

HOME &gt; INSPIRATION &gt; ADVENTURE &gt; GASOLINE DREAMS: TWO LIFELONG CAR GEEKS IN ITALY'S MOTOR VALLEY



A parade of Ferrari 250s in Modena during the Motor Valley Fest / Photo: Courtesy of Riccardo Gallini/GRPhoto

## *Gasoline Dreams: Two Lifelong Car Geeks in Italy's Motor Valley*

By Justin Goldman

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No car captured the imagination of a child of the 1980s more than the Ferrari F40. Released in 1987 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the company's founding, the Pininfarina-styled supercar went 0–60 in 4.1 seconds and had a top speed of 201 miles per hour, thanks to the 471 prancing horses its turbocharged V8 produced. Those are relatively pedestrian numbers by 21st-century standards, but at the time they seemed impossible. Making the F40 seem even more like a figment of the imagination was its scarcity: Ferrari only manufactured 1,315 of them over the course of five years, with just 213 of those—at the cost of \$400,000 each—coming to the U.S. The car was a ghost, existing seemingly only in posters on the walls of car-loving kids.



A parade of Ferrari 250s in Modena during the Motor Valley Fest / Photo: Courtesy of Riccardo Gallini/GRPhoto

Now, here stand Matt and Justin, two former car-loving kids whose 1980s bedroom walls were plastered with such posters, positioned on either side of an F40, staring across its low-slung roof at each other, their eyes wide.

The childlike sense of wonder these 41-year-old men feel is due only in part to them seeing the car of their dreams in the real world; it's also because they're seeing it in the nearly 200-year-old brick building in Modena, Italy, that housed the carpentry and metallurgy workshop of Alfredo Ferrari, the father of company founder Enzo. After the elder Ferrari's death, young Enzo asked his mother to sell the building to help fund his racing career. In 1947, he began making cars at a factory in Maranello, which today remains a fount of dreams for automobile lovers the world over. The old brick workshop, meanwhile, is now part of the Museo Enzo Ferrari Modena.

Matt and Justin have come to Italy because of Ferrari, yes, but not only Ferrari. The region of Emilia-Romagna, southeast of Milan, is known as the Motor Valley because it's the home of Ferrari, Maserati, Lamborghini, and a host of other supercar producers. Each May, these brands come together to flaunt their wares at the Motor Valley Fest. Over the course of four days, the city of Modena evinces even more need for speed than usual, with classic car processions, museum exhibitions, industry panels, and more. When Justin was invited to the fourth edition of the festival last year, there was no question Matt was riding shotgun.

Matt and Justin have been friends since they were 16, a 25-year relationship that was forged in a love of combustion engines and finely tuned suspensions. The first time they met, Matt drove them around the San Francisco suburbs in the old BMW 528e his father had given him. They later raced each other around those same streets in that Bimmer and the Alfa Romeo 164 Justin's father passed along to him. Both young men got their appreciation for automobiles from their dads, but they pushed each other's interest further, sharing loaner cars, getting tickets to the Indianapolis 500, sending each other countless Jalopnik links. This trip is the capstone.

There was never any doubt that this experience would begin with Ferrari. After gawking at the F40, the guys continue through the museum, taking in a recreation of Enzo's office and a display case that shows how the famed Prancing Horse logo—originally a lucky charm gifted to Enzo by an Italian countess—developed over the years. Stepping out of the workshop, they cross to the museum's three-year-old addition, a glass and aluminum structure with a roof shaped to look like the hood of a car. Inside is a high-tech barn full of spit-shined Prancing Horses too numerous to list.



Historic photos at the Museo Enzo Ferrari / Photo: Courtesy of Riccardo Gallini/GRPhoto

Maranello is about a 25-minute drive away, through vineyards and cherry orchards and roundabouts adorned with Prancing Horse sculptures. The center of town swarms with factory workers in red jumpsuits taking their lunch breaks, so Matt and Justin do the same, at Ristorante Cavallino. Long an unofficial canteen for company execs, Cavallino was taken over in 2021 by Modena native Massimo Bottura, the chef-owner of Osteria Francescana, which has twice topped the World's 50 Best Restaurants list. The decor includes a Colombo V12 engine from a 1947 Ferrari 125 S, and the meal is just as well-crafted as that motor: mackerel with *squacquerone* cheese and cherry sauce, *fusilloni* with anchovies, steak with truffle-laced potato purée.



Inside the Maserati factory / Photo: Courtesy of Maserati

Ferrari's production facility is not generally open to the public, but the guys have been invited on a small tour for journalists. A bus carries the group through the campus, past the Renzo Piano–designed wind tunnel to the assembly line, created by French architect Jean Nouvel. One of the sections of the line is suspended 20 feet above the floor, and when a car soars overhead, like Doc Brown's DeLorean, a journalist from Abu Dhabi remarks, "This is the only time in your life you'll look up and see a Ferrari flying over your head."

