



More bangers for your bucks

There's nothing like a sausage lovingly made by hand. As Bill Knott discovered at this once-a-month meeting of manly meat lovers



Franco Sotgiu and his cousin Daniel Izza (third and fourth from left) wait to get their hands on the feast of homemade sausage and mash

San Sebastian, the gastronomic heartland of the Spanish Basque region, is famous for many things, not least of which are the all-male gastronomic societies which thrive, it is said, because of the particularly fearsome nature of Basque wives.

At first glance, Bolton, Lancashire, seems to have little in common with San Sebastian. But once a month, the spirit of escapee Basque husbands is alive and well in Franco Sotgiu's Bolton kitchen. Not that Franco is himself Spanish – in fact, his father came to Britain from Sardinia in the 1960s.

One of Franco's earliest memories is of groups of Italian, Spanish and Hungarian men cramming into the family kitchen, swearing in several languages as they argued over the relative merits of salami, chorizo and

kolbasz, while mincing and seasoning their favourites. So Franco has carried on the family tradition: his hobby-cum-business is www.sausagemaking.org, which sells everything the amateur aficionado of salami – or any other sort of sausage – might need to make it at home.

The monthly sausagefest in Franco's Bolton kitchen is about as hands-on as dinner gets. It also has an element of "bring your own" about it: farmer Pete has brought a huge shoulder of Gloucester Old Spots pork, which will be minced and blended with salt and spices; retailer Rupert has brought organic leeks and potatoes to make splendid mash; and huntsman John has a host of furred and feathered game – pheasant, hare, rabbit and teal – which he is carefully trimming.

Franco, meanwhile, is busy seasoning a big pan of pig's blood with the classic ingredients of the local sausage, black pudding.

Stuffing sausages is a two-man job. At the cranking end of the Heath Robinson-style stuffer, one man forces the meat towards the business end, where several yards of intestine are rolled over the nozzle. Airlocks and bursts are not uncommon, and the whole process has more than an element of comedy to it.

Once the cooking is done, conversation becomes muted; but the consensus is that the "Italian" sausage is the winner. And the only disappointed diner is Jasper, the family dog, for whom the evening has been torment. All this meat – five different sausages made from six kinds of meat – and what does poor old Jasper get? Not a sausage. Well, maybe the odd one. ■

What's on the menu?

Bangers, black pudding and Bolton FC

Who's who?

Franco Sotgiu, antique dealer and sausage-maker; his cousin Daniel Izza, solicitor; Pete Cartwright, owner of Paradise Farm in Derbyshire (tel: 01298 814 650); Steve Wignall, director of a building company; electrician Richard Brown; huntsman John Magee; and organic retailer Rupert Clare (www.thereallygreengrocer.com).



of organic leek and potato mash, gravy and mustard.

And to drink?

Organic Côtes du Rhône-Villages (Franco prefers French wine to Italian, strangely), German lager, Hungarian 1993 Tokaji 6 Puttonyos and apricot schnapps.

Name that tune

Franco's sister is a mezzo-soprano with the Welsh National Opera: her recordings of arias by Donizetti and Rossini lend a cultured air to dinner.

Any style tips?

Bolton sausage-eating chic: stretchable fabrics are very much in evidence.

Any gossip?

The prospects for Bolton's football team in the FA Cup (they beat local rivals Oldham); the hunting ban (unsurprisingly unpopular); and the spread of organic food. And sausages.



What's the occasion?

A monthly gathering of likeminded sausage-eating folk: this particular meal marks the end of the game season.

What's cooking?

Black pudding to start (pig's blood mixed with oats, barley, small cubes of back fat, dried mint, salt and pepper) with slices of rare, smoked duck breast. And then the main event: a huge variety of sausages, served with plenty

