



BOLOGNA

Report by Lee Jackson 30

My next door neighbour Kris Jones has become the subject of some envy. Kris has a successful business called Truck Hydraulics Ltd, based in Doncaster and specialising in the supply of bespoke crane solutions for Industrial Vehicles. The reason for my envy is that Kris's key supplier of many years is based in Modena, the beautiful Italian city that is the home of balsamic vinegar and part of the wider Emilia Romagna region famous for other gastronomic delights such as Parma ham, Parmesan cheese and Tortellini.

So here am I with a travel business, and a restaurant, and a life-long love of Italy waving my neighbour off to the airport every 3 months as he jets off to "foodie heaven".

Enough is enough! This time around I have persuaded Kris to accept my company and I will happily stay out of his meetings and investigate instead the delights of Modena and Bologna.

As Kris heads for the modern suburbs I head for the historic centre of Modena. First stop is the Piazza Grande where I take an early Cappuccino (it is after all a breakfast drink!) and admire the Duomo and Ghirlandina Tower which form a UNESCO world heritage site. The city has a relaxed feel helped with so many people travelling on Bicycles, a popular feature in the towns and cities of the River Po basin.

I visit Fini, famous locally for being one of the first producers of Tortellini (I learn later that the famous Pasta dish was created in Castelfranco Emilia midway between Modena and Bologna, and both cities lay claim to the dish). I learn of the origins of Balsamic Vinegar. The Traditional Balsamic Vinegar is aged over 30 years and passed on to family members as a wedding or christening gift. At 70 Euro for 100ml it is a world away for the industrial version that we are familiar with in the UK, and only a few drops are needed for a huge flavour impact, but I fear restaurants wouldn't have happy customers if they had to wait 30 years for their food dressing!

Having sampled the "Balsamic City" it is a 20 minute train ride into Bologna. I have spent the best part of a lifetime sending customers to "Rome, Venice and Florence, the most popular tourist haunts", and I was pleasantly surprised by the "Medieval Magic" of Bologna. In exploring the city I am guided by "Simone" a local bus driver who kindly offered to provide a guided tour of the city on his midday break, a wonderful welcome.

The historic hub is the Piazza Maggiore from which we stroll through the vast Town Hall, by the magnificent Duomo, which is currently under renovation, and on to the twin towers. Like San Gimignano in Tuscany Bologna was once a medieval Manhattan with a skyline of tall red brick towers. Of The two that remain I suffer the 498 steps to the top of the highest tower for a spectacular view of the city skyline and the Apennine Hills.

Adorning many buildings is the flag of St George which had it not been for Simone could have been perceived by me as a further personal greeting from the city. The truth being that the flag is part of the shield of the city, this due to St George being instrumental in the liberation of Bologna in the 12th Century.

Still, thanks to Simone I feel more than welcome and as he bids me farewell I wander through the Jewish Quarter to Piazza Augusto V111. Here in the early evening sun I find myself surrounded by another highly prized product of Italy in the form of 25 Red Ferrari's. It is a get together of a local owners club and even for non car enthusiast this is a sight to behold.

The city of Bologna has three epithets, the Fat, the Red and the Learned, unfortunately the pasta and ice cream have helped towards number 1, on 2 I will be purple with envy when Kris visits again, and thanks to a superb guide I have learned that Bologna is a city worthy of greater attention.