



Ballabio 2009

Text and pictures by lluisgib

I had heard really good things about this event. Peaceful surroundings (Lake Como, The Alps), good people and lots of bricks. This time my visit was a bit different. I was going to be there during the setting up of the event (perhaps one of the most interesting bits) and during the first hours.

I left Barcelona at 5 in the morning, and arrived in Ballabio at around 12 in the afternoon, after riding a motorbike, a plane, a bus, a train and a car. What a marathon!

Just after entering the building where the event took place (the school of Ballabio), I met Antonella, an Italian AFOL I met last year during LEGOWorld in Zwolle (Holland), and she "commanded" me to go to the reserved room saying we were going to eat Pizza and Focaccia. That was the best way to bond with the Italian community. With my humble Italian I was able to communicate and tell them a bit about the Spanish fans. A bit later Marco Chiappa, the newly re-elected Italian ambassador, arrived and we had a lively conversation. After lunch, I went for a walk to check how the event was organized.

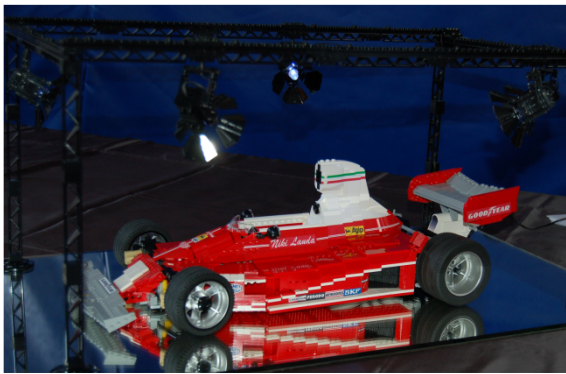
The school of Ballabio has 3 floors; the main floor, where they have the classrooms; the lower floor, with a big hall and a small gym; and the top floor which is a bit smaller than the others.

The hallway of the main floor was completely filled with tables for exhibiting MOCs and displays (Probably around 35~40 meters overall). Apart from that, there was a classroom used for two themed



exhibitions: the complete collection of the Western sets and a showcase of all the castles released by LEGO®. Another classroom was meant for conferences, a third one for selling sets and parts, and a fourth one reserved for the exhibitors. On the lower floor, the hall housed many City displays. In the gym they had big MOCs, more displays, and all the robotics stuff.

On the top floor, there was a gaming area for visitors. I'd like to go into detail with this point because there were many interesting initiatives promoted by Antonella. For a start, there were some tabletop games created by this active AFFOL, some inspired by classic games like Domino, and some thought up Antonella. With a small instructions book, the kids were ready to play. Then there was this really original initiative, perfect for events as well as for working with disabled kids and similar. It was a series of plastic boxes filled with LEGO sets, instruction booklets and playmats. A catalog showing all the available sets was given to the kids so they could pick their favourite. Once chosen, they gave him/her the set for building it. There were different



levels of difficulty, depending on the kid's ability or progress.

This system was used with kids that were victims of the Abruzzo earthquake, and the results were really satisfactory.

On Friday night, there was dinner and a couple of activities meant for AFOLs, like the auction of new sets Jan Beyer brought with him. The Pick-a-Brick was postponed to the next morning since there was no time left after everyone got all crazy building the novelty sets.

The Italian fans are great builders and showed a big amount of original and amazing creations. It's hard to highlight only a few, but I'll just mention my favourite ones. The completely functional reproduction of the gondola lift of the city of Bolzano really amazed me. It was made with Technic and Mindstorms and it was working during the whole event. Really spectacular.

Continuing with Mindstorms/Technic, I must mention the plotter that was able to draw your face based on a picture taken with a web cam and processed through some special software.

The classic Formula 1 cars exhibition was another big point in the event.

As for displays, there was Classic Space, Castle,

World War II... but the spotlight goes to the City displays. There was a great amount (and quality) of them in every corner of the event, showing us the beach of Rimini with all the parasols lined up, or a city with a harbor filled with water where ships could just float and move around. And of course there were many with trains as the main thing.

As an example of international contribution to the event, the Beijert family from Rotterdam (Netherlands) travelled to Ballabio for the first time to build and exhibit a city and train display of about 8 meters. They have quite a lot of experience with this, since they've been attending events in Belgium, Holland and Germany for 10 years. While the father and the two sons were working hard setting up their display, the mother stayed in Lecco since she isn't that much into LEGO®... I suppose this is something common in many families. From this display I really liked the simple yet ingenious system for making an articulated bus.

There were many countries represented, and everyone managed to make this a great event. The people, as always, were really kind and always ready to chat about anything brick related. Luckily Spanish and Italian are rather similar, so there wasn't much of a language barrier.

Grazie a tutti e ci vediamo presto!■