



THE REAL BOAR CO

The Real Boar Company
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What a boar!

From a secret location in the Cotswolds, Simon Gaskell is producing award-winning wild boar which appears on the tables of Michelin-starred restaurants, as ADAM EDWARDS discovers



Isolation was what farmer Simon Gaskell wanted. Escape from the madding world was what he sought. Acres of space to rear his wild crop were what he needed, which, oddly, is why he chose to settle down within walking distance of a Burger King. Simon is a wild boar farmer. He lives, sleeps and, let's be honest, eats wild boar. Furthermore his company, The Real Boar Company, provides the beast's meat to a dozen Michelin starred restaurants. Surprisingly this rare and exclusive product hails from a tiny 20-acre mixed woodland west of Heathrow Airport, a smallholding where the roar of 21st century living drowns the rooting of the boar. 'The motorway completely isolates us. We are very difficult to find,' said Simon, who spent a year at the prestigious Cirencester Agricultural College. 'And yet

ironically a service station Burger King is our nearest local restaurant.'

It was four years ago that Simon returned from a tour of the Antipodes with a wife, Louisa, and a hankering to farm livestock. However the only land available to him was the cluster of trees by the six-lane highway.

'I came to the conclusion that the only way to make a living out of the acreage was to find a niche market,' said Simon whose tall good looks make him more suited to Hollywood than husbandry. 'I had always adored pigs and wild boar was the logical solution.'

He took me on a tour of the well-hidden wood that allowed me to glimpse a score of the camouflaged creatures warily watching us before they scampered off into the darkness of the trees.

'The hardest thing about boars is getting them to trust you,' he said. 'When I took the first crop to slaughter it took me nine days to get them out of the paddock.'

Simon's waders – waders are the only kit that can cope with the mud the creatures create – are proof of their suspicion. They are peppered with tusk holes while his legs bear the permanent scars of his trade. Further confirmation of this mistrust

is the attack by his stud boar 'Julian', 180 kilos of muscular alpha male with four 2½-inch tusks.

'Within 15 minutes of his arrival I knew I was in trouble when I found myself caught with him right in the middle of a paddock,' said the young farmer. 'When he put his head down and ran at me, there was only one thing I could do: I put my head down and charged right back. Fortunately, we both stopped.'

In Britain wild boar was effectively hunted to extinction by the end of the seventeenth century. The creature did not return to the wild in the UK until 20 years ago when the hurricane of 1987 allowed domesticated boars to escape from a farm in Devon. Today no one is sure how many are abroad but they are spotted in small family groups in among other places the Forest of Dean and the New Forest.

The boars' existence on Simon's farm is similar to their life in the wild. He keeps 30 female boars in two family groups each with a strong male in charge - Julian is one, Sparky is the other.

His sows breed three times in two years, according to the amount of food and light available. The young boarlets take 18 months to mature – three times

more slowly than the equivalent domestic piglets.

The meat is butchered into loins, haunches and, most successfully, salami that is made with a red wine recipe.

'It's a good old-fashioned taste,' said Simon slicing off a fat chunk of his English saucisson. 'If you think about the difference between mutton and lamb, then wild boar is of that ilk. It's a flavour from the old days,' he says, ...unlike, say, a flame-grilled Whopper with cheese. 🍷

