

Pigging Out in the Wild Wild West



This month, Clifton Times takes a closer look at the world of wild boar-farming with The Real Boar Company – a charcuterie company with a fascinating methodology and an impressive string of awards to boot.

● Simon Gaskell's wild boar salami and chorizo has gone down a storm with delicatessens across the West Country and beyond, with popularity soaring over the last few years. Among The Real Boar Company clients is the region's own Whatley Manor in Wiltshire, an establishment lucky enough to have the boar farmed on its doorstep! The boar is also served in several Michelin-star restaurants, including Le Cinq restaurant in Paris – hardly surprising as the company insists on using only the finest cuts – occasionally adding just a dash of rich red wine, too!

Mr Gaskell, founder of The Real Boar Company, told Clifton Times all about the creatures themselves as well as his farming methods when we managed to grab him for a chat in between wild-boar-chasing escapades. Three hundred years ago, wild boar were hunted out of Britain, and it has been the quest of the Gaskell family to reintroduce this aspect of English heritage on 20 acres of Cotswold farmland. The species of boar used is a native species which lives harmoniously in English woodlands and, unlike pigs, they are a robust creature, not prone to disease. Ethically farmed, the boars live in an area of pesticide, herbicide and fertiliser-free woodland at the edge of the Cotswolds, with their unique 'Real Boar' flavour achieved through a foraged diet consisting of acorns, assorted fungi and cherries.

The little boarlets are weaned at four months and then separated into male and female paddocks so that they can put all their efforts into growing nice and big without getting distracted! After about 18 months, they are mature enough to be farmed, which is where the real hard work comes in! Courageous Mr Gaskell is responsible for catching the beautiful, formidable animals himself when they reach maturity – which certainly seems some Herculean task! Star of the show is Julian, a magnificent stud boar with razor-sharp tusks and

some significant swagger – and he knows it! He loves the camera, although he's not always so impressed with the unfamiliar folk holding it... Usually not one to shy away from a hands-on experience, the Clifton Times team thought it best to leave the boar-catching to the professionals, in order to avoid a farcical episode worthy of Frank Spencer.

As with any wild animals, these bad boy boars are impossible to harness using conventional farming techniques, but despite the boar's reputation as an aggressive and dangerous animal, it's actually only while the females are pregnant that Mr Gaskell usually experiences cantankerous behaviour – and that's just part of being a good daddy boar, right!?

As 2009 winner of the Cut Above Meat Quality Award sponsored by Morrisons, The Real Boar Company produce has been praised for its rich aroma, great presentation, and excellent flavour with a unique, spicy depth. What's more, Clifton Times is wholeheartedly prepared to vouch for such a declaration, having tasted the delicious boar-meat – and with more than one South African boar expert on the panel, we were able to give a fairly valid opinion! Mr Gaskell's wild boar with red wine chorizo and salami has also won various gold awards over the past few years – including at the 2008 Taste Awards and this year's BPEX Awards.

That's not all either. Per 100g of wild boar, there's only 2.9g saturated fat to be had, so it's great for the gut and fantastic for those watching their waistline – particularly compared to lamb and pork, which pack in 9.3g and 8.3g of saturated fat respectively. The rising popularity of this innovative, ethical young company and its collection of accolades seems not only to reflect a nation opting out of badly-farmed produce, but also an increasing focus on healthy eating in the UK.

Baked Rigatoni with Wild Boar Salami

TO SERVE 4 WILD BOAR BUFFS

Ingredients

A big splash of extra virgin olive oil
Wild boar salami, thinly sliced
300g rigatoni
1 ball of buffalo mozzarella, sliced
400g chopped tomatoes
3 tablespoons crème fraîche
1 red onion, peeled and thinly sliced
1 clove garlic, peeled and thinly sliced
4 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
Lots of chopped fresh basil
Sea salt and freshly-ground black pepper

Method

Preheat the oven to 190°C/375°F/gas mark 5
Gently heat the olive oil in a frying pan, and add half the salami – frying until it is fairly crisp. Add the onion and garlic and cook slowly until soft. Chuck in the vinegar, chopped tomatoes, crème fraîche and basil and mix together. Season to taste, and simmer for a few minutes.

Meanwhile, cook the rigatoni until 'al dente' and season after draining. Add a little olive oil and whack it into a baking dish, pouring the sauce evenly over the top.

Arrange the mozzarella and the rest of the salami across the pasta and sauce, and leave to bake in the oven for 25 minutes.

Sorted.

Why not order some as an unusual gift, or have a go at whipping up your own wild boar banquet, and see what you think? To find out more visit www.therealboar.co.uk or call 01249 782861.

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