

THE DREAM SCENE

Helping to keep expat's informed.....and smiling.

Issue no. 72 1st of February 2013

Bienvenido a todos.

After a remarkably dry December, 42% less rainfall than normal, January also turned out to be an excellent month with temperatures often in the low 20's. However, from January 19, we have been experiencing some very strong northerly winds. These have caused extensive damage throughout Spain; two men being killed in Cartagena when a wall was blown down onto them and a woman in Badajoz died after her house-gate fell on her. Palm trees, shed-roofs, signs, and indeed anything not strong or firmly secured collapsed in the wind. Even the large Alcampo sign at Zenia Boulevard is now being supported by a large 'cherry-picker.' If you had a canvas gazebo in your garden, it is now probably somewhere in North Africa.....or the Med'!

Looking back at last year, the economy was also just as stormy and problematic. Unfortunately, 2013 has not started any better. There are now six million unemployed in Spain, more than 26% of the population. Inflation is around 3% and may increase due to a swathe of price increases announced in early January. The electricity continues its upward climb with an increase of 3%; road-tolls are up 3.3%; Renfe train-tickets are also up 3%; your Telefonica standing-charge is now increased by 2.9%, but this is the first increase in five years, and cigarettes are up by around 20 cents per packet. But the one increase which leaves me flummoxed, is the increase in the IVA rate on new builds from 4 to 10%! The tax relief on housing was also removed in January. No respite here for the builders and buyers.

But these difficult times have also brought an increase in the human 'cockroaches.' There is a marked increase in the incidence of overcharging by 'gas engineers.' They are now targeting non-Spanish names in the phone books and pestering them. Not only Brit's but Dutch and Scandinavians as well. They tell the victim that their 'gas certificate' has expired and needs to be renewed. If you fall for it, you will end up paying several hundred euros, whereas the cost of the replacement plastic tubing is just a handful of euros and is a simple job to do. It is probably best to be rude and slam the phone down. These are, after all, con-artists. Similarly with car maintenance and repair; even the big name garages will often 'pad' the bills of expat's. This is not paranoia as I am aware that several of my friends have been 'taken for a ride.' Demand the price up-front before any work is undertaken. Unfortunately when it comes to money matters in Spain, or indeed anywhere else, the meek don't inherit the earth!

You also need to be tough with your bank. If your account is continually in credit with a reasonable turnover, you should not be paying any charges. The banks do have special offers and 'freebies' but will rarely offer them unless you ask for them. There is an old Spanish saying that sums it up: "*El que no llora, no mama*", which could be translated as, "The baby will not be fed until he cries", or "If you don't ask, you don't get." If they are unhelpful, move your account.

A Medieval Market will be held in Orihuela from February 1 to 3. Buses will be provided from the roundabout near the *Ayuntamiento* in Playa Flamenca. The local council will be paying the market organisers €30,000 for the event.

2GB Indian Restaurant in Via Park V will be closed for the month of February and re-opening in early March.

The Lounge in Lago Jardin II will be holding a number of events to raise money for Parkinson's Disease charities. Weather permitting, they will hold a barbecue and quiz on Sundays with raffle tickets. On St. Valentines Night, there will be a disco evening with a buffet. Tickets will be €5, €3 for the charity and €2 for the buffet. Fancy Dress is optional.

Thanks to Søren Olsen for the sub' and extra donation.

Have an excellent month and don't forget Valentine's Day on February 14.

Mick & Tid.

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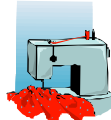
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Cars.

A boy is walking along the road when a car pulls up alongside him. 'If you get in my car,' says the driver, 'I'll give you a bag of sweets.' The boy ignores him. 'Okay,' says the driver. 'Get in my car and you can have two bags of sweets and €5.' The boy ignores him. The driver says, 'Listen, if you'll just get in the car I'll give you all the sweets you want and €20.' The boy turns to the driver and says, 'Dad, for the last time, I'm not getting into that Skoda.'

I took my banger for a service yesterday - the mechanic advised me to keep the oil and change the car.

A woman tells her husband that her car won't start. 'I think there's water in the carburettor,' she says. 'How do you know that?' asks the husband. The wife replies, 'I drove it into the canal.'

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The IMF on Wednesday said it had revised its economic growth forecast for Spain slightly downward for this year, predicting that the recession in 2013 would be wider than in 2012, with Spain missing out on what is expected to be a gradual global upturn.

PM Rajoy has said that his forthcoming program would be 'the most ambitious and intense agenda' ever seen in Spain, and he considered that things will improve in the second half of 2013.

Four regional governments (Catalonia, Andalucia, Murcia and Valencia) went over their annual deficit objective in Q3, Murcia being the worst offender. Some regions could post a surprise finish. Castille-La Mancha, for example, has made major spending cuts by deferring expenditures until the end of the year. Both the obvious overspending by these four regions and the more subtle attempts to hide overspending by the other regions show that the regions are still not undergoing the required reforms and are hoping to get out of trouble by playing the victim or cheating the system. But these ploys are self-deceiving, because they overlook the fact that Minister of Finance Montoro has promised the EU that Spain would meet its deficit objectives. And if it does not, then the EU will intervene. (El Economista)

The businessman Miguel Angel Flores, promoter of the Halloween party in Madrid Arena, is now free after posting bail of €200,000 within hours of it being set. He is being investigated following the death of five youths at his grossly overcrowded disco.

Carlos Fabra, the President Aerocas - the concession holder for Castellon Airport - announced the "imminent" sale of the Airport to Libyan owned investment company, for the sum of €200 million. The airport, which has not yet had a commercial flight and which "officially opened" in March 2011, had swallowed up €138 million by the end of December 2011, according the Government Audit Office. But then just two weeks later it emerged that the Libyan story was rubbish. The President of the Generalitat Valenciana, Alberto Fabra, announced that if the sale of Castellon Airport did not go ahead by the end of February, the facility would be managed and operated under the direct management of Aerocas. Fabra of course is president and no doubt will require more funding! But still, no planes! Meanwhile the facility has been rented out to a car racing team who were charged €1,000 per day.

It's much the same story at Corvera Airport. The concession holder here, Aeromur, intends to refinance the €200 million loan it was awarded by a consortium of banks in order that they could complete the project. When the loan was awarded in 2010 it was agreed that the repayment would be made in full - plus interest - within 3 years of the airport becoming operational. Given that the originally agreed date for opening has been delayed by more than 2 years it is perhaps understandable that the Banks are keen to recoup their investment. The new terms of the loan are expected to demand full repayment - plus interest - by 2015, regardless of whether the facility is operational or not. The question now is whether the airport is capable of generating enough revenue to successfully repay the loan and make a profit.

The Association of Inspectors at the Bank of Spain, which covers 80 percent of the professionals at the lender, has produced a damning report about the institution's practices, including the accusation that when evidence of wrongdoing is discovered in Spanish banks, "the usual reaction is to look the other way." The new governor of the Bank of Spain, Luis Linde, announced in July 2012 that a commission would be created to investigate the failings of the institution. Under its watch, a number of regional savings banks have been blighted by cases of corruption, while the taxpayer has had to stand by and watch as the government spends billions of euros of public money shoring up the banks, whose balance sheets were devastated after the collapse of the country's construction sector.

The Spanish Central Government has taken the decision to make a number of cuts to medium-distance train routes and replace them with buses in an attempt to make financial savings. Medium-distance trains - those with journeys of not more than 100km - account for around 52% of the Spanish railway network and scheduled journeys, but are used by less than 16% of the country's population. The proposal is expected to save the country around €51 million, according to Government sources. The Autonomous Communities can still take the decision to keep such routes and journeys open, however they must meet the cost.

Over 49,400 Spaniards found jobs in Germany last year, an increase of 15.8 percent over 2011. Spain is loosing over 2,000 jobs a day because of the economic crisis and spending cuts.

