

S61 Reunion 2013 - La Herradura - The Spanish Job

It all started quietly enough. It was Friday 6 September, and me and Carolyn had just arrived at Steve's Villa in Andalucia, overlooking the pretty little town of La Herradura and the blue Mediterranean Sea.

We'd been cooped up in a tiny motorhome for the last fortnight, so Steve and Anne were busy trying to buck us up with tea and ice cool beer, having thoroughly demoralised us by way of a guided tour of their lovely home. It was then that I first heard the sound that would come to dominate the reunion weekend.

It was distant, and faint at first, though growing ever louder as it came closer to us. Was this the sound of Espana; the clacker of Castanets, perhaps; or the rat-a-tat-tat of Flamenco dancer's heels? Oh, the romance of it all! But wait! (cue the sound of a needle scratching across a record). I recognised that sound! Dagnino!



Friday's Greetings



The One and Only!

And gradually, following Joe at steady intervals, the entourage assembled. Trev Payne, all the way from Austruckinphalia; yet again going way, way above and beyond the call of duty to attend our reunion; and with him, the reason; the lovely Lindy. Al Trusler, fresh from the English countryside, suitcase in hand, stuffed full of ABBA impersonator's outfits. Mike Deveria and Toos, from the bleak, icy wastelands of Norway, icicles still clinging to their beards. All that Northern air must be doing them good, though, as while the rest of us look like Dad's Army, Mike still looks like Captain Hurricane! Tom and Marge Taylor from Aberdeen, pockets stuffed full of free prescriptions, bus passes, electricity tokens and various other inducements towards Independence, provided by Alex Salmond; no wonder they never stop smiling!

Finally a tall, athletic, powerfully built man, with chiselled good looks stepped forward and shook my hand. No, it wasn't Steve! This was Graham; Anne's son, and he was accompanied by Helen, a tall, gorgeous Kate Middleton lookalike. They both work in banking, at the sharp end, in Trading, and had decided to visit Steve and Anne, at short notice, for a quiet break, away from the high powered environment of the City. Oh dear! They proved themselves to be great sports, and contributed enormously to the whole weekend.



We Happy Few!

All the talk was of a couple of nights of drunken revelry, which had continued until 0530 that morning. I wondered what utter madness could have possessed such a fine, upstanding bunch to have driven themselves to the brink of self destruction before the weekend had even begun? And then the answer stepped out of the shadows! Or rather, the shadows appeared to step out of the corner! Calvert! And Marisa! Both burned almost black by hours, days even, spent lying out in the sun on various beaches, cruise ships, pavements etc., and both with the drinking capacity of a rhinoceros! The cast was complete!



The Likely Lads - and Lasses!

A Couple of Swells!



Steve and Anne were superb hosts that night, laying on a lavish spread of food and drink, all to a backdrop of music from our Caledonia days, and ensuring that we all had a wonderful start to the weekend. By the end of the evening we were all fully acquainted, and primed and ready for the reunion proper on the Saturday. We'd even begun to understand Mike! Born in Glasgow, raised in Nor'n Ireland, 7 years in Gabon, 3 years in Egypt, a year in Norway and living for over 20 years in Holland - no wonder he sounded like he was talking gibberish! Mind you, he works in Health and Safety, so maybe he was just talking shop!



Inseperable! Toos as Duty Wallflower!

We still had the Saturday dinner time session to negotiate though, before the main event! This was spent at the local British Bar, aptly named 'The Hideaway', down in the village. Everyone attended, and a thoroughly good time was had by all. The bar staff didn't know what had hit them, and pretty soon panic set in and most of them fled, leaving the stalwart Christine to cope with the baying mob almost singlehandedly.

After a while, the mood turned ugly, when Christine announced that the pub had run out of cider. Marisa was just about to torch the place, when we managed to persuade her that it was time to go and swap banyan rig for Nos 1s and smart frocks for later.



