

CALIFORNIA ON WHEELS

After seeing members of the wine trade devouring burgers while sitting on curbs in the parking lot at ProWein, Felicity Carter went to find out what was going on.



Some of the best burgers in Sweden are inside this truck

ProWein 2015's biggest secret was the Gnarly Burger truck, parked at the back of the halls. Inside the van, cooks prepared what smelled like the world's finest burgers.

But getting hold of a burger wasn't so easy, as they were only available to customers - or potential customers - of Delicato Family Vineyards, the California producer behind the Gnarly Head wine brand. Fortunately, EMEA sales director Jonas Hillergren, the man holding the coveted vouchers, was easy to approach. He was also happy to explain the truck.

Fierce competition

"We've been running a competition for maybe five or six years called the 'Gnarly Burger Competition,'" said Hillergren, adding that the competition had run in several European markets as well as the US. Last year, when the company was planning their next competition, they decided to do it all year round, to give it more impact. "Food trucks are a new occurrence in Sweden and Finland, and starting in Norway - not like in the US, where you have food trucks everywhere - so I suggested we have a food truck. Whatever the best recipe was, we'd sell it out of the truck."

They found a catering company - Bob on the Corner - and asked them to be partners. "It started out small in September, but now they're running

seven days a week, selling 200 burgers a day."

The truck can be found in different spots in Stockholm doing lunch and dinner, and occasionally in other cities. To find it, customers can download a street food app, which gives directions, or they visit the Gnarly Burger Facebook page. In any case, the truck is hard to miss, because the Gnarly Head branding is bright orange. "Gnarly Head is very strong in Sweden - it's the number-one-selling Zinfandel," says Hillergren, adding that the burgers and relaxed Californian branding are a perfect combination with the wines.

Gnarly Head is from the portfolio of Delicato Family Vineyards, a family-owned company founded in California in 1924. What started as a Prohibition-era farm that grew grapes for home winemakers is now a major US wine business, with sales estimated to be around \$110m annually. The brand is named for the old, head-trained vines found in Lodi, California, from which the Gnarly Head Zinfandel is made. Hillergren says the Zinfandel is number one in the US, the number two or three Californian Zinfandel in Sweden, and possibly the number one in the world. He adds that it gained its listing in Sweden through consumer demand, and not through tender.

Yet even bestselling brands need to stay top-of-mind. And the particular problem in Sweden is that it's awash with wine advertising. "There's a lot of noise," says

Hillergren. "Wine is a huge spender of printed media in Sweden, so you need to reach out to the consumer in different ways."

Yet there is no wine served from the truck, except when it's parked at special events, like the Nordea Masters Golf Tournament happening in Sweden this summer. And nor can Hillergren prove that it boosts Gnarly Head sales, no matter how popular the burgers themselves are, but he does believe the branded truck promotes awareness. "When the wine is at events, it does open the eyes of new consumers who may not have been Gnarly Head consumers, but who will have a chance to try the wine at the truck with a burger."

Making it pay

Hillergren says there's no cost involved with running the truck, because it pays for itself. "We have a license agreement with the people who own the truck and they run it on our behalf."

Not only that, but the burgers have been so successful that "the guy who opened the truck in Sweden has opened a Gnarly Burger restaurant. They serve wines and craft beers and Gnarly Head wines."

Would either party consider a restaurant franchise? Hillergren thinks not. What might be on the table, however, is a Gnarly Burger cookbook, because the company has kept all the award-winning burger recipes. Speaking of which, what kind of burger recipes do the Scandinavians enter? Hillergren says the locals put a lot more effort into the bread and toppings than the Californians do. "We've had everything from blue cheese and bacon - which is not really that creative - to a burger with sea urchin sauce on it." Sea urchin? "It's very salty and briney. It tasted very good."

The truck itself will be in California later this year, as well as in the UK, Denmark and Germany, so the company can make a YouTube video of the tour.

If you miss the tour and want to try a burger? You'll need to visit the Delicato stand at ProWein next year and ask for Jonas. ■

