

# Serbia's Testicle-Cooking Championship: Machos at Your Table

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*If there is a place where to refrain from spelling out the proverb You are what you eat, it is Šumadija, the home of first international testicle cooking (and eating) competition.*

Grey smoke rises up to the blue sky. The yards are green, the road – dusty, and there are bright red and pink geraniums spilling out of the pots. There are apples falling from trees, crashing onto the roofs of the old Yugo cars, cats running across the road towards the weed-covered graveyard and hiding by the old church under the rock.

This is the first shot, which reveals itself in the village of Borac, located in the Šumadija region of Serbia. The second shot is a billboard, grandiosely stretched across the street, with the suggestive logo – a yellow ‘M’ on a red background. It’s a remake of the McDonald’s one, but its upper edges are rounded in order to faithfully represent the nature of the advertised event – known here as ‘Mudijada’ or ‘mudriada’ (with the letter ‘R’ signifying it is a registered trademark). The Testicle-Cooking Olympiad. (Made up of the Serbian slang word for testicles, *mudi*, combined with the ending of the word ‘Olympiad’, in Slavic languages the event’s name has the benefit of also sounding like a combination of the same slang word with the noun *jesti*, which means eating.)

“Watch out now,” Ljubomir Erovic, the ideologue, organiser and main genius behind the Mudijada, as he draws the logo on a piece of paper. “This is the ‘M’.” Then, he turns the paper upside down. “What does it look like to you now?”

If cooked animal intestines or brain make many people around the world a bit queasy, then the testicles stew has the capacity to create human explosions. What dish could be more macho, more hairy and more Balkan than that? The Šumadija Olympiad caters to all these associations. It amplifies them and gives them a resonant, smoky and fragrant expression, which carries over the meadows and spreads far – to Sydney in one direction and Montreal in the other.

The first time these enthusiasts for the taste of animal testicles gathered in the region was 2005. Since then, the province has organised a yearly “world festival of testicle-cooking.” Now, four years later, it has grown quite naturally into the Olympiad. Last year, the get-together took place in the nearby village of Gornji Milanovac, south of Belgrade, and it inspired Ljubomir Erovic to release a cookbook as a result.

Published by London’s online edition YUDU, it contains recipes for all kinds of testicle-based dishes: pizza and goulash; barbequed and stewed; cooked with wine; with bourguignon sauce; in an omelette; with béchamel sauce. The sources are also varied – bulls, horses, ostriches. Ljubomir Erovic’s guiding principle, which he likes to repeat over and over again, is that “only the human ones are no good.”

A day before the competition begins, on the last day of August, the meadow on the outskirts of the village of Borac is already steaming. Tents have been put up; bottles have been opened; bon fires have been lit up, with *čevapčići*, *pleskavici* and plastic bottles of *slivovica*, or plum brandy, laid out diligently next to them; double basses, violins and drums already rumbling among them. Folk songs take turns with military marches.

While everything is going smoothly on the meadow by the river, the village seems to be starting to stir in a kind of relaxed chaos. There is no such thing as a script. The time estimates vary: ‘In



a minute’ or ‘In a bit’ or ‘Any time now’ or ‘Later’. It is getting darker and noisier and the outline fades of the rock on which the mother of the [Krali Marko](#), the hero with superhuman powers venerated throughout the Balkans, used to live. Then eating, drinking and being merry take place – of the kind that can be seen only in these geographical latitudes.

While some may consider the following morning as the one that comes after heavily indulging in food and drink, for others, this is the first encounter with Mudijada’s happy world. At least for this year.

The dusty road of Borac has probably not seen as many automobile tyres in the last twelve months. Rows of cars – mostly the emblematic Yugos, but some Ladas as well, interspersed here and there with Opels and Volkswagens have caused a congestion in the village, having parked along the houses’ fences, near the piles of chopped wood and all along the length of the kilometre leading to the meadow.

The belief that the testosterone-rich testicles are a powerful aphrodisiac is ancient and popular in many places around the world. This must be why many Serbian men find it quite entertaining to take their wives to the big eating event on the last week of August.

Very early in the morning in the village, two loudspeakers start booming with Serbian pop and rock covers of well-loved songs, performed by the band of... Ljubomir Erovic. This man, whose organisations skills continue to astound (the whole time, it seems like the competition is going to fall apart, but it goes on, with reports on it in the AFP, BBC and the Sydney Star) already has a music group as well. “I offer a two-for-one service: I cook testicles and play music.” Not only is his talent universal, but his music is quite eclectic too. Everything from rock to jazz and from evergreens to old Serbian songs. At the moment, he cooks and plays at the Lovachke Price in the Serbian town of Rajac, but he is considering the opening of a restaurant in London.