Over 300 public health-centre directors across the Madrid region formally handed in their resignations after agreeing last month to step down *en masse* in protest at the regional government's plans to privatise some medical services in Madrid. The resignations will take effect when the privatisation process starts, according to the documents the doctors have signed. The 322 directors, including head nurses and administrative chiefs, will keep their jobs in the public health sector but will give up their supervisory positions at facilities across the region. At the same time, some 3,000 health professionals at 166 centres have also stated that they will give up their positions on special committees that oversee vaccines, prescriptions drugs and patient care.

Cement demand in Spain recorded its biggest yearly drop in 2012 since the outbreak of the country's Civil War in 1936 and is expected to tumble another 20% this year in the wake of the property crash, official data showed. Cement consumption fell by 1/3 to 13.5 million tonnes in 2012 compared to 20.4 million tonnes in 2011. (Reuters)

The tax amnesty offered by the Hacienda was not as successful as the government had hoped. Although 618 companies and 29,065 individuals benefited from the amnesty, only €1.2 billion was raised in place of the planned €2.5 billion. The amnesty, which ended in December 2012, offered a fine of just 10% of the capital reported with no questions asked. Around €40 billion has been repatriated, but the actual fines were nowhere near that they should have been - €4 billion!

The Unió Democràtica de Catalunya (UDC) — one of the political partners in the ruling Catalonia CiU bloc — was found guilty of diverting €388,483 from a fund set up to train the unemployed in the region into their own accounts.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Working Group on Bribery, established in 1999 to monitor alleged bribery and illicit payments to government officials, has criticised Spain as being one of the worst offenders reporting that Spain had failed to launch a single prosecution for bribery during the last 13 years, and had initiated only seven investigations. "Spain must vigorously pursue foreign bribery allegations and strengthen its legal framework for fighting bribery by addressing gaps in its Penal Code," the working group said.

Gardening.

- Man, to Neighbour: 'Can I borrow your lawnmower?'
- Neighbour: 'No, she's not home yet.'
- A little boy goes up to Old Ned the gardener and says, 'What do you put on your rhubarb?' 'Well, usually rotted horse manure,' replies Old Ned.
- 'We have custard,' says the little boy.

What's Up? continued

Farmers with orange and lemon orchards, particularly in the Vega Baja region, are complaining about the poor prices their crops are attracting at the moment. They say that it costs between 17 and 20 cents to grow and pick a kilo of oranges or lemons. However, wholesalers are now only paying around 10 cents per kilo for them. The Vega Baja Region accounts for 69% of the sweet orange production in the Alicante Province, which is itself the main producer of sweet oranges in Spain.

The Faculty of Medicine of the University of Valencia has installed frequency inhibitors to prevent students from copying in exams using electronic devices. It is rumoured that some mobile devices were used for exam cheating in previous years. Let's hope that your new doctor wasn't one of them.

The Civil Guard have arrested an employee of a restaurant in Benidorm that duplicated credit cards of customers and subsequently made purchases through the Internet worth €8,750. Seven victims of the scam have been located to date.

A court martial will try six military officials for allegedly diverting nearly €300,000 in Ministry of Defence funding. The money was meant to buy cafeteria food for the San Hermenegildo military student residence in Seville for the period 2005-2009. Two colonels, two majors, one captain and a sub-lieutenant, as well as two businessmen, face up to six years in prison. The judge's report notes that while students complained repeatedly about going hungry, the officers received gourmet food worth thousands of euros from the suppliers, who provided fake invoices in order to obtain ministry funds.

Burt it seems the Armada are at it as well. Two Spanish Navy corporals have each been sentenced to five years in prison for trafficking 224 kilos of hashish from Ceuta to the coast of Cádiz in 2008. The two sailors used the navy's P-114 patrol boat to transport the packages, valued at €18,000, from the Spanish North African exclave to the Carraca naval base in San Fernando. Occasional convictions for drug trafficking by armed forces personnel do occur, but almost never come to light because of the confidential nature of the military code in contrast to the criminal and civil codes.

Local police in Castellón arrested a 45-year-old German lorry driver. The driver, who was noticeably drunk, stopped to ask a pedestrian for directions, who reported him. The driver, who was driving a massive heavy-goods vehicle, was six times the legal alcohol limit and it was only 2:30 in the afternoon!

A 30-year-old woman has been arrested in Alicante for threatening a local rugby team. It seems her romantic approaches were spurned by one of the players and she did not take it very well. It is alleged that she went on-line to various forums, threatening the team with murder; insulted and slandered them and may also be responsible for painting insults and threats in the toilets and sports' facilities where they train. She used the on-line name 'Satan' and although she used different internet-cafes to post the threats, the police managed to track her down. Beware! A woman scorned.....etc!

El Mundo held an online poll with the question, 'Do you think justice is more lenient with corrupt politicians than with other criminals?' 99%, several thousand, said 'Yes!'

The National Police have arrested a 45-year-old woman after she drove over her 52-year-old husband deliberately and repeatedly in a supermarket car-park in Malaga. Despite being 'passed over' several times, the victim is still alive and stable. The police could not comment as to whether the romantic relationship between the couple is finished or had problems! I think I can help you out with this one, guys!

Did you hear about the dwarf psychic who escaped from prison? The newspaper headline read, 'Small medium at large.'

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JUST OPENED...




Ecuador has presented a legal suit against Spain at the European Court of Human Rights over the Iberian nation's eviction legislation. Ramiro Rivadeneira, the Ecuadorian public defender, told a press conference in Madrid that Spain was "violating the right to justice" of Ecuadorian nationals resident in the country and called on Strasbourg to modify the Civil Procedure Law. The injustices within the Spanish mortgage law has been highlighted in these columns many times. Ecuadorian authorities calculate that as many as 15,000 of its citizens in Spain are affected by either eviction processes or mortgage-payment problems. What a pity that David Cameron, Enda Kenny and Jens Stoltenberg are not similarly motivated to protect the interests of their own citizens abroad.

A number of the congregation in a Catalan church were recently rendered comatose; however, on this occasion it was not down to the anaesthetizing effect of the sermon. Around 35 people were poisoned by carbon monoxide during a concert held in the parish church of San Vicente de Gualba (Barcelona). It occurred during the Winter Festival of the municipality. Of the 100 people who attended the concert, 10 were taken to hospital and just one was kept overnight. Reports that Country 'n Western music was the cause of the poisoning are unfounded.

Medical Corner

Two elderly men are eating breakfast one morning. One notices something funny about the other's ear. 'Hey,' he says. 'Did you know you have a suppository in your left ear?' His friend pulls the suppository out and stares at it. 'I'm really glad you saw this thing,' he says. 'Now I know where my hearing aid is.'

A man is given a pig's ear during a transplant operation. A month later he goes back to the hospital for a check-up. 'Any problems?' asks the doctor. 'No, it's fine,' replies the man. 'Though I do get a bit of crackling.'

The colder the X-ray table, the more of your body that is required on it.

Plenty of news and amusement still coming from the local council, but most of it unwelcome. A respectable restaurant in Orihuela began to resemble a scene from a Dodge City fistfight one evening. Pedro Mancebo, head of the Clr-CLARO party and two fellow councillors, Juan Ignacio Lopez-Bas and Marta Campillo, were allegedly assaulted by Jorge Lorente, the brother of the former PP mayor of Orihuela, Monica Lorente. It is alleged that Jorge provoked the Clr politicians by referring to them loudly as 'shit councillors' and 'sons-of-bitches.' It is then alleged that Jorge pummelled the three councillors with his fists. The police were called but Jorge had 'scarpered' leaving his friend to deal with the police. The police stuck the friend in the 'clink' for a few hours until he could prove his identity. The three Clr councillors went to the hospital for treatment and have denounced Mr. Lorente, who has counter-denounced them for an injured fist.



