

**TT No.56: Paul Roth** - Sunday 18th September 2011; **Club Esportiu Alaior** vs. Club Esportiu Ferreries; Spanish La Liga Tercera Division Group 11; Res: 0-1; Att: 500; Entry: Euros 15 (although I didn't pay); Altitude and global positioning: Estadio Los Pinos is 44m (144.356ft) above sea level; at latitude 39 degrees, 55.9 mins N and at longitude 4 degrees, 8.2 mins S (Position derived from centre circle); Weather: Clearing thunder storms; hot and humid; CFL: 13.7.

Spain's easternmost territory is the Balearic island of Menorca, and as a result it is the first place within that country to witness the rising of the sun. Another interesting fact about this family-friendly holiday destination that you may not be aware of is that Menorca boasts roughly two prehistoric sites per square kilometre, and has in the Naveta d'es Tudons ossuary the oldest covered building anywhere in Spain. Lacking the grandiose scenery of western Mallorca or the raucous nightlife of Ibiza, it does though possess its very own intimate and subtle environment, and is much less developed than her touristic neighbours.

Measuring just 45 km wide from the present-day capital Mahon in the east, to the former ecclesiastical capital of Ciutadella in the west, Menorca's allure is gleaned from its 365 - one for every day of the year - beaches that ring its periphery. Some of these bays are as pretty as they are spectacular, and worthy of the epithet "The best in the Balearics." There can't be many places more beautiful than the horseshoe and pine-clad bay of Cala Santa Galdana; or Ciutadella (little city), when the setting sun turns the sandstone buildings rose-pink as the locals come out for their evening promenade.

Menorca's two sources of income, after the main money-earner of tourism, are the production of Queso de Mahon (cheese that comes in differing strengths and is utterly delicious) and Mahon Gin (produced on the harbourside at the Xoriguer Distillery, in Mahon itself). Both foodstuffs are legacies from the time when the British seized control of the island, in 1708.

This year's base for our summer holiday was the luxurious Insootel Punta Prima Prestige, in Punta Prima, on the island's southernmost point. My wife had long wanted to visit this establishment, mainly to avail herself of the multifarious spa treatments offered by the S Grau Clinic based there. During the early 80s you may recall the S Grau Experimental Liposuction Institution, in Gstaad, Switzerland, had been closed down after some of the unethical procedures performed on wealthy clients went catastrophically awry. Amongst the unfortunates to suffer at their hands was a certain Italian actress, who spent the rest of her days buckled and bent over, only able to get around with the aid of a sturdy walking stick. She never lost her sense of humour however, conceding in later life that obtaining the lead part in any new production of Quasimodo had been a virtual gimme! The mud and the ensuing law suits never stuck, and now various spas trading under the S Grau banner can be found in similarly ostentatious hotels throughout the Mediterranean. Today's jaw-droppingly expensive and bank account-emptying therapies include,

amongst many others, those for 'Genital Rejuvenation' and 'Erogenous Zone Re-stimulation'. Yes, I can pre-guess your question at this juncture; and the answer's.....NO!

Football-wise It would have been possible for me to attend four matches whilst we were on holiday, as the Menorca-Copa is currently taking place and involves all the island's football clubs. That I didn't was due to the fact that it would have meant a lot of tearing about, arriving back late at night at our hotel and I'd be condemned to watching double-headers. This, after all, wasn't just my holiday. The overriding reason for my non-attendance though was the blistering heat - the mercury consistently hovered above the 30-degree mark; surprisingly too, despite being on the coast, it was intensely humid. Not football weather at all.

Thankfully for the one football match I did attend the heatwave broke. In fact, when heading towards Alaior whilst driving around the Mahon ring road, so flooded were the roads due to the terrific thunderstorms occurring, I almost turned back. Pleased I didn't though, as Club Esportiu Alaior's Los Pinos (The Pines - the ground takes its name from the five pine trees that greet you upon entry) stadium is a gem. So, for that matter is the cheese-making and university town of Alaior itself. The Church of Santa Eulalia looks down from the settlement's highest vantage point to the hugger-mugger of narrow streets below, and is clearly visible from the ME-1 highway that passes close by - Alaior, along with Es Mercadal and Ferreries are the three major towns that lay on this main carriageway that links the island's two major cities. All three are virtually untouched by tourism.

