

How Do You Say 'Gears' in Italian?

Erik Schmidt, Assistant Editor

It was late November in Northern Italy, and everything was coming up vinegar oil and high-performance cars for Cory Sanderson and the 11 other members of his Yankee armada.

They sat around a rustic table in scenic Tuscany (or was it Emilia-Romagna? Or Lombardy? Any which way, it was a breathtaking and bountiful land), enjoying heaping plates of antipasto and primo and secondo and contorno...

Sanderson, Koepfer America's VP of marketing and sales, doesn't recall the exact name of the ristorante — all those elegant, fine dining establishments in *Settecento* look alike, anyway — but he does know what it wasn't called.

"It was a lot better than going to a Maggiano's, that's for sure," he said.

And, for the better part of a week, so went Koepfer America's Italian Gear Tour, which roared back to life on Nov. 16, 2014 after a roughly seven-year dormancy for what Sanderson blamed on "economic issues."

The trip's return was not met with as much fanfare as, let's say, Michael Jordan reappearing at the United Center wearing that anomalous No. 45 jersey after his ill-fated baseball sabbatical, but it was still a welcome breath of fresh air in an industry that occasionally gets stuffy — a rare chance to mix in a tiny bit of pleasure with the overabundance of business.

"It's always been the concept of this trip to expose people to the culture of the country," Sanderson said. "We try to visit a major landmark or a major city. We try to do a couple museums that are significant in some way. And then we always try to do something that you can only do in that part of the world."

"So, for Italy, there are a lot of unique things, actually. They've got a lot going on for them."

For starters, they have gears.

The collection of industry professionals on the tour — which included members from C.L.C. S.r.l., Gear Machinery Resources, Forest City Gear, New World Technology, Ontario Drive & Gear and Timron Precision Gear, Inc. — visited several renowned gear manufactures, including Corradini Giacomo Gears and OMIG Ingranaggi, to get briefed on the latest Italian products primed to hit the North American market.

Once they got the meat and potatoes of the trip out of the way, the group got to enjoy the vast luxuries and spoils of the Italian ethos, which included sightseeing in Florence, wine tasting in the Tuscany countryside and a special visit to one of Italy's largest producers of balsamic vinegar. After all, you can't put a bevel gear on a slab of Parmigiano Reggiano.

As Sanderson described the three different levels of balsamic they tried:

"Good, better and mind blowing."

Then, since "it was kind of on the way," the group stopped by the Museo Ferrari, because anytime you get the chance to test-drive a \$200,000 supercar you have to throw your trip itinerary right out the window.



Norbert Benik (Ontario Drive & Gear), Roberto Cervi (C.L.C. S.r.l.), Claudio Montanari (C.L.C. S.r.l.), Warren MacRae (New World Technologies), Richard Reenan (Gear Machinery Resources), Gene Fann (Forest City Gear), Jared Lyford (Forest City Gear), Jim Fritz (Timron Precision Gear, Inc.), Cory Sanderson (Koepfer America, LLC), Kevin Corpe (Koepfer America, LLC).

"Just to be in the city of [Maranello, Enzo Ferrari's hometown] was incredible," Sanderson said. "As we're coming into the city we're on the bus and we're just getting passed left and right by Ferraris. Obviously they have a very distinct sound, especially when they're passing you."

"They had a stand next to the museum where you could rent a vehicle for different increments of time, and we had a couple people do that. So that was fun and everyone came back with gigantic smiles on their faces, as you might imagine."

"And then we hit Lamborghini, because if you're going to do one you might as well do the other."

Oh, sure. *When in Rome, right?* Well, at least when you're 350 kilometers north of Rome.

Though Sanderson — the trip's organizer and host — said he was fairly stressed out making sure nobody in his party wandered off the Matterhorn or got attacked by a bent-winged bat, it would also seem he took a rather *laissez faire* (pardon my French, *lasciare*) approach to tour guiding.

To Sanderson's credit, this is precisely the right way to travel, especially when flanked by hard working, clock-punching industry executives who rarely have the time or opportunity to venture outside of the office.

He was also able to answer an age-old riddle: How do you turn a group of American sophisticates into fun-loving, Ferrari-driving Italians?

Just land in Florence and add balsamic.

"It could have been a little bit more relaxed if it was pure pleasure, but I think the balance we ended up with was really good," Sanderson said. "We saw a lot of different things and ultimately nobody complained. As soon as we got back to Chicago and parted ways everyone was gracious and thankful."

"They were happy they could be a part of it."

Apparently the trip was such a hit that Koepfer is going to do it again in the fall of 2015, this time traveling to Italy *and* Germany.

Oh Dio.

Wait until Sanderson gets a load of a Ferrari on the Autobahn. 