The tour guide, Roberta, intermittently scolds the journalists during the walk-through ("Don't go there... Don't touch that... *Don't take photos!*"), but she ends the afternoon with an extra-special treat: a peek inside the Attività Sportive GT area. It turns out that you—if you're preposterously wealthy—can buy used Ferrari race cars. "A Formula 1 car has a very short life," Roberta explains. "The

first year, it's a race car; the second year, it's a test car." After that, it gets auctioned, and the company stores the vehicles—including racers driven by Niki Lauda, Nigel Mansell, and Michael Schumacher—here, transporting them to track events where their .01 percent owners can drive them.

"I can't believe I can't take a picture," Matt groans. "No one's gonna believe me. There are 50 F1 cars in here. I *counted* them."



A Lamborghini Aventador roars through Modena / Photo: Courtesy of Lamborghini

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It seems only fair that after a day dedicated to Ferrari, Lamborghini should have its say, so the guys begin their next morning in Sant'Agata Bolognese. Ferruccio Lamborghini, a World War II mechanic who made his fortune manufacturing tractors, decided to build sports cars in the early 1960s, after buying a Ferrari and coming to the conclusion that he could do better.



A Ferrari 599 GTO stops all conversation at a Modena café / Photo: Courtesy of Riccardo Gallini\_GRPphoto

Ferraris are known for their sexy curves, thanks to a long partnership with Pininfarina. Lamborghinis are different—more angular, more aggressive, befitting their names, which are taken from notable Spanish fighting bulls. This philosophy is apparent in the wooden wind-tunnel models of a Countach and a Diablo in the lobby of the brand's museum, MUDETEC. Arguably the most revered Lamborghini, however, runs counter to that notion. In the museum's first gallery stands a yellow 1966 Miura, widely considered the world's first supercar, thanks to its mid-engine, two-seat layout. It's as sleek as a shark scything through water.

The rest of the day is spent back in Modena, the epicenter of the festival and host of its various parades and exhibits (as well as tonight's VIP dinner, to which Matt and Justin have scored invites). First stop is Bar Schiavoni, at the edge of the historic Mercato Albinelli, where the guys plow through a pair of astonishing sausage and pesto

sandwiches. They walk off the meal with a stroll through the Piazza della Torre, where festival officials have parked a couple of Maseratis outside the Duomo di Modena. The cars seem to be appearing in more tourist selfies than the 700-year-old bell tower behind them.

Speaking of Maserati, it's a short drive to the company's factory, which is visible from a distance thanks to its nine-story, trident-topped tower. The lawn in front of the showroom is dotted with the brand's current production cars.

"My Maserati does 185," Justin intones as they approach the doors.

Matt finishes: "I lost my license, now I don't *driiiiive*."

The showroom's centerpiece is a sweeping blue platform bearing a late-'50s 3500 GT. A tour guide, Alessandro, leads the guys into the 11-acre plant, past the original red brick buildings from the late '30s, to the division where the MC20, a stunningly sexy new V6 sports car, is built. The MC20 is manufactured entirely on-site—just six completed vehicles roll off the line per day—and the methods are the highest of high tech. Every single part and installation process is tracked in the company's computers from beginning to end to ensure performance and reliability. Yet, even amid all the machines and computers, there's something romantic about walking through the facility, jumping to the side as a freshly painted chassis is towed past, peeking beneath the white blankets that cover finished cars ready to be shipped out to dealers. "It's a metaphor for the human body," Alessandro says, watching vehicles at varying states of completion tick along the assembly line. "We build the skeleton, then we add the organs, and finally we apply the skin."



Perhaps that's the best way to understand the Motor Valley—as a place where sensuality is infused into every pursuit. Chef Massimo Bottura speaks to that idea later that evening, standing on a stage in front of the Baroque Palazzo Ducale di Modena, flanked by personalized editions of a Ducati Panigale motorcycle and a Ferrari SF90 Spider. “The thing about Modena is slow food and fast cars—what we have here is balance,” he tells a group of onlookers. “I go all over the world, but my heart is here.”



Claudio Domenicali (left) and Massimo Bottura with the chef's signature Ducati Panigale Photo: Courtesy of Riccardo Gallini\_GRPhoto

At the cocktail hour before dinner, the guys end up chatting with Claudio Domenicali, the CEO of Ducati, the legendary Bologna-based motorcycle company. “This unique combination of art and performance, emotion and technology, is what makes Ducati special, and it's very similar to Ferrari or even Lambo,” he says. “Emilia-Romagna is about being dedicated to working, but when you finish working, try to enjoy yourself. We are trying to export that.”

