the cars leave from 9am, departing from a red-carpeted ramp to the cheers of flag-waving schoolchildren. I was partnered with a glamorous female Italian journalist who, unfortunately, wasn't familiar with reading tulip route books and couldn't speak any English. The sole limit of our conversation was commenting on when it was sunny and when it wasn't. Which



Nicola Pedroni & Marija Popadnicenko in a Ferrari F430 F1

might have been great when sitting outside a piazza coffee shop, but wasn't too much help in navigating a white Lotus through a busy Italian town. I knew things weren't going to plan when I glanced at the route book during her protestations to head under a "ponte" (bridge) ahead, only to discover she was reading the page that explained what the map symbols stood for!

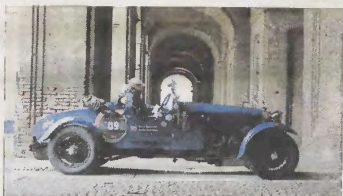
After getting hopelessly lost, we admitted defeat – albeit in different vernaculars – and headed back under the phantom ponte to the starting point, to find another of the English Lotus teams, this time in an Elise, also bewildered and disorientated. We eventually fell into a convoy behind Lotus' head of global marketing operations, who managed to successfully lead us back onto the main route. However, even he got lost on a few occasions. As he was a native Italian, my navigator jumped ship to guide him instead – hopefully in a language they could both understand.



Richard Gunn and Luciano Caporali prepare to leave Borgo Val di Taro in the surprisingly agile 1927 Lancia Lambda Series VII



The 1927 Lancia Lambda charges towards Parma



A Russian-entered 1928 Om 665 Superba in Parma



Richard Nava & Marica Schroder in their 1964 Fiat 1500



The Italian police provided their Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4 as an escort vehicle. Now that's just showing off



Citroën DS's hydropneumatic suspension allowed it to compete on an equal footing with Porsches on mountain passes

## THE ROUTE

### DAY ONE

Reggio Emilia – Castelnova Monti – Sarzana – La Spezia (202.30 kilometres/125.7 miles)

### DAY TWO

La Spezia – Borgo Val di Taro – Varano de' Melagari Autodromo R Paletti Circuit – Parma (228.22 kilometres/141.8 miles)

### DAY THREE

Parma – Guastalla – Reggio Emilia (116.67 kilometres/72.5 miles)

### TOTAL

547.19 kilometres/340 miles



## CHASING A LAMBORGHINI

Outside of the towns, the scenery was superb, as we climbed high into the Appennines, past sinister castles perched on peaks. I abandoned my escorts in Castelnova Monti when we caught up with some of the other classics and trailed them into the clouds through some spectacular high altitude passes. One of the most memorable moments came on the descent, when I fell in behind the blue haze of the spiritedly-driven Lamborghini Espada and pursued it around hairpins back to sea level. The V12 leviathan might have had the edge in a straight line, but on bends, it lumbered while the Lotus danced.

The day ended in La Spezia, a harbour town on the western coast. Again, the importance of the event was underlined by a gala dinner hosted by the Italian navy at an aristocratic mansion. Seafood was much in evidence. So was yet more Parmesan.

The following morning saw a series of tests within the naval base. I'd been intending to transfer to the back of a 1967 Citroën DS Prefecture for the day, until it was found that rally rules prohibited more than two occupants to each car. That confined me to a support vehicle, which at least allowed me to appreciate the landscape of wine-producing villages clinging doggedly onto steep hillsides as we headed for the lunch stop of Borgo Val di Taro.

There, hurried negotiations secured me the vacant passenger seat in the 1922 Lancia Lambda Series

VII of Luciano Caporali. "You'll enjoy this – he's completely crazy," I was assured as I strapped on my essential flying helmet and goggles for another blast over the mountains towards Parma, hanging on for dear life as Luciano wrung similar performance from his 84-year old Lancia as I'd been getting from the Lotus. The V4 engine, which sounded like it had been pilfered from a propeller-driven fighter plane, was surprisingly lusty and proved capable of catching much younger vehicles. It was an exhilarating experience, especially when we did a lap of the short but twisty Varano de' Melagari Autodromo R Paletti circuit not long before reaching Parma and another gala dinner complete with a musical tribute to former local resident Giuseppe Verdi and, as usual, a mountain of Parmesan. For the final day, the cars departed through the ancient archways of the Piazza della Pilotta in Parma. I'd managed to grab myself the navigator's place in the Citroën DS of Gianni Marchetti, president of the Club Auto Moto d'Epoca Reggiano. I'd also managed to gain myself a serious hangover – something I was blaming entirely on an excess of cheese – so the DS's compliant hydropneumatic suspension was extremely welcome.

Unfortunately, there was also some major map-work to be done, and the amount of rally stickers on Gianni's Goddess suggested he was a serious contender in this sort of event. Unfortunately, once again, a common language was not something we shared. Hand signals turned out fine for 'left', 'right', 'straight ahead' and 'follow that Porsche', but I messed up badly on the timed sections and, by the end of the rally in Reggio Emilia, we were well down the rankings. Gianni was very gracious about all his hard work being undone by a motoring journalist, perhaps because I'd shown him a picture of my Citroën CX before we set off, thus proving we shared a mutual faith. But I still felt terrible and found somebody bilingual at the finish point to apologise profusely to him on my behalf.

The awards ceremony was held in Reggio's Sala del Tricolore where, in 1797, the green, white and red Italian flag was first unveiled. It was an appropriate place for the finale of an excellent event that had showcased some of the best scenery – and cars – that this part of northern Italy has to offer.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Dates for the 2012 Terre di Canossa International Classic Cars Challenge have yet to be confirmed, but organiser Luigi Orlandini confirmed that it will be taking place, probably around April. The rally is open to any classics built between 1919 and 1975, and British teams are especially welcome, with most of the organisational and

support teams speaking very good English. Keep an eye on [www.granpremioteredicanossa.it](http://www.granpremioteredicanossa.it) for information (there is an English language option). The website also contains video, photos and details on this year's staging. Alternatively email [info@granpremioteredicanossa.it](mailto:info@granpremioteredicanossa.it) or telephone +39 0522 441632 to find out more.