**Saturday lunchtime at
The Hideaway**

A few hours later and, shining like new pins, and with batteries recharged, all those staying at Steve's house fell in for inspection, before being marched down by Anne to catch the Liberty Boat, in the form of a friend's minibus. The steep and sharply winding descent into the town should have been ominous, but what cared we, oblivious in our anticipation of a good run ashore! Like lambs to the slaughter!

Earlier in the day, Steve had impressed us all with his description of the exhaustive research and prolonged negotiations that he had undertaken in choosing Joachim's Restaurant to be the venue for the reunion. The deciding factor, the absolute clincher, was that it was the most easterly establishment on the seafront, and would afford an unbeatable view of the Mediterranean sunset - which, if any of us had arrived in time, would have been fabulous, I'm sure! Still, we *almost* made it, and in any case, we enjoyed our Sundowners out on the terrace before moving inside for the main event.



Sunset over Cerro Gordo



Sundowners on the Seafront



"It's not that we don't believe you, Al....."

And hadn't Steve done well! We were greeted by the setting for the perfect Iberian banquet; a beautifully presented long table, set in a room brimming with the vivid colours, smells and decorations of Spain. Surrounding it, a team of hand picked Senhoritas stood ready to wait upon us, and to ply us with as much Vino, and other assorted alcoholic beverages as we could handle!

Joachim beamed, as he delivered his piece de resistance, with a swirl and a triumphant 'Ole!' Enormous silver platters brimming with delicious, steaming fruits de mer; the finest Paella that Andalucia could offer. I seem to recall a couple of the waitresses having to pick poor Joachim up off the floor when at least three amongst us asked for menus, and began ordering things like Lamb Chops and Omeletes! Mike and Toos had the valid excuse of being vegetarians, but Eddy had no such excuse! One look at the spines, tendrils and tentacles, the claws, wobbling antennae and the glistening jet eyes of dozens of dead crustaceans, and Eddy was reaching for the a la carte!



Now that's what I call a plate of Paella!



**Getting Stuck In!
Eddy looks aghast!**

So finally, the reunion that we'd travelled so far to attend, began in earnest. We shared a brilliant night together around that table, swapping dits, filling our bellies, and generally having a ball. The waiting staff worked non stop, catering to our every need, pausing only now and then to throw buckets of cold water over Trev and Lindy, who were otherwise inseparable. And it was so cheap! The Scots amongst us were ecstatic, though we still had to tip Mike upside down to obtain his share of the tip!

Talking of cheapskates, however, I have to say that Eddy took the biscuit, by refusing to buy Marisa one of the little Cuban dolls that the staff brought round, at the end of the evening, to sell for charity. He was probably getting his own back on her for letting everyone know that he washes his socks and nicks in their bidet. Now *everyone* knows that he's probably the only owner of a bidet on the Isle of Wight; how embarrassing is *that!* Whatever his excuse, there's probably one poor revolutionary in Cuba tonight with one less round up the spout of his AK47, thanks to Piso Ed!



Sing us another one - Cat's chorus?



The Gals on their 2nd Bottle of Malt! Anne, guarding the Malt!

After a final round of sticky greens - on the house - we were all ushered outside and marched on to the beach by Anne, where she magically produced two bottles of whisky and a pile of plastic cups. She then insisted that we drink the whisky, sing loads of old Navy songs and sacrifice one of our number to the deep. I wouldn't mind betting that, when sober, very few of us could remember all the words of *any* songs.

However, as there were eight of us, all being plied with Scottish firewater, and being egged on by the fairer sex, there was seemingly no limit to our repertoire! Inevitably a rousing chorus of 'Zulu Warrior' was struck up, and just as surely, a natural exhibitionist emerged from the chorus line to play the starring role; step forward Al! Helen tactfully refused to swap clothes with him, the wisdom of which became apparent when he promptly waded into the oggin! Good old Al, he played a blinder all night!



I'm telling you; if we don't cover him with a layer of lard, he'll never make it to Africa!



