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Published by

BOAT
International Media



ON THE FAST TRACK

A car enthusiast's dream lays just a short distance from the Italian coast. Necee Regis visits the exotic brands that make up the Motor Valley.

Strapped in the passenger seat of a bright-red Ferrari F430 Challenge, I anxiously waited for my driver to clamber inside for a three-circuit spin around the Autodromo di Modena racetrack. As sunlight glinted off the asphalt and puffy clouds skittered across the cerulean sky, he adjusted his mirrors before glancing my way. "Ready?"

The 4.3-liter, V8 engine hummed, then roared as we accelerated from zero to 100 kph in seconds. My helmeted head pressed back against the seat, then shifted side to side as we took the curves at ever-faster speeds. The scenery passed in a dizzying blur, and I soon abandoned all attempts to raise the camera and get a shot. In no time, it seemed, we cruised to a smooth stop. Whoa.

So began my exotic car adventures in the Motor Valley, the

area surrounding Modena in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. Located about 75 miles from the Adriatic ports near Ravenna, and just over 100 miles from La Spezia on the western coast, this excursion is an opportunity to tour the area's exotic car factories, showrooms and museums. Visit either as an add-on to a typical coastal yacht charter, or as a bonus treat when checking on your vessel's progress in the superyachting center of Viareggio, a two-hour drive away.

In two days of touring, I was able to get up close and personal with old favorites while discovering new models to love. Of course, I appreciated the pure artistry of each vehicle, but I was also wooed by the histories of the visionaries who aspired to – and achieved – pinnacles of perfection in the automotive world.



F430 Challenge



488 Spider



PHOTOGRAPHS: NEECEE REGIS (OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT, CIRCLE); COURTESY OF ENGINE LAB/STILEDIGITALE (BOTTOM RIGHT); COURTESY OF MUSEO FERRARI (TOP RIGHT)

FERRARI

In Italy, there's Ferrari the man and Ferrari the brand, so two complementary museums were created to tell the stories – admittedly intertwined – of Enzo Ferrari and his race car empire.

"Live the dream" is the motto that greets visitors at the Museo Ferrari in Maranello, near the factory where new models are designed and built, though it really should say "whiplash zone ahead." My head twisted every which way as I spun around to see all the famous track and road offerings in the multi-floor exhibition, including historic Formula 1 cars, sports prototypes and GT models.

A shiny, red, cigar-shaped Formula 2 racer, circa 1948, first caught my eye. "You had to be very brave to get in one of these and race – with no seatbelt and a leather helmet," said my guide. Nearby, the 312 B3, known as the "Snowplow" and driven by Mario Andretti, demanded my attention.

It was the same in every room. Where to look first? From the 1969 Dino 246 GT, named in honor of Enzo's deceased son, and the 250 GTO, one of 36 ever built, to a model of the 2012 LaFerrari, the company's first hybrid, the museum is an eye-popping feast of metal and design.

Not to be missed is Victories Hall, a permanent exhibition featuring race cars, helmets, trophies, films and images of Formula 1 and World Championship winners. Near the gift shop and café, experience racing

thrills in single-seat Formula 1 simulators.

A more personal story emerges at the Museo Enzo Ferrari in Modena, adjacent to Ferrari's family home. Inside the voluminous, futuristic, yellow, aluminum and glass pavilion, 19 video projections create an immersive environment to tell the story of Ferrari's 90-year life and long career, including grainy black-and-white images of early races, historic world events, drivers and famous personalities, like Luciano Pavarotti, whose singing provides an emotional soundtrack. Between the two films one can ogle displays of milestone cars, such as the 1948 166 Inter Aerlux, Ferrari's first four-seater with transparent panoramic roof, and the limited series Superamerica, circa 2005.

DRIVE
Take a Ferrari for a spin at the Autodromo di Modena, www.autodromodimodena.it

VISIT
Personal factory tours for Ferrari owners can be arranged through a dealer, or take a guided tour at Museo Ferrari in Maranello and Museo Enzo Ferrari in Modena, musei.ferrari.com.