More serious however is the perceived cutting of services and funds to the coastal residents. The closure of the National Police presence at the Playa Flamenca town hall has meant that anyone applying for a *residencia* or for a renewal, will now have to make three trips to Orihuela. The reason the police left was because the mayor, Monserrate Guillén, withdrew the clerk who was assisting the police. I have no doubt that this will be corrected quickly. But if not, we will all know where we stand with Orihuela.

Further disregard for expats came when Pepa Ferrando, now president of Orihuela PP revealed her 70-strong candidate list for their local government if they win the next election. There is not one non-Spanish European on the list. So much for integration!

You may recall earlier entries concerning the sale of council land in Orihuela Costa. The council planned to 'asset strip' the vacant council-owned land on the Costa to raise over €100 million. However the sale was a failure with only land to the value of €1.2 million being realised. Prior to the land sales, the Coast was promised that it would get 40% of the funds realised, 30% for the city and 30% for the surrounding areas. However, the councillor responsible for the sale, Antonia Moreno of the Socialists, has insisted that the funds received be invested in the redevelopment of a single street in Orihuela only, the Avenida de Teodomiro! What is it about politicians and promises? I recall the words of President Charles de Gaulle who said, 'Since a politician never believes what he says, he is quite surprised to be taken at his word.'

The problem with selling plots on the coast means that there will be no land available if and when the council attempts to improve the facilities for the coastal residents. Councillor Moreno now wants to sell plots from the protected Sierra Escalona area near Orihuela, which 'the Greens' and the other parties will hopefully vote against. But the developers have no real appetite for large projects at present. Torre Vieja recently failed to sell even one of 22 plots it hoped to attract more hotels to the area. Developers were even allowed to have up to 30 stories on favourable terms in privileged areas.

The mobile telephone scandal in Torre Vieja continues to grow. Graham Knight from the Foreigner's Office there is alleged to have spent €1,120 on his mobile during a single weekend in the UK. It then transpired that Torre Vieja have been paying €400,000 annually on their mobile and fixed line service. However, no contract was ever signed and there were no competitive quotes solicited for the service. What a way to run a business!

The Revival disco just outside Los Montesinos may be familiar with those of you under 30. It seems it has been operating without a licence for 17 years and the authorities are getting a bit 'pissed-off' with it. There has been an attempt to close it down which is a shame as it is the best disco on the coast, particularly if you are into 'techno.' They have a good web-site with videos here, which is worth a look - <http://www.discorevival.com/index.php>

My wife asked me what I was doing on the computer last night. I told her I was looking for cheap flights. "I love you!" she said, and then she got all excited, quickly undressed and we had the most amazing night ever

Which is ODD because she's never shown an interest in darts before

(Kevin Wood)

Sunday, December 30, saw an unusual event in Orihuela - a charity football match between the local bullfighters and the local police. Not sure what the final result was but I hear that some policemen may have been gored and some bullfighters were injured after 'falling down the stairs.'

Exhibitors at the recent 'Russian Meeting Point' and exhibition in Torre Vieja have complained that there were not enough Russians at the event. Each stand for the three-day-event cost the exhibitors €3,000.

Torre Vieja Hospital have spend around €500,000 in extending its dialysis unit. A total of 174 people were served by the unit last year, a number which is expected to increase.

Arsonists struck on two separate occasions in the Villamartin area on New Year's Eve. In the first a car was destroyed. The car window was broken by a concrete block and a firework thrown inside. In the other incident, a pergola and some trees were destroyed. See photo.



Bring on the dancing girls! An international dancing troupe, "La Sal de Torre Vieja", will tour several



countries this coming year and will start in early February in Hong Kong. There they will participate in the Chinese New Year celebrations in the traditional "New Year International Parade," along with several representations from other countries. The "Sal de Torre Vieja" has been chosen to represent Spain. A delegation will travel with 21 multinational dancers, led by Conchita Valdés, head of the troupe, and Maximum Cavazzoni, technical director. For this event the organization has been working for months preparing the costumes that will look spectacular in the parade, see photo. On returning from Hong Kong they will travel to Nice and then onto Monte Carlo to perform in the spectacular Battle of Flowers which is held annually in the principality.

The owner of Torresat TV has appeared in some unfavourable press coverage recently. It is alleged that she owes €600,000 to the Hacienda in tax payments for 2010 and 2011. She denies the allegations.

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A rag-and-bone man knocked on my mother-in-law's door and asked her if she had any beer bottles.

'Do I look as if I drink beer?' she said.

So the man looked at her and said, 'So do you have any vinegar bottles?'

(Roy Hudd)

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Combating the Crisis.

Faced with savage cut-backs, large IVA increases, evictions and dwindling demand generally, growing numbers of people throughout Spain are taking matters into their own hands, staging small acts of resistance and coming up with creative ways to encourage customers.

Locksmiths in Pamplona have refused to work with the authorities to carry out evictions. Although locksmiths are usually not required until after an eviction has taken place, Iker de Carlos, spokesman for the city's 15 locksmith companies, says that in many cases locksmiths are required to force open doors while the occupants are still inside, making them the final link in the judicial chain by which the banks recover properties from people unable to pay their mortgages.

"When you see it on the television it is different when you turn up at an eviction and you know you are helping to throw somebody out of their home; that will stay with you forever," he says.

"We know this isn't exactly going to start the revolution, but it might just provide the spark that Navarre needs to come up with solutions to this unfair situation," says De Carlos, pointing out that the law still allows for banks to recover properties by force if necessary.

Following the lead of their colleagues in Pamplona, the Union of Security Locksmiths, which is made up of more than 300 companies nationwide, has said its more than 2,000 members will not take part in what it calls "extremely serious" evictions: cases involving families, elderly people, or children who are going to be put out on the street. The first such protest took place in Barcelona, when a locksmith found himself dealing with a situation involving a single father with four children, one of whom has mental health problems. "It was a situation in which he believed that he should not take part, and so he left," says the organization's president, David Ormaechea.

Thirteen euros for a carrot? That is the solution that Quim Marcé, the director of the municipal theatre in the small Catalan town of Bescanó, has come up with to get round the new 21% sales tax on movie tickets. Then the government hiked the value-added tax (VAT) rate on theatre tickets last summer and Marcé thought his theatre was doomed. With one in four local residents unemployed, Marcé knew that even a modest hike in ticket prices might leave the 300-seat municipal theatre empty.

"We said, 'This is the end of our theatre, and many others.' But then the next morning, I thought, we've got to do something so that we don't pay this 21 percent, and we pay something fairer," says Marcé. He says he looked out his window at farmland that surrounds this village, two hours north of Barcelona, and suddenly had an idea: instead of selling tickets to his shows, he'd sell carrots.

"We sell one carrot, which costs 13 euros -- very expensive for a carrot. But then we give away admission to our shows for free," he explains. "So we end up paying 4% tax on the carrot, rather than 21%, which is the government's new tax rate for theatre tickets." Classified as a staple, carrots are taxed at a much lower rate and were spared from the new tax increases that went into effect on September 1.


(Abridged from El Pais)

Most of the funeral associations in Valencia have agreed a scheme with the city to provide up to 50 anti-crisis funerals. The normal price for a funeral, which includes the basic coffin, the treatment of the deceased, the hearse, management, staffing etc, usually costs between €2,200 and €5,500 according to the president of the Undertakers Association. "We will now offer this service for €500, to families who are without resources and are unemployed."

The IVA rate on funeral services has now increased from 8 to 21%.