Around 10 in the morning, the Mudijada organised by Erovic promises to be much more massive than the previous night’s event. The 12 teams have gathered up on the meadow with the serious intention of proving that “Scots have their scotch, the Swiss – their cheese, and we, the Serbs, have balls,” as the competition’s website claims.

While bonfires are being lit up, there are people in aprons scurrying about and the t-shirts displayed by the road are selling like hot bread. Across them is written ‘World Mudeyada’, with the rounded logo, and they come in red, white, green and black, as well as large, medium and small sizes. It must be said that Erovic’s reference to the McDonald’s logo is not out of place at all – by all standards, eating a Big Mac and a Serbian goulash are events that will forever stand at the opposite ends of the spectrum. As a side note, however, it may be worth noting here that an American slang term for testicles is Chicken McNuggets.

It is noon. The teams have taken their positions. Over every bon fire hangs a copper pot filled with goulash. They call it Serbian goulash and its key characteristic is that it contains testicles. Generally, the ingredients include all kinds of edible offal fried in onion; fat; peppers; tomatoes; spices. One team has also added pickled gherkins, dried plums and crushed nuts. Another team is also preparing a side dish – even though it is still the end of the summer, they are roasting *kiseli kupus* – meat with cabbage that has been soured over a week.

Despite the personal preferences of the championship’s ideologue Erovic, nobody is using horse, ostrich, kangaroo, rooster or turkey testicles. The teams are “working” only with pork, veal, young goat and ram.

As time advances, along with the number of consumed glasses of brandy and beer, the good mood, but also the tension, increase. On the meadow, everything points to the fact that a competition is underway, rather than simply a Balkan-style gathering.

The international participation comes in the face of a Hungarian man who lives in Serbia and a Serb who lives in Australia. Ana Weksler from Israel, a fan of strange food, is among the guests. She is under the guise of performing her fantastic fire show, but really it is the food that has brought her to the event.

The others who stand out include: the Paganini of prosciutto – a middle-aged man who demonstrates playing with a knife over a leg of Serbian prosciutto; Zoran, who organises the Kupusiada – a *kupus*-cooking festival and a Bulgarian-Belgian baby who, on the previous night, has been pronounced a future Serbian *vojvoda*, general and marshal, and who has witnessed scary military marches roared out. No matter that she is a girl.

There is also time set aside for a press conference, which takes place in the local watering hole. Two people with video cameras and two with Nikons arrive. Ana attracts the most interest – the US-born Israeli is a personification of the sought-after international character of the championship. While she is being asked about the relationship between the US and Serbia and the Israeli people’s message to the Serbian nation, plates of smoked meat and sour cabbage appear on the tables.

After that, Ljubomir rises and gives a long speech, from which it becomes clear that he doesn’t want Serbia to only be associated with the bombings and sanctions, that he intends on opening a testicle restaurant, that he likes living on the edge, and that, in addition to being able to cook well, he can also play well, and – all in all, as those who know him can confirm, “I have always looked for something more unusual in my life.”

At 4:30 in one of the houses, which has been turned into the championship’s improvised headquarters, the “tasting panel” assembles. After passing through a staircase which would give any health and hygiene authority a pause, one reaches “the hall,” in which the winner will be elected. It corresponds quite well to the generally held idea of the delicacy: one of its corners is occupied by a bed, covered with a wrinkled blanket, next to the stove-pipe hang two romantic portraits of Serbian rulers, and thin cigarette butts with a leopard-skin design roll around in an ashtray by the window. The contestants’ plates have been piled on a table in the middle of the room. Most of the dishes have the usual look of offal stews, although some have been additionally embellished with suggestive decoration symbolising not only the male physiological organs that have been cooked, but also some of their neighbouring ones.

The decision for the top three awards is unanimous. The only disagreement is regarding their order but a consensus is quickly reached. The first prize is awarded to the team from a neighbouring village, but everyone receives some kind of a prize, and – in the end, when Ljubomir Erovic plays his last rock’n’roll song in the house’s courtyard and announces the results on the microphone, all of the teams are rejoicing with diplomas in their hands.