



Bistro Noir offers an eclectic range of dishes at very enticing prices, our reviewer found

Bistro with a sense of adventure

John Sutton takes Bistro Noir on Lark Lane by the horns – and finds plenty to savour

menu. As for goat, outside of specialist Caribbean or African restaurants I doubt it would even get near a professional kitchen.

The curry was spicy and tasty, the flavours reached out and spread themselves round the tastebuds rather than being just spoonfuls of hot gloopy sauce over meat. It was slow-cooked, making the goat tender.

Really, it was like mutton, but I know mentioning that unfashionable version of sheep will put people off. So it was like older lamb.

I was already in a good mood when Miss and I sat down and it announced three courses for £14.95 on the top of the menu. There were eleven choices for mains, plus a specials board. And come Sunday, Monday or Tuesday it's £9.99, cheaper than a dine-in for two from one of the country's premium retailers.

Miss went for sea bass with a peanut

sauce on noodles for her main. A fine choice. Sea bass on these sorts of menus often carries a supplement, but not at Bistro Noir. The fillets can also look like they've been cut from an anorexic goldfish. Again, not so – here, three fillets of decent size were balanced on top of the noodle and veg stack.

We washed this down with a Peroni (£3.10) a glass of house white (£2.55) and a diet coke (£1.75).

Saturday night when we went was pleasantly busy. There was a group of girls on a night out, a family with a youngish child, and couples either dining à deux or on double dates. There was a nice buzz over the red check tablecloths with some groups grabbing a quick bite before heading out onto Lark Lane or others setting the world to rights and getting settled in for the evening with a bottle or two of red wine.

We'd started with hummus and bread, which was supposed to be warm but wasn't. The chickpea dish was more than passable – obviously homemade as it had some texture, and it wasn't just the baby food-consistency mush that passes for hummus these days.

There was calamari too, picked from the specials board and served with garlic mayonnaise and a bit of salad. The batter came apart a little too easily and was a tad anaemic, not a golden colour, but the fish was fresh and not rubbery.

The surroundings, as the name of the restaurant suggests, have something of a French theme. There's that art nouveau picture of the seductively evil-looking Chat Noir and other adverts of that vogue, but also pictures of Liverpool from the fifties, when so much of the city was badly bomb-damaged and looking more than a bit sorry

Key Facts

- Name of restaurant** Bistro Noir
- Address, telephone number, website** 14-16 Lark Lane, Liverpool, 0151-728 9826, www.larklane.com/bistro-noir
- Children:** Welcome and separate menu
- Disabled access:** Yes
- Service:** Excellent
- The bill:** £41.80 for two, and even cheaper if you don't go on peak nights
- Rating:** ★★★★★

Jane Clare on wine

Add Bucks to Eurovision wine drink

FOR me, it's just never been the same since Terry Wogan moved on. The Eurovision Song Contest that is, not Radio 2. I miss him.

But for many Eurovision fanatics, Terry's absence doesn't matter. It's the songs that count. Or is it? I have no idea. What I do know is that thousands gather in their living rooms and have Eurovision-themed parties to sing, drink and dance the night away and cheer every NIL point.

But what's this wine column got to do with it? If you're planning a party to mark the contest a week on Saturday (and the serious stuff starts with the heats on Tuesday and Thursday which can be watched on BBC Three at 8pm) then how about a vino-Euro evening? This week I've teamed up with colleague Jamie McLoughlin, writer of Boom Bang a Blog, to suggest wines which will tease your tastebuds and loosen your vocal chords.

Says Jamie: "Just like the contest, wine lovers have what you'd call the bookies' favourites from the well-known producers France, Italy and Spain but there are always those dark horses from the smaller nations waiting patiently in the wings."

I approached the Wine Society for help. It is proud of its long tradition of sourcing good wines from places that others have not reached. Who better to ask in our Euro-vino-vision search.

The society was formed in 1874 and is the world's oldest wine club. A spokesman said: "Since its inception, a key objective has been to introduce wines not commonly imported to this country. Buyers taste very widely to search for good bottles to stretch the horizons and quench the British public's thirst for new flavours."

Jamie and I picked two each. Jamie in the red