The Honeymoon Suite

A hotel porter is looking through the keyhole of the honeymoon suite. 'Holy crap!' he exclaims. 'Look at him go!' A passing maid hears him. She pushes the porter out of the way so she can take a peek. 'Oh, my God!' she gasps. 'Lucky girl. My boyfriend never does that for me.' One of the restaurant waiters happens to hear her. He bends down to peer through the keyhole himself. He gives a low whistle and says, 'Incredible. He's certainly giving her such a good time: and last night he had the nerve to complain about a hair in his soup!'



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Footie!

•One evening Arsene Wenger's phone rings. It's the fire brigade telling him that the Emirate's Stadium is on fire. 'The cups!', shouts Wenger. 'Save the cups!' 'Don't worry, sir,' says the fireman. 'The flames haven't got to the canteen yet.'

•My doctor told me I should avoid any unnecessary excitement. So I started supporting Aston Villa.



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LIME BAR GOLF SOCIETY, LOS ALTOS, ORIHUELA COSTA

The golf societies venue for the 9th January 2013 was held at the Vista Bella Golf Course.

The weather was fine but very cold in the strong wind which made play difficult; the course was in fairly good condition.

The competition was in the Stableford format and the main prize on this occasion being the President's Cup.

The President of the society, Pete Rushton, teed off to lay the marker for the Presidents Drive which was won by Len Henderson.

Nearest the Pin in two on the par 4 12th hole was won by Stewart Coleman.

Best guest was Charlie Kohn Winkley.

Silver Class 3rd place was Norman Dobson.

Silver Class 2nd place was Nev. Greenwood.

Silver Class 1st place was Andy Mc Donald.

Gold Class 3rd place was Steve Cottle.

Gold Class 2nd place was Charlie Mc Gonagle.

Gold Class 1st place and winner of the Presidents Cup was Dave Gill with a score of 33 points.

A very enjoyable day's golf in pleasant company. Thank you to Captain Mick Slater and Vice Captain Stewart Coleman for organising the event and also thanks to the Staff at The Lime Bar for a most enjoyable meal. Anyone wishing to join our friendly society just needs to phone Mick on 659866468 or Stewart on 966180003.



UP-COMING FIXTURES

Fixtures for the next four months of 2013 are:

February 13th, Mar Menor – 50 Euros;

March 13th, Altorreal – 35 Euros;

April 10th, Curtis Cup at Vistabella – 35 Euros;

May 8th, Captains Day at La Torre - 50 Euros.

All games include green fee, buggy, prizes and buffet.



The Jocks: What does a Scottish football team have in common with a three-point plug? They are both useless in Europe. Angus contacted the authorities in Scotland to tell them he'd just seen a UFO hovering over his house. It turned out it was the sun.

There are two seasons in Scotland - June and Winter. *Billy Connolly*

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Tight as a barn-owl's ...!

A man goes into a shop to buy his wife a Valentine gift. He points out a bottle of perfume and asks how much. 'That's €50, sir' says the assistant. 'Oh, no. That's too much,' says the man. 'What about the smaller bottle?' 'That's €30, sir' says the assistant. 'No,' says the man. 'That's still too much. What about that really tiny bottle?' 'That's €15,' says the assistant. 'No,' says the man. 'Still too much. I'd like to see something really cheap.'

So the assistant hands him a mirror.

Pension Reform in Spain.

Spain's pension reform, which raises the age of retirement from 65 to 67 between now and 2027 now takes effect. The increase will be made incrementally, at the rate of one month per year for the first six years, and then at two months per year for the remaining 9 years. The maximum number of years of contributions in order to qualify has also increased from 35 to 37 years. The reform also maintains 15 years as being the minimum period of contributions in order to qualify for a 50% reduced pension, whilst 22 years of contributions will be required in order to qualify for 100%.

More changes to electricity billing.

The Cabinet have approved a royal decree which dictates that households and small businesses with an Electricity supply of less than 15kw will be billed bi-monthly and for an actual, as opposed to an estimated consumption, to be used. This is due to an increase in the number of complaints being made about incorrect billing to the National Energy Commission. However, consumers can choose to remain on the current system, which sees monthly bills alternate between actual and estimated amounts. When it has not been possible for an engineer to visit a property to take an actual reading, the energy provider in question will allow the householder to submit their own reading by telephone, which will then be treated as an actual reading. The monthly billing system with bi-monthly estimated readings was introduced four years ago, but the majority of households found that their expenditure increased considerably overnight. Furthermore, the cost of Electricity in Spain is set to increase by 3% from the 1st of January 2013. (Cinco Dias)

Changes and confusion re driving licences.

The question of whether expats should change their own-country driving licence to a Spanish one is constantly debated. There have been occasions when the Spanish police have even fined non-Spanish residents for not changing their licence to a Spanish one. This does not mean that the Spanish police are correct.

The Costa Consulting Bureau have been particularly helpful in investigating this issue. I detail hereunder the result of part of their enquiries at the Trafico office in Malaga. More details can be had by going to the links at the bottom of this column.

'In 2009 there was approved the new Rules of Driving License in Spain. These rules established that on the 19th of January, 2013, it would come into force a law that said that all European residents who have been living in Spain for more than 2 years, and had not got the European driving license, had to be inscribed in the office of Trafico in Malaga. The inscription means that they have to renovate their UK licenses. For doing that, they need to go to Trafico and hand in the following documents: application form of renovation, pay taxes of renovation (less than 30€), medical certificate, and a photo. In case the residents don't update their UK licenses in Trafico, they will be fined with 200€

Not all residents have to renovate their UK licenses. All residents who have the European driving license, that is the plastic card with the date of expiration in the front side, don't have to renew their UK licenses. Their driving license is correct. But those residents who have the old format UK driving license, that is a paper, they need to go to Trafico to renovate their licenses. (Costa Consulting Bureau)

Changing your home country licence for a Spanish one may raise some issues, particularly if you decide later to return to your home country. Check-out here for more information -

<http://costaconsultingbureau.com/spanish-paperwork/new-driving-licence-rules-in-spain/>

<http://www.tumbit.com/news/articles/6681-dgt-clarifies-uk-spanish-driving-licence-requirements.html>

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The Cabbie.

A businessman flew to Las Vegas, gambled and lost everything. He had nothing left but a couple of dollars and a return plane ticket. If he could just get to the airport, he could get home. He jumped in a cab outside the casino and explained the situation to the driver, promising to send him the fare money from home.

But the cabbie said: 'If you don't have fifteen dollars, get the hell out!' So the man had to walk to the airport - a long uncomfortable walk in the sweltering desert sun.

A year later the man comes back, but this time he wins big in the casino. He goes to the taxi rank outside the casino and looks around, and sure enough, at the back of the queue of taxis is the driver who refused to give him a lift the previous year.

For a moment the man thinks about how he could get revenge on that taxi driver. He gets into the first cab in the line and asks the driver, 'Hey buddy. How much for a ride to the airport and a blow job?'

'What the...!' yells the driver. 'Get the hell outta here!' The man jumps into every cab in the line and asks the driver the same question, getting the same angry response each time.

He finally reaches his original driver at the back of the line and asks, 'How much for a ride to the airport?' The cabbie replies, 'Fifteen bucks.' The businessman says 'Okay,' and off they go.

Then, as they drive slowly past the long line of cabs, the businessman gives each driver a huge grin and a 'thumbs-up.'

The Confession

A chap goes into the church confessional and says, 'Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. I slept with six different women last week.'

The priest says, 'Go home, squeeze six lemons into a glass and drink it all as fast as you can.'

'And will I be forgiven?', asks the man.

'No,' the priest says, 'but it will wipe that smirk off your face.'

Ouch!

A man goes into a chemist and asks the pharmacist if he could give him something for hiccups. The pharmacist reaches out and slaps the man's face. 'What did you do that for?' asks the man. 'Well, you don't have the hiccups anymore, do you?' says the pharmacist. The man replies, 'No, but my wife still does!'