MASERATI

“This is a land of passion. Without passion, it is not possible to have great stories,” said Davide Kluzer, chief press officer at Maserati.

We were standing on the ground floor of the Modena headquarters, a sleek futuristic showroom designed by the Israeli-born British architect Ron Arad. A spiraling architectural element swept from floor to ceiling, creating a dramatic backdrop for viewing the latest GranCabrio and GranTurismo models crafted in the adjacent plant. (Two additional models, the Quattroporte and Ghibli, are produced in a larger facility in Grugliasco near Turin.) The polished cars, deep blue and black, sat like sleeping panthers, all glistening muscle and quiet power. I gingerly touched one’s paint, as if afraid to wake a sleeping beast.

In the spotless modern factory, cars suspended by chains from an overhead trolley travel through 24 stations – 12 mechanics and 12 interiors – every 37 minutes. In another building, 15 stations check and double-check the workings of everything from transmission to waterproofing to how smoothly the doors open and close. When finished, all these luxurious vehicles will be delivered to their owners. Every Maserati car, I learned from my guide, Giorgio Manicardi, is pre-sold. So much for dreaming about driving one out of the showroom.

Passion was surely in the blood of Alfieri Maserati, who founded the company in 1914, originally as a garage to service Isotta Fraschini cars, before building the Tipo 26, the first true Maserati car with a supercharged, 1.5-liter, eight-cylinder engine.

Perhaps the best place to see vintage models is at the Collezione Umberto Panini. Located just outside Modena, on the grounds of an organic farm producing Parmigiano-Reggiano, this museum reflects the enthusiasm of entrepreneur Umberto Panini (1930-2013). Designed to look like a railway station, with soaring

two-story cast iron framework and tile floors, it houses a number of noteworthy Maserati vehicles, including a 6C 34; A6GCS “Berlinetta” Pininfarina; 420M 58 “Eldorado” and the Tipo 61 “Birdcage.”



Modena, Italy



MC12

The polished cars, deep blue and black, sat like sleeping panthers, all glistening muscle and quiet power.



Left: Collezione Umberto Panini

LAMBORGHINI

“Men are like children in a playpen when they visit here,” said our female guide at the Lamborghini Museum. The men in our group nodded in agreement.

Automobili Lamborghini, located between Modena and Bologna, is more than the headquarters and factory of this storied car manufacturer. It is also home to this sleek two-story museum, where visitors can wander amid a comprehensive display of cars designed and built at this location since 1963.

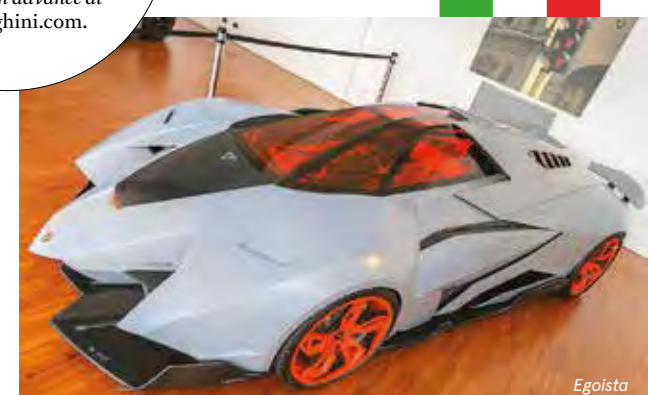
From the 350 GT, the first model built by Ferruccio Lamborghini in 1964, to a 2013 Aventador Roadster that is dramatically mounted on the wall, the museum is a cornucopia of Italian craftsmanship and design, guaranteed to impress the novice as well as serious collectors and fans.