What a Star!

Last one in's a Jessy! Oi, you lot, I said...



Eventually, we moved off the beach and stumbled into one of the many beachfront bars. Sadly, we had to part company with Calvert and Marisa, and Trev and Lindy, who, sensibly, called it a night, having planes/coaches to catch in the morning. YES, you did read that right! **The words 'Calvert', 'sensible', and 'called it a night', all in the same sentence!** If ever there was proof needed that Marisa had finally tamed the beast, and that Eddy was now well and truly under her thumb, then the sight of that sad, broken man, being dragged off to an early bed, was it! Sic transit gloria mundi!

For the rest of us, the night was yet young! We set off along the front, in a hedonistic search for excitement. Our needs were soon satisfied, when we poured into La Cochera; a steaming hot, pulsating, pressure cooker of utter blackness, penetrated intermittently by blinding shafts of light, in which the shattering din of a hundred speakers was enough to turn a man's spine to jelly. Naturally, the clankies were right at home, and transformed immediately into a raving great bunch of John Travoltas. Well, why not; Grease *is* their word after all!

Al, having thrust himself into the limelight on the beach, was now working himself into a trance, in whirling dervish fashion, with arms and legs being flung so violently in every direction that it seemed inevitable that he was going to tear his straining frame apart. Joe was already *in* a trance, having mesmerised himself, and everyone around him, with a shimmering array of breathtaking moves that he'd learned as a snake hipped youth in the clubs of Manchester and Dunfermline. Oh, alright then, so he was staggering around in a drunken haze, bumping into everyone, and everything, like a pinball, looking in serious danger of tilting at any moment. Tom and Marge were doing what they did the whole weekend, which was lighting up the whole room with their happy, beaming personalities. Like two ships, they floated around the dance floor until, in line astern, and without a word, they set course for home, and sailed out through the door, still dancing and gyrating as they disappeared gracefully into the night. Mike had already vanished. I reckoned he'd either yomped back to his hotel, or had set off from the beach on an endurance swim; like I said - Captain Hurricane!



At La Cochera



Enjoying Worselves at La Cochera at 0230, and we're having it large!



Oh if only I had a hat like Tom's

Steve had told Anne that he wouldn't be joining us in the club, as he knew his limits, and would walk home instead. Yeah, right! Ten minutes later, he turned up, beer in hand, and proceeded to demonstrate, with sickening ease, just why he was always accepted as the coolest living Artificer Apprentice when we were in the boys!

It was now 0300, and we were in the zone! We were on fire, and we knew that we were impressing the hell out of all the local kids, who could do no more than stand, open mouthed in awe and wonderment, as we pulled out all the stops and brought the 60s back to glorious, exhilarating life in front of their disbelieving eyes!

Five minutes later, and we were back on the seafront, blinking in the street lights, and gulping in the fresh sea air; these Spanish kids can be so fickle! By now, we were reduced to a bunch of stragglers, Al, Graham and Helen having beaten a reluctant retreat. For a moment, we were in disarray, but Anne is made of sterner stuff! She rallied us once more, and soon we were storming the next club along the seafront, where a live band was thrashing out 90s rock into the night at the sort of decibel levels normally associated with a Space Shuttle launch.



**Shakin' a wicked hoof,
at the Bacuba**



It's really late; and everything's getting hazy!

Right, that's it! Time to go...



Carolyn pogo'd until she dropped; literally! I thought she was executing a stunning dance move, until she slashed my skull to the bone by clinging onto my head as she plummeted to the floor. Anne broke into an impromptu performance of the Can-Can, using her skirt as a fan to cool us all down. Joe's gyro had now finally tripped, and momentum carried him into the group of bewildered musicians, where he knocked one of their mikes over, and, for some strange reason, known only to Joe, grabbed and stubbed out a cigarette that the lead singer had, for effect, placed between the strings of his guitar! And nobody even bought a drink, which could account for the bewildered looks of both management and local!