Major Scandal Emerges!

The former treasurer of the ruling Partido Popular, Luis Bárcenas, had a bank account in Switzerland with an average balance of around €15 million. These are the latest findings according to an ongoing investigation into the kickbacks-for-contracts Gürtel scandal, in which a number of high-ranking PP officials have been implicated. At one stage the account was believed to have peaked at €22 million. The account recorded a balance of €4,885,976 in 2005; which rose to €9,757,330 in late 2006; €2,144,832 in late 2007; fell to €3,673,661 in late 2008 and €1,853,921 in October 2009. Bárcenas said that he used to go to Switzerland only for skiing and mountaineering.

Bárcenas also took advantage of the controversial tax amnesty last year by reporting a deposit of €10 million, previously undeclared. The amnesty allowed people to come clean on assets they had hidden from the taxman without questions asked by paying a fine of only 10% of the funds declared. Indeed many on the Left were sceptical about the amnesty. Their scepticism is probably justified as the government recovered just over a billion euros, less than half of what was expected.

After the Gürtel scandal first broke in 2009, Bárcenas was named as an 'official suspect,' but he later transferred €2.5 million to a bank in New York. He also resigned from his position as treasurer of the PP in 2009 and his seat in the Senate in 2010.

Bárcenas, together with another treasurer of the PP, Ángel Sanchís, are reported to own a massive Argentinean farm which is three times the size of Barcelona and employs more than 1,700 employees. Parts of the farm, which comprises 30 million acres, is heavily protected by armed guards. A couple of journalists who hired a plane to photograph part of the estate were grounded at gunpoint and expelled from the province.

El Mundo has recently reported that Bárcenas used to pass out cash-filled envelopes as bonuses containing between 5,000 and 15,000 euros to PP 'big-wigs' on a monthly basis. The opposition are now having a field day and the PP are running for cover, issuing denials by the handful and promising an enquiry.

Judging the Judges!

An unusual eviction came to light recently. In this case Elpidio José Silva Pacheco, the examining judge at Madrid's Investigation Court No. 9, was sentenced by a colleague in 2009 to a fine of €7,115 for the back rent he owed on his rental home, plus late charges and lawyer fees. The case ended with the judge being officially evicted from the apartment, although he still hasn't paid what he owes.

In the meantime, he is one of the judges in charge of the investigation into Gerardo Díaz Ferrán, the former boss of the employers' association CEOE, who is no stranger to these pages and is suspected of concealment of assets and money laundering. So, here we have a 'problematic' judge investigating one of the biggest 'chancers' in Spain?

The managing agents of the apartment are obviously furious stating, 'He did not pay us a single month's rent. It's a scandal.' Why Silva Pacheco refused to pay remains a mystery. The salary of a person in his position in Madrid is around €70,700, and that is without taking any bonuses into account.

On the professional front, Silva Pacheco's career is not without blemish. He was slapped with a €6,000 fine by the General Council of the Judiciary for behaviour that violates articles of the Organic Law of the Judicial Power, which sanctions hindrances to the investigative work of the Council, the Supreme Court, the High Court or other higher courts in Spain. Council sources said this is not the only fine Silva Pacheco has received in the past. Although it is now 2012, the rental money has still not been paid as the judge who has been fined is appealing his own lawyer's fees! A bit of a 'black sheep' I think.

Slight decrease in foreign residents.

The number of foreign residents in Spain on January 1, 2012 was 5,736,258, 15,229 less than in 2011. This represents a decline for the first time in fifteen years in the number of immigrants residing in the country. But this decline is just 0.3% over the previous year.

According to the National Statistics Institute, Spain has a population of 47,265,321 inhabitants, nearly 75,000 more than in January 2011 when it was 47,190,493. While the total population in Spain has grown steadily in the last fifteen years, now the number of foreigners has not followed the upward trend which was recorded in 1998. In that year there were 637,085 registered foreigners out of a total population of 39,852,651.

By country of nationality, Romanian citizens are the most numerous (897,203), followed by Moroccans (788,563), British (397,892), Ecuadorians (308,174) and Colombians (246,345).

LATE NEWS: More Electrikery!

FACUA - Consumers in Action warns that the suspected discounts offered by electrical companies actually increase the bill up to 11%. In its report Las mentiras de las eléctricas, FACUA uncovers the false advertising by the sector and the fraudulent practices committed by its salespeople, who visit the addresses of users to offer discounts that do not match reality or are conditional on the contracting of additional services which inflate the bills, and give false promises that the rates will not rise in one or more years. FACUA has carried out an analysis of offers from Iberdrola, Endesa, Gas Natural Fenosa, HC Energía and E.On ahead of the Last Resort Tariff (TUR) set by the Government from January. The association concludes that to abandon the TUR is an unwise decision in the majority of cases and a real blunder if the most expensive rates are purchased, which are those offered by the three major companies. Moreover, these contracts reduce the rights of the users and eliminate obligations imposed on electric companies in different sections of industry standards that only affect the Last Resort Tariff. The Government needs to change the legislation to avoid this situation, warns the organization. Details here - http://www.facua.org/es/noticia_ant.php?Id=7320&IdAmbito=22&idioma=1



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The Catholic Church has a tough new policy on child molesters: three strikes and you're a cardinal.

David Letterman

The scandalous wastage in Valencia continues!



The ex-premier of Valencia, Francisco Camps (photo), who was forced to step down after his implication in the Gürtel kickbacks-for-contracts corruption scandal, must be a big fan of football. So much so that his last act in office was to use the Valencia Finance Institute (IVF) to guarantee the loans that Valencia FC, Hércules FC and Elche FC had asked the banks for in recent years: 118 million euros in total!

With the announcement by the debt-racked teams that they are unable to pay back these loans, the lenders will trigger the deal in place with the regional government, making it the biggest shareholder in all three sports clubs. This contravenes the Public Limited Sports Company Law, which prohibits any one entity from holding over five percent of more than one team participating in the same competition.

After the execution of the guarantee against the IVF, current regional premier and Camps' Popular Party successor, Alberto Fabra, has inherited a poisoned chalice. The Generalitat has had to absorb 70% of Valencia's shares, and unwillingly now also owns 65% of Hércules and 45% of Elche. At the same time the region's unpaid invoices from pharmacies, care workers and privately run hospitals are stacking up, while massive cutbacks are being implemented in education, healthcare (see below) and scientific research.

Three years ago, Hércules borrowed €18 million from Caja Mediterráneo to pay player bonuses following its promotion to Primera, and to cover an unpaid tax bill. The club was owned at the time by Enrique Ortíz, who is also embroiled in a corruption scandal and is accused of illegally financing the Popular Party.

Camps' hand is also evident in the collapse of Valencia FC. In 2004, he invited the president of the region's business associations, Juan Soler, to assume the presidency of the club to avoid the return of Paco Roig, who was considered a danger to the team. Soler embarked on a pharaonic plan to build a new stadium. As the construction industry crashed, the new stadium remained half-built, the land on which the stadium stands could not be sold and Valencia's debt in the scheme rocketed to €50 million. Bancaja, its principal creditor, placed current president Fernando Llorente in charge and the haemorrhage was stemmed through refinancing and the sale of players.

The generosity of the regional government under Camps did not end there. Levante also accepted a loan of €5.6 million from Caixa Penedés. It hopes to start paying some of it back this year. Villarreal, meanwhile, last year refused five million euros of public money, but has a sponsorship deal with Castellón airport that was worth 20 million euros over five years. The aerodrome is another legacy of Camps' administration. To date, not one plane has landed or taken off from it, despite it being completed over a year ago. (Abridged from El País)

Of course the above profligacy means that the region now has less funding to spend on essential services. Just last week it was announced that €45.3 million, which was earmarked for investment in new hospitals and new health centres this year, will now go to pay the operating costs - electricity, water, telephone - of the other health facilities. Several Valencian areas, such as Benalúa, have been promised health centres ten years ago and are still waiting.