I played a game: If I could have one car, which would I choose? It was hard to resist the appeal of the vintage Miura S series with distinctive “eyelashes” and 370-hp, designed by Marcello Gandini. Then again, the elegant, black, two-door, four-seat Espada, another Gandini creation, had retro-chic appeal.

A group of young gearheads was admiring the futuristic Egoista, a single-seat vehicle created to celebrate Lamborghini’s 50th anniversary in 2013. (To exit the car, the driver must remove the steering wheel and place it on the dashboard, open the dome with an electronic control and climb out of the cockpit as if in a jet aircraft.) A gold Diablo 6.0 SE, the last model in a series of 42 made, was surrounded by fans of classic elegance.

For the factory tour, lockers were provided to hold cell phones, cameras, purses and backpacks as photos are forbidden when viewing the assembly line. We were led through every aspect of production of the Aventador and Huracán models, from mechanics to the paint studio to the area where cowhides from Austria, Italy and Germany are cut, sewn and glued.

VISIT
Museum tickets may be purchased on site at the headquarters in Sant’Agata Bolognese. Guided museum and factory tours must be arranged in advance at lamborghini.com.



Egoista



Diablo



Aventador Roadster



VISIT
Factory tours by appointment for Maserati owners must be arranged through a dealer, maserati.com. View historic cars at Collezione Umberto Panini, by appointment only, paninimotormuseum.it.

PHOTOGRAPHS: OPPOSITE: ISTOCK/TUPLINGATO (TOP), NECEE REGIS (CENTER RIGHT, BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT), ALBERTO MORUZZI (BOTTOM CENTER). THIS PAGE: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNELS/HOFF PRODUCTIONS (TOP), NECEE REGIS

PAGANI



Huayra



Zonda C12

“People are amazed at how we create supercars. We follow the principles of the Renaissance where art and science walk together hand in hand,” said Luca Venturi, Pagani’s communications manager.

Venturi was guiding me through the showroom and factory of this bespoke manufacturer. Born in Argentina in 1955, Horacio Pagani dreamed of traveling to Modena and building his own supercars. “He was mad about cars as a kid. His father was a baker who had no money for cars, so Horacio built one from scratch – and cooked the parts in his father’s oven,” said Venturi.

Pagani eventually moved to Italy and worked for Lamborghini, heading a design team in the composite materials department before founding his own design, engineering and prototype service company. At night, Pagani worked on creating his first supercar, the Zonda C12 (with a Mercedes-Benz V12 engine) and presented it at the 1999 Geneva Motor Show.

Fast-forward 17 years: Pagani Automobili has won dozens of awards, and its 100 employees produce 40 to 50 cars per year with a starting price of €1.3 million. In fact, the 2016 Huayra was sold out before the year began.

“We are like tailors. Every single car we produce is a one hundred percent bespoke product,” said Venturi.

One can understand the appeal of this exclusive automobile when visiting the factory; though perhaps “atelier” is a better word to describe where these cars are made. Instead of a production line, assembly takes place in a series of stages where a small team of artisans attends to every procedure. Even the titanium screws have been designed and signed. Each car is put together in its entirety and then taken apart to be hand-sanded and painted before it is reassembled.

Indeed, the assembly area, designed by Pagani’s sons Leonardo and Christopher, is meant to recreate the spirit of an Italian square replete with vertical gardens. A new museum – under construction during my visit – will display Pagani’s full line of historic cars. In some cases, that means buying back models for more than €1 million that originally sold for €600,000. “We are trying to give a beautiful form a wonderful function. They are truly appreciated as objects of art,” said Venturi.



PHOTOGRAPHS: THIS PAGE: NEECE REGIS; SHUTTERSTOCK / CLAUDIO ZACCHERINI (GROTTOLI); OPPOSITE: NEECE REGIS. SIDEBAR (FROM TOP): SHUTTERSTOCK / MARCO PRATI; COURTESY OF GRAND HOTEL MAJESTIC; COURTESY OF ENGINE LAB / STILEDIGITALE; COURTESY OF EMILIA-ROMAGNA TOURIST BOARD

VISIT

A new exhibition showroom is scheduled to open this summer in San Cesario sul Panaro near Modena. Reserve a guided factory tour at pagani.com.