Anne knew it was time to go! Once again, she rounded us all up and marched us out of the door and in the direction of home, and sanity.

Unfortunately, marching was now way beyond our capabilities, and one or two of us were having serious trouble managing to walk even. Joe never ceases to amaze me! All muscular control had been lost, and all non essential organs had been shut down, one by one, until Carolyn and I had been reduced to dragging him physically up the hill. And yet, by some miracle, all services required for speech were not only still intact, they were on full power and providing maximum volume; incomprehensible, garbled even, but still loud and unremitting! The dits kept coming, but they had been reduced to mere samples, on random play!

Me: "Come on Joe, you can do it!"

Joe: "Did I ever tell you....."



Doing a grand job, Anne!

I mentioned the hill earlier in my report! By Christ, it's long and steep when you're dragging a 15 stone dead weight up it! And Anne was also performing miracles in getting Steve up the hill, all by herself! But eventually, at around 0430, we finally made it back to Steve's house. An absolutely brilliant night had been had by all, and in no time at all, everyone had been stowed in their pits, and peace reigned at last.

Post Script

Sunday was meant to be the calm after the storm, and for most of us, it was. Having performed impressively in getting to the airport at the crack of dawn(ish), the vagaries of Malaga's security system managed to throw a spanner in both Eddy's and Joe's works. Joe had queued for an hour, blissfully unaware that repeated calls had been made for all passengers on his flight to report to the check in desk, and that airport staff had walked up and down his queue, doing the same thing. No doubt the situation was made more difficult by language differences, but I'd bet a pound to a pinch of goat's shit that Joe was deep in conversation, and far too engrossed in spinning dits to hear the tannoy! Still, knowing Joe, he'll have made the best of a bad situation, and having to endure an extra half day spent hanging around the airport won't have fazed him one iota - he's certainly a one off!

Eddy and Marisa, meanwhile, were suffering similar problems. They managed to get to the check in desk after queuing for forty minutes, only to be told that they would only be allowed onto the flight if their suitcases travelled with them as hand luggage. As you can imagine, they agreed, and caught the flight; but both of them were in tears at the sight of their rum, bought in Gibraltar, being confiscated by security!

Al, Mike and Toos, and Tom and Marge came to say their farewells at Steve's house before going their separate ways, all looking amazingly spritely and bright eyed. Trev and Lindy had already begun their journey back to Southampton, via La Linea. Carolyn and I met up with them a couple of days later for a wonderful day of reminiscences on Gibraltar. The Rock was festooned in Union Jacks, and literally everyone was proudly wearing the red and white national colours, as part of the Gibraltar National Day festivities, which added to the enjoyment and sense of occasion enormously.



Tuesday: Trev and Lindy in Gib; what a superb couple!

Me and Carolyn enjoyed a lovely, relaxing day at home with Steve and Anne, before continuing on our Iberian travels the next day. Yet again, Steve and Anne proved themselves to be the perfect hosts. I knew we'd get to watch the Italian Grand Prix on telly, and we'd come to expect the excellent standard of food, beer and wine that just kept on coming. But never in my wildest dreams did I expect that one day I'd be sitting with Steve Southern, in his house in Andalucia, watching Countryfile and The Antiques Roadshow! Follow that!

The Full Ensemble!



Marge, Carolyn, Joe, Mike Lindy, Trev, Anne, Tom, Marisa, Steve, Toos, Al, Me and Eddy

And Finally!

I feel certain that I can say, on behalf of everyone who attended, that this was a hugely enjoyable and totally unforgettable reunion. On behalf of the rest of us, I'd also like to say a massive thank you to Steve and Anne, not only for agreeing to host the event in the first place, but also for their superb organisation and management, which made it such a huge success. They were kind, generous and attentive hosts throughout, not only to the lucky souls who were their house guests, but to everyone who attended, for whom Steve and Anne's home was the focus of the whole reunion.

Hasta La Vista!

Dave Lenton