30 workers who have been caring for 300 mentally ill patients in the Centre for Rehabilitation and Integration in L'Alacantí, have been without pay for four months. The total amount owed to the centre by the regional government is €450,000 and the centre may have to close shortly unless the agreed funding is forthcoming.. The dreadful thing is, this is not an isolated instant. Millions previously allocated to claimants under the Dependency Law have also now been withdrawn, leaving the disadvantaged, dependent, ill, and their carers with nothing.

In many responsible societies, those responsible for such wastage would be punished and ostracised. In others, they would be placed up against a wall and shot!

Stranded!

Harry gets stranded on a desert island with Scarlett Johanssen. One day he goes up to her and asks her to put on some of his old clothes. She does so. Then he asks if he can call her Pete. Scarlett is surprised but says it's okay by her. Harry then takes a piece of charcoal from the campfire and draws a moustache on Scarlett's upper lip. 'What on earth are you doing?' says Scarlett. 'Never mind that, Pete,' says Harry. 'Listen, you'll never believe who I've been sleeping with for the last six months.....?'



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Brothel Wars or Trouble at t'Knocking-shop!

Regular readers of The Dream Scene will recall my report about two years ago, on the opening of the massive Paradise brothel, probably the largest in Europe, in Catalonia. Now don't get too excited, it was a news item not a review! Well it's back in the news again. It seems that the town where this massive 'house of ill-repute' is located, La Jonquera in Girona, Catalonia, is now experiencing a 'brothel or knocking-shop war' between rival establishments.



During just two weeks in December, El Club Paradise (see photo) experienced two violent attacks on its premises.

In the first, masked men on motorcycles threw two hand-grenades at the roadside establishment. There were no clients inside at the time but the explosions startled about 100 girls who were sleeping inside at the time ('Did the earth move for you, Honey?') and destroyed two bathrooms. In the second attack, several men wearing ski-masks left an Opel Astra outside the 'nightclub' and fled. The Astra was packed with TNT and US-made dynamite, which was connected to a six-metre fuse which may not have been lit. The regional police, the Mossos d'Esquadra, made the device safe, stating that the aim of these outrages 'was to scare-off customers.' Never mind about the customers! 50 of the 100 girls who worked in the 80-room brothel have already been scared off to less dangerous venues.

The owner, José Moreno, has no doubt where the attacks originate. 'While they have robbed me of business, there are lines forming outside other brothels. They are trying to destroy us. They have cleaned us out during the holiday season.' There are several other brothels in the town and business is now booming at the largest ones - Lady Dallas, Madam's and The New Baby Doll. Moreno, who owns two other brothels in Girona - Eclipse and Edén - was sentenced to three years in prison last March for being the head of a sex-trafficking ring. But the Girona regional High Court ruled that he personally didn't force the women to enter Europe. 'I don't know if I have been convicted; I am still free and I am still operating my businesses,' said Moreno when asked about these court cases.

La Jonquera is on the Spanish border with France, the brothels attracting hundreds of those frog-munching surrender-monkeys from across the border every weekend. The police believe that the attacks are part of a vendetta between prostitution kingpins. The sex trade takes advantage of the fact that prostitution is not regulated by any laws in Spain; it is neither legal nor illegal, and therefore tolerated. Local residents and law enforcement officials are worried about these violent incidents and fear the arrival of armed and organized rings aiming to take control of the booming business. 300 business owners in the town met to find a solution to the town's deteriorating image. 'Before La Jonquera was known for its truckers and hookers. Now it is known for its truckers, hookers and bombs,' said one restaurant employee. (Continued in next column)

Religion

The Vatican is to start printing a Catholic edition of *Playboy*. It still has a centrefold, but you have to pull it out at the right moment.

How do you know that Adam was a Baptist? Only a Baptist could stand next to a naked woman and be tempted by a piece of fruit.

I used to tell a lot of religious jokes, but not any more; they put me on the Sects Offenders Register.

But despite all these incidents, there are still lots of clients willing to pay the €15 cover charge just to get in to the Paradise and catch a glimpse of the ladies inside, and the clients, mainly French nationals in their 20's and 30's, are back queuing outside. But I will leave the last word with one of the doormen/bouncers at the club entrance who, when asked by El Pais reporters is he was scared replied, 'Scared? Why should I be scared? I have been shot at at Saratoga's, and at Madam's, someone threw a Molotov cocktail at me. That is what they are looking for, to scare us, but we are not giving in.' Tough place La Jonquera.

Which all brings me nicely to some late news on STD's. Around 2,000 new cases of gonorrhoea are reported in Spain annually. Although there is no agreed single recognised method of treatment in this country, between 15 and 20% of the strains treated are showing some resistance to the medicines. The EU is now looking at alternative drugs to combat the disease. Closing a few knocking-shops might help.

Some quotations on brothels -

•"So this was where lust was satisfied. If I'd been an old-time miner I'd have asked for my gold nugget back."

— Ava Gardner, *Ava: My Story*

•On television I feel like a man playing piano in a brothel; every now and again he solaces himself by playing 'Abide with Me' in the hope of edifying both the clients and the inmates.

— Malcolm Muggeridge

•"The gravel road widened into a large turnaround where three similar looking and designed brothels sat waiting for customers. They were called Sheila's Front Porch, Tawny's High Five Ranch and Miss Delilah's House of Holies.

"Nice," Rachel said as we surveyed the scene. "Why are these places always named after women - as if women actually own them?"

"You got me. I guess Mister Dave's House of Holies wouldn't go over so well with the guys."

Rachel smiled. "You're right. I guess it's a shrewd move. Name a place of female degradation and slavery after a female and it doesn't sound so bad, does it? It's packaging."

— Michael Connelly, *The Narrows*.

But I feel that it would be very wrong to leave you with the impression that La Jonquera is a cesspool of carnal permissiveness and wanton lust. (A bit like Merthyr Tydfil I suppose?) Well, the town may very well be that, but I have to mention the nearby Requesens Castle, see photo. This beautiful castle, which dates back to the 9th century, is the jewel of Catalan castles. The castle itself is more abandoned than ruined and offers wonderful panoramic views of the hills and valleys. Legend says that the castle was originally the home of a giant's wife and daughters. The giant, who was King of the Pyrenees, was reputed to be seven times taller than the largest tower in the castle, which must have made bedtime very interesting!

So it goes to show that even in a field of cow-pats, you are bound to find some flowers!





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I look forward to meeting with you very soon!

Idiot of the Month Award

Once again, there are a number of entries this month. This time, you choose who should get the award.

Most of you will be aware that the theft of 'scrap metal' has reached prodigious proportions in Spain. Post box doors, garden chairs, supermarket trolleys, even bird cages are not safe from the sticky fingers of those anxious to make a quick euro. In a recent case in Alicante, a gang of five were arrested while they were cutting the metal roof supports in a factory. A lucky break I suppose before the roof would fall on their collective empty heads.

But the story of the missing man in the railway town of Santa Magdalena de Pulpis (Castellón), is surely a contender for the award. Police spent eight hours looking for a 45-year-old Spanish man whose disappearance had been reported. They finally located the man, or rather his body, on the Castellón-Barcelona railway line. The man was found to have a flashlight on his forehead, was wearing gloves and had a metal-cutting saw in his hand. It appears he tried to cut the overhead wiring to the railway for the scrap metal, and was electrocuted in the process. Tragic but oh so dumb.



Okay. Now we all know that men hate to ask for directions when driving. Moses after all spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness because he wouldn't ask for directions! However, this case shows that the fairer sex can also be just as pig-headed. Sabine Moreau (photo), a 67-year-old Belgian woman, meant to pick up a friend on Jan. 5 in Brussels, less than 90 miles from her home. However, because of a GPS error, she ended up more than 900 miles and two days away -- in Croatia.