Bologna

VISIT

Factory and museum guided tours at Bologna headquarters must be made in advance at ducati.com.

DUCATI

The Ducati Museum’s curator, Livio Lodi, refers to the museum as a “Vatican for motorcycle lovers.”

I’m a 20-minute drive from the center of Bologna at the Ducati factory and museum. More than 9,000 square feet in size, the museum illustrates the history of Ducati from its humble beginnings to the present day through drawings, films, photographs and, of course, an impressive collection of racing motorcycles.

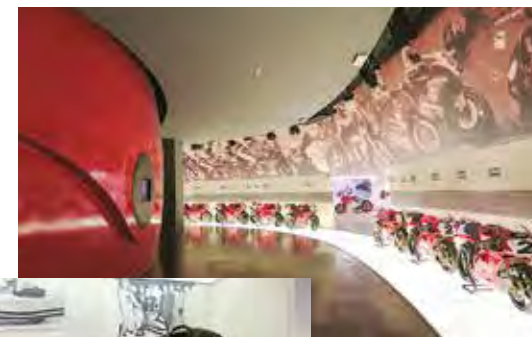


Ducati began as an electrical company founded by three brothers in 1926. The first chapter of its motorcycle empire debuted post World War II with the introduction of the Cucciolo, a four-stroke auxiliary scooter – basically a bicycle with a motor attached. A quaint, red Cucciolo, accompanied by its black-and-white advertisement marks the beginning of the museum tour, with seven consecutive rooms each representing another decade in the company’s history.

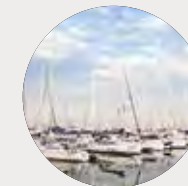
Designs by legendary engineer Fabio Taglioni are featured, including the Gran Sport 100 and 125cc single-cylinder Marianna that dominated Italian racing in the 1950s. Other historic projects – all considered avant-garde in their time – are on display, such as 1960’s single-cylinder and parallel twin-cylinder models, 1970’s bevel-gear twin-cylinder bikes and 1980’s belt-driven cam engines, the Ducati TT2 and 750 F1. A collection of 1990-and-later powerful superbikes with four-valve engines line a circular display, as if ready to surge into racing action.

The factory tour leads visitors through all stages of production, from engine assembly and testing chambers to vehicle assembly and test-bench, on-road simulators. Curator Lodi estimates that it takes two hours and 40 minutes from start to when each bike is ready to be shipped for delivery.

“Luxury can be frustrating,” said Lodi, adding, “Ducati is a luxury you can afford.”



DOCK



Marinara, a marina in the heart of the resort town of Marina di Ravenna, offers berths for yachts up to 40 meters (131 feet). Two offshore breakwaters extending along two miles of coast keep the marina accessible in all weather conditions. www.marinara.it
Larger vessels dock at the opposite side of the Ravenna Cruise Terminal, located at the Porto Corsini waterfront. www.ravennatp.it
In La Spezia, both **Porto Lotti** and **Porto Mirabello** have berths for yachts up to 100 meters with a heliport on site. www.portolotti.it, www.portomirabello.it

STAY



Grand Hotel Majestic Gia Baglioni, located in a restored 18th-century palazzo, is the only five-star hotel in the heart of Bologna. grandhotelmajestic.duetorrihotels.com



Borgo Condé, a resort and spa on the grounds of a family-run winery, offers four-star luxury villas and suites in Forlì. www.borgoconde.it

DINE



Emilia-Romagna, the heart of Northern Italian food, is renowned for its Parmigiano-Reggiano, balsamic vinegar and olive oil. For fine dining in Modena, visit Chef Massimo Bottura’s three-Michelin-starred **Osteria Francescana**. www.osteriafrancescana.it