Having arrived ridiculously early for the 5pm kick-off, I entered the ground and asked the first person I met, a dumpy gentleman with gnarled features and a tousled moustache, whom I later discovered to be named Georges - a Newcastle United fan he explained to me, simply because the Geordie side play in the same black and white striped uniform as his beloved Alaior - if it was okay for me to take some photographs inside the encampment. A 'Grand Tour' ensued, with my host allowing me to snap away to my heart's content, even escorting me onto the 3G playing field to obtain whatever vantage point I required.

The walled and white-washed arena is aesthetically most pleasing, having as it does a 500-seater grandstand on its town-side that has 'A L A I O R' picked out in the black lettering. There are three steeply-raked terraces on its other flanks and splashes of colour augment the already-pleasant vista with a plethora of advertising hoardings adorning every white-washed free space. Oddly, the ground has only five floodlight pylons.

Two snack/drinks bars were open for the event, the larger one having numerous atmospheric photographs of the club dating back to the 1930s and 1940s, when Alayor (the town was thus called) played 'Festival Matches' against Reial Club Deportiu Espanyol and Futbol Club Barcelona respectively. After my recce Georges raised the palms of his hands in a gesture for me to wait, muttering "Senor, siete momentos". 'Seven moments' later, having reappeared from the home changing room with one of the Newcastle-attired combatants, my new-found amigo was

introducing me to a politely-spoken young man whose name I think was something akin to Roy. This fresh-faced individual spoke eloquently of how Georges had scored over 100 goals for Alaior during the late 1960s. It quickly dawned on your correspondent that the two men in front of me were of course grandfather and grandson.

I was proffered a seat in one of the "Socio's" comfortable armchairs at the top of the grandstand, but declined this offer (I was generously allowed my entry free of charge - it would have cost me a staggering 15 Euros otherwise) as I wished to take snaps of the action elsewhere.

The initial period of play between these two local rivals saw both offences gently tapping on the door of each other's defences, without any real chance of gaining entry: It was cagey stuff to say the least. During the second-half, out of necessity - Alaior had only managed to obtain one point from their initial four league outings - the home side put a meatier shoulder to the stubbornly locked barrier, in an attempt to obtain ingress. That having failed a battering ram of fierce shots, deft headers, whipped-in corners and fizzing free-kicks was employed. All to no avail. Somehow the ball would not pass between the two uprights and across the goal line. Then, to howls of joy they scored. The town's Sunday evening torpor had been destroyed as the home fans went ballistic. Players and spectators alike were still remonstrating with the linesman beneath me, who'd flagged the goal 'offside', as Club Esportiu Ferreries stole up the other end. The five-man maroon and blue-clad attack was no match for the otherwise redundant home 'keeper. 'The Farriers' had sensationally 'Smashed and Grabbed'. The defeat, at the time of writing, leaves Alaior second bottom on goal difference ahead of CE Felanitx; all I can hope is that the management team can turn things around soon, as to lose quite such a magnificent stadium as Los Pinos to the obscurity of the Menorca-Preferente would be a catastrophe of apocryphal proportions.

Another sun-drenched holiday has concluded. We have returned home to more sunshine and another heatwave - we're saying we managed to bottle it - with the happiest memories of a much-unspoilt and understated, paradise island.

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Other Menorcan football options include CF Sporting Mahones who play in Division 2B, Group 3 of Spain's La Liga, and are the highest ranked team on the island; they possess the only grass pitch on Menorca, everyone else plays on 3G or dirt-based pitches. Along with the two 3rd division teams mentioned, CE Mercadal also play in the same division, in the shadow of Mont Toro, the rock's tallest mountain.

The Preferente Division has numerous teams dotted all over. CF Norteno, who were relegated after their solitary season adventure in the higher echelon, hail from pretty Fornells. CE Sami ply their trade on the outskirts of Ciutadella and there are many opportunities in the same competition to catch a game in Mahon. One ground I would not recommend to visit is that of CF Es Migjorn Gran. Apart from four floodlight poles, and a 3G pitch there's nothing else there. A shame, as the town itself is authentically sleepy Menorcan. My favourite ground, after Los

Pinos that is, has to be that of Sant Lluís, just a few kilometres from our Punta Prima base. With its squat floodlight pylons (it is next door to the international airport and virtually at the end of Sant Lluís Flying Club's runway) and blue and white grandstand, the arena is tastefully decorated in the same colour scheme as the town's famous windmill. For a change of sport why not try a night at the trotting. Every Saturday, just south of the capital, at 6pm, you'll find 'Los Menorquins' satiating their appetites for all things equestrian.

FGIF Star rating 5: (Cinco)\*.

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