The unexpected journey took the woman across five international borders. By the time she hit Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, two days after leaving her house, Moreau finally realized she'd taken a wrong turn somewhere. She'd stopped several times to top-up her gas tank and taken cat-naps in her car on the side of the road, being involved at one stage in a minor accident. "I was distracted, so I kept going," Moreau admitted to El Mundo's Brussels correspondent. "I saw all kinds of signs, first in French, then in German and finally in Croatian, but I continued driving because I was distracted." La Nouvelle Gazette reports Moreau's friend found other transportation to her house. Moreau's son had reported her missing to local police, who tracked her down by following activity on her bank statements. "When I passed Zagreb," she told the reporter, "I told myself I should turn around." You can imagine what will happen the next time she offers a friend a lift in her car: 'No, honest, it's okay, Sabine. I'll walk home. It's only ten miles.'

The Leprechaun.

One morning a young woman walked out of her front door and noticed a strange little man perched on a rock in her garden. He was smoking a long pipe, wore a shabby green hat and coat, and had shrewd, wizened features. Quickly, she snuck up behind him and said, Gotcha! You're a leprechaun and I caught you!

The leprechaun was pissed. 'All right, yes, fine. You got me. So what?' You can't fool me,' said the woman. 'I know the rules. If someone catches you, you have to grant me three wishes.' 'That's true,' said the leprechaun. 'What are your three wishes?'

The woman thought for a minute and then said, 'I want a million euros, a 100-acre estate, and a diamond the size of a baseball.'

'You got it,' said the leprechaun, who clapped his hands and did a little jig. 'But first, you have to have sex with me all night. That's the only way to make the wishes come true.' The woman wasn't too keen on the idea, but she agreed.

The next morning the leprechaun woke up the woman. 'Tell me,' he asks, 'how old are you?'

'I'm 25-years-old,' she said.

'F**k me,' said the little man. 'Twenty five and you still believe in leprechauns!'

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If you find computers too complicated or need assistance in your everyday Spanish life, then, I'm your man! Computer training and translations are my speciality. I live in the Dreams Hills area. I'm originally from Spain, and have two years of experience as a translator, and many years dealing with computers, since I have two computer-related college degrees from the US. Please, let me know if you need any assistance with the following:

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A little non-pc humour from Pedro Tartán.

Paddy decides to take up boxing and goes for the required medical. A few days later the doctor telephones and says "Paddy, you realise you've got sugar diabetes."

Paddy says, "Nice one, when do I fight him?"

A Muslim bloke I work with was bragging he had the entire Koran on DVD. Being interested, I asked him to burn me a copy.

Well, that's when it all kicked off!

In hindsight I should have posted my Facebook status as: "I've blown the head-gasket on my 1999 Ford XR3i" rather than "I've just bugged a 14-year-old escort".

The police still haven't seen the funny side, my lap top's been confiscated, and the wife has gone off to her mother.

Bargain Booze!

A man goes into a remote Scottish pub and orders a whisky. 'That'll be twenty pence,' says the landlord. 'That's cheap,' says the man. 'A whisky would cost me £4 in London.' 'Aye,' says the landlord. 'But the folks hereabouts will nae stand for prices like that.' The man takes his drink over to a table where two old men are playing dominoes. The man notices that neither of them has a glass. 'Why aren't you drinking?' says the man. 'The prices are an absolute bargain.' 'Is that right?' says one of the old boys. 'Well a Londoner might call them a bargain, but Hamish and I are waiting for Happy Hour.'

The Pilot

On a passenger flight, the pilot comes over the public address system as usual to greet the passengers. He tells them their altitude, the expected arrival time, and a bit about the weather. He advises them to relax and have a good time. Then, forgetting to turn off the microphone, he says to the copilot, 'What would relax me right now is a hot cup of coffee and a good shag.' All the passengers hear it.

As a stewardess immediately begins to run toward the cockpit to tell the pilot of his slip-up, one of the passengers stops her and says, 'Don't forget the coffee!'



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Be careful what you wish for!

A man is walking along a beach when he comes across a lamp. He picks it up, rubs it, and a genie pops out. As is customary the genie grants him three wishes. The guy says, 'I'd like a million pounds.' Poof! A million pounds appears at his feet 'I'd like a top-of-the-range Mercedes,' says the guy. Poof! It appears in front of him. Finally the guy says, 'I want to be irresistible to women.' Poof! He turns into a box of chocolates.

A good time?

A lord dines with an elderly duchess one evening. Next day, a friend asks him if he enjoyed himself. 'Well,' says the lord, 'If the melon had been as cold as the soup, and the soup had been as warm as the wine, and the wine had been as old as the chicken, and if the chicken had been as young as the maid, and the maid had been as willing as the duchess, then yes, I would have had a very good time indeed.'

Introduction: The governing Popular Party is set to take the offensive in Spain's long-running dispute with Gibraltar in 2013. Foreign Minister José Manuel García-Margallo plans to slowly but steadily dismantle the concessions granted to the British overseas territory by the previous Socialist government that the PP feels have strengthened the Rock's sovereignty without Spain receiving the benefits it had expected in return. He plans to try and have Gibraltar International Airport excluded from the so-called Single European Sky legislation. This could create problems for any Gib' bound or based aircraft flying over Spain. This prompted me to write about the Great Siege of Gibraltar, something I have wanted to include in this newsletter for some years. This article is the first of two parts on the siege.

Gibraltar was no stranger to sieges, experiencing 14 between 1309 and 1779. Spain's border with Gibraltar were closed in 1969 by Franco and all communications were cut. Almost a siege. The border was not fully reopened until 1985 prior to Spain's accession to the European Community.

In July 1704, a combined British and Dutch force of 1,800 troops were landed on the Rock. However, the brave defenders, though significantly outnumbered, refused to capitulate without a fight. 21 British and Dutch men-of-war vessels then poured a withering fire on the fortifications, firing some 15,000 rounds in a period of five to six hours. Eventually the small defending force were worn down and accepted the offer of surrender with 'honours of war' from the Anglo-Dutch commander, Admiral Sir George Rooke. The Spanish defenders had inflicted more death and injuries on the attacking forces than they themselves suffered and marched out to Spain with colours flying, drums beating and soldiers bearing their weapons.

In 1713, Gibraltar (and Minorca) was formally ceded to Great Britain by the peace Treaty Of Utrecht. Part of Article X of the Treaty states - 'The Catholic King does hereby, for himself, his heirs and successors, yield to the Crown of Great Britain the full and entire propriety of the town and castle of Gibraltar, together with the port, fortifications, and forts thereunto belonging; and he gives up the said propriety to be held and enjoyed absolutely with all manner of right for ever, without any exception or impediment whatsoever.'

On 12 April 1779, France and Spain signed the Treaty of Aranjuez wherein they agreed to aid one another in recovering lost territory from Britain. Then in June 1779, Spain declared war on Great Britain, France having done so the year before. France and Spain sought to secure Gibraltar, which was a key link in Britain's control of the Mediterranean Sea, and expected its capture to be relatively quick—a precursor to a Franco-Spanish invasion of Great Britain.

The blockade and siege of Gibraltar was announced with great flourish and courtesy by Lt Gen Joaquin de Mendza to Governor Eliot on June 21, 1779. The siege took some time to gather pace as Spanish troops took several weeks to reach the Spanish land side of Gibraltar. Governor Eliot commented that it initially amounted to little more than an interruption of mail by land.