It seems impossible that anything could be as artisanal as a meal designed by Massimo Bottura (strawberry risotto with smoked cotechino, anyone?), but the cars on today's itinerary just might qualify. The morning's first stop is an industrial strip on the outskirts of Modena where Pagani Automobili builds what might be the flashiest cars in the world. Argentina native Horacio Pagani came to Italy in 1983 to work at Lamborghini, on the recommendation of his countryman, champion F1 driver Juan Manuel Fangio. He ran the composites department and restyled the 25th anniversary edition of the Countach, and in 1992, after buying his own autoclave to cook carbon fiber, he started his own company. "Pagani basically takes a 12-cylinder Mercedes engine," Matt notes, "and builds a work of art around it."

Indeed, a stroll through the Pagani facility reveals vehicles that make a Lambo feel like a commuter car. Take the 2010 Zonda Cinque Roadster, one of only five ever built: Named for an Argentine wind, it makes 678 horsepower, looks like a rocketship, and has a monocoque made out of a revolutionary "carbo-titanium" material. Inside the workshop is an array of supercars in various levels of assembly. Pagani makes only around 50 vehicles a year—fewer than 500 exist in the wild—with each typically costing in excess of \$2.5 million. To sum up the level of bespoke detail, every single part, right down to the nuts and bolts, has the company logo on it.

Lunch is at La Zagara, on the outskirts of Parma, where the guys enjoy plates of 24-month-aged Prosciutto di Parma. Afterward comes a visit to yet another über-exclusive automaker. Much like Horacio Pagani, Giampaolo Dallara specialized in designing carbon-fiber chassis, cutting his teeth at Ferrari, Maserati, and Lamborghini. In 1972, he started a company in his hometown of Varano de' Melegari, focused on making race cars.



Race cars at the Dallara Academy / Photo: Courtesy of © Car-Shooters

A curved ramp inside the glass-walled Dallara Academy displays a series of treasures, among them a Miura (Dallara oversaw its development while he was at Lamborghini), the open-wheel race car in which Eddie Cheever won the 1998 Indy 500 (the company is now the sole supplier of chassis for the IndyCar series), and the brand's first road car, the Stradale. While the public exhibit is cool, the guys get truly excited when tour guide Maria gives them a look behind the scenes, at Dallara's racing simulator. The machine looks like a Louise Bourgeois spider with a cockpit in its stomach, and it can exert 3.5 Gs of lateral acceleration as the virtual driver inside it tackles any of more than 100 track layouts. Justin tries to wheedle Maria into giving him a test run, but she just laughs; backstage passes only get you so far.

Who needs a simulator when you can have the real thing? The time has come to get behind the wheel: For their last

day, the guys have booked a track session at the Autodromo di Modena, where they'll each have the chance to do a couple of laps in a Ferrari 488 GT Challenge.

The bright red car idles in pit lane, its 670-horsepower V8 emitting a barely restrained growl. Inside, a staffer offers espressos. "I'm already so amped, I'll jump out of my skin if I drink one of those," Justin replies. The track's chief instructor, Pietro, runs through some tips: "The main rule is no steer, full gas; full steer, no gas" ... "The right value for upshift is about 8,000 rpm" ... "You'll end the main straight at about 210 kilometers per hour [130 mph] in 5th gear." The Ferrari's engine roars as another instructor zips it around the track to warm up the tires.

Justin's up first, stomach fluttering and hands shaking with adrenaline before he even slides into the cockpit. When the instructor in the passenger seat gives him the thumbs-up, he tears away from the line, ears full of turbocharged howl. He's done track sessions before, but his first lap is a riot of poorly timed shifts, missed apexes, mistakes. His nerves have settled by the time he hits the back straight, where he stands on the gas to launch the car past the pits. The second lap goes smoother, quicker, and then ... it's over.

Matt then takes the torch, contorting himself between crisscrossing roll bars and into the bucket seat of the racing-spec Ferrari. (He's six inches taller than Justin, so he feels more as if he's putting on the car than sitting in it.) He quickly realizes the differences between a racer and a road car—the brake pedal requires much greater strength, and the acceleration is neck-snapping. By his second lap, he too is more comfortable, braking later and later into corners, provoking a melodramatic shout or two from the instructor. After a few more turns, he's pulling back into pit lane, the shortest three minutes of his life over.

Justin is still drenched in sweat and buzzing with slowly fading adrenaline when Matt extricates himself from the 488 and eases into the chair next to him. They sit quietly for a minute or two. The engine still rumbles loudly, but the sound seems strangely distant now. Finally, Matt speaks up. "Dude," he says, his voice full of awed disbelief, "we just drove a Ferrari race car around an Italian racetrack."

After 25 years of friendship, they both know nothing more needs to be said.