At this stage, the defending garrison amounted to 5,382 army troops and 760 sailors. Roughly 2,300 of these were Hanoverian troops from Germany. Oddly Hanover formed part of the United Kingdom until 1837! In addition there were 1,500 military dependants (soldiers' wives and children) and around 3,200 civilians. Governor Eliot was concerned that a large civilian presence would place unwanted pressure on food resources so he strongly encouraged civilians to leave. Every vessel leaving the Rock now contained civilian passengers but some also elected to stay and face an uncertain future.

By October 1779, the Spanish had amassed a sizeable force of 14,000 troops opposite Gibraltar. However, the number of ships provided to blockade from the sea was initially very few. Vice Admiral Antonio Barcelo had only his 80-gun flagship, a small 50-gun ship-of-the-line and a fluctuating number of frigates and small gun-boats to enforce the naval blockade. The great Spanish fleet still remained at dock in Cadiz. To maintain a secure blockade around Gibraltar's peninsula, Barcelo would require three times as many ships and many more rapid interceptor craft as well. But the blockading forces continued to grow.

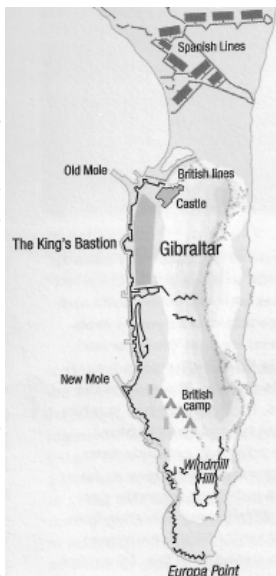
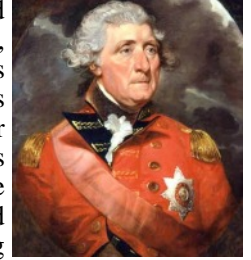
The blockade began to take its toll and by early January 1780, Governor Eliot, see right, reported that many inhabitants were near starving and that there was only 'sufficient wine and strong liquor to last four months.' Although Eliot was teetotal and a vegetarian, the importance of alcohol to the moral of his troops did not escape him. But if the defending garrison and town could not be supplied, then it would have to surrender within a few months and without a shot being fired. But relief was on the way. A fast brig flying British colours sped past the Spanish fleet and batteries with the news that a relief convoy, under the command of Admiral Sir George Rodney, was on the way. But the Spanish also 'got wind' of this convoy and dispatched a force of 11 ships-of-the-line under de Langara to intercept it. The British fleet was much larger than the Spanish anticipated with 21 ships-of-the-line. The Spanish fleet of de Langara were due to be joined the 15-ship fleet of Admiral Cordova in the Atlantic; but when Cordova heard the true strength of the British, he 'legged-it' to Cadiz leaving de Langara to face the might of the British Navy on his own. When he finally spied the large British fleet, he also tried to make for Cadiz. However the Royal Navy ships all had copper-bottomed hulls, which made them very fast. They caught up quickly with the Spanish squadron on January 14, 1780, and a sea battle commenced at four in the afternoon, finishing around two in the morning. Admiral de Langara, his flagship and five other war-ships were taken and a fifth blew up. Rodney's convoy and the captured ships entered the bay of Gibraltar on January 19.

The new provisions were a welcome relief to the hungry defenders, who were down to a ration of a little salt meat and four ounces of rice a day, and were also beginning to suffer from scurvy. However there was no wine or rum in the new supplies prompting Governor Eliot to state that their absence would be 'severely felt' by the soldiers, and bad for their health.

After Rodney's fleet left, the Spanish began to strengthen their offensive land lines with forts, redoubts, entrenchments, and batteries. But still no shots were exchanged between the garrison and the Spanish.

Shortly after midnight on June 7 1780, several sails were seen approaching the Rock from the west. When challenged, these ships burst into flame. This was an attempt to sail six fireships, three of them linked by chains, into to the moored British ships and destroy them. Two British naval ships bombarded the fireships, cut the chains and slowed their progress down. British seamen in longboats then towed the fireships out of harms way.

By March 1781, the shortages of foodstuffs in Gibraltar was quite serious. Although the troops were reduced to meagre rations, the remaining inhabitants of the town largely had to fend for themselves. It was with great relief that on April 12, a Royal Navy squadron of 29 ships-of-the-line, entered the bay, escorting nearly 100 store-ships from England. Frustrated, and for the first time, the Spanish besieging Gibraltar opened fire with all their mortars and batteries virtually destroying the town. Finally, the siege was now entering a new but much violent phase. (More next month)



The **Feast of the Three Kings** was held on January 6th. This is the other and probably more traditional Spanish Christmas. Throughout Spain, every city holds a procession to honour the event. These are always hugely enjoyable and always feature elaborate and colourful costumes, beautiful floats and of course, the Three Kings, Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar, in all their splendour. The parades focus mainly on the children with plenty of dressed-up Disney characters and lots of Super Heroes, such as Spiderman (a favourite), Superman, Batman etc. Boiled sweets are thrown to the children from the floats, which brings great smiles to the faces of the dentists in the crowd. For me, it is by far the most enjoyable of all the Spanish fiestas. The photos below come from a number of processions, ranging from Orihuela to Valencia.



January 17 was the **Feast of San Antonio**, the patron saint of animals. This is a day when many animal owners take their animals, usually pets, to be blessed. The blessing, which takes place in most large towns or cities, is a very popular event. This photo was taken at a *Blessing* in Sagunto north of Valencia. There were around 2,000 animals in all passing-by the church steps. The dog in the photo is a Chihuahua and Pekingese cross and wears special sun glasses to protect its eyes from the sun. I have no doubt though, that it would still want to bite its owner for dressing it up in such ridiculous clothes! This particular parade included dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, turtles, a goat, a sheep and nine circus tigers. Somebody even brought a couple of goldfish! Several police horses also took part, the other horses presumably being at Burger King. You can see a very good short video of the procession here - <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2013/01/17/valencia/1358455061.html>



The Lounge, in Lago Jardin II, formerly Coastal Property Lounge, is now in full swing. Laguna Vista has not re-opened as promised but Marita & Darren have grasped the opportunity and now offer bargain priced drinks, delicious bar food, and excellent service in comfortable, south-facing surroundings. See photos below.



Christmas Day at The Lime Bar, Los Altos.



Above, Darren, cremating the bangers!



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Clever Pooch!

A guy is in a theatre watching a movie when he realises that, sitting in the two seats next to him, are a guy and the guy's dog! The dog really seems to be enjoying the movie. He smiles at the funny lines and growls at the bad guy. The first guy whispers to the man with the dog, 'Excuse me. The way your dog is enjoying the movie, that's amazing!' The dog owner says: 'It surprises me too. He hated the book.'

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The editor, Mick, can be contacted at mick.dreamscene@gmail.com or at 586 Dream Hills.

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Security Controllers.

LOVE & DATING.

Love is a temporary insanity curable by marriage.

Ambrose Bierce

I fall in love real quick, which can scare guys away. I'm like, 'I love you, I want to marry you, I want to move in with you.' And they're like, 'Ma'am, just give me the ten bucks for the pizza and I'll be out of here.'

Penny Wiggins

I've learned that you can't make someone love you. All you can do is stalk them and hope they'll panic and give in.

Emo Philips

Love is just a chocolate substitute.

Miranda Ingram

The world's tragedy is that men love women, women love children, and children love hamsters.

Joanna Trollope

There is a fine line between true love and a conviction for stalking.

Buzz Nutley

I was dating a transvestite. My mother said, 'Marry him. You'll double your wardrobe.'

Joan Rivers

When I finally met Mr Right, I had no idea his first name was 'Always'.

Rita Rudner

I go from stool to stool in singles bars hoping to get lucky, but there's never any gum under any of them.

Emo Philips

Oh, those June nights on the Riviera.....we were young, gay, and reckless! I drank champagne from your slipper - two quarts. It would have been more but you were wearing inner soles.

Groucho Marx

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