

# A Trip to San Javier Airport in Murcia

The Vera to Cartagena toll road (AP-7) is now open. It intersects with the N340 motorway (A-7) at the exit for Vera and the El Real business park (km 534) but, due to the layout of the slip roads, it appears to be impossible to join the AP-7 from this spot. Locals, or returning travellers, must first get on to the N340 motorway at the Cuevas or Vera south exits, then travel back to Vera! Mojácar's motorists are best advised to drive to Los Gallardos, joining the N340 at exit 525. It's a bit of a strange design, really, and many businesses that took premises in El Real, with an eye on future extra trade from Aguilas and Mazarrón, may feel a bit miffed. From the Vera toll station to the centre of Cartagena is 104kms, which is a good 25km shorter than the journey to Murcia on the N340 motorway. Milestones on the toll road follow the north of Spain convention and show overall distances to the French border at La Jonquera. Thus the Vera toll station is at km 910 from France.

Nine hundred and one kilometres from France is the Los Lobos access point. This is not yet open but it will, eventually, be the best joining point for many coastal residents.

The motorway was superbly smooth and delightfully deserted most of the time. It's bound to get busier, but never as crowded with heavy vehicles as the A-7 and will remain a relaxed drive. For the purpose of this trip I stayed strictly "within the law", keeping to within 5kph of the speed limit. **A point to bear in mind is that the only service station, near Mazarrón, is only accessible to vehicles travelling towards Cartagena.**

Exactly 21kms after the Vera toll station is exit 890, mainly for Pulpí

and Puerto Lumbreras.

After Pulpí comes the first of the tunnels, 1,250 metres long and the only one in Andalucía, just before the road enters Murcia province. There are spectacular views down to the coastline between Los Terreros and Aguilas, interspersed with artistically arranged sheets of plastic - as in greenhouse!

Fifteen minutes after Vera, I reached the Aguilas exit (878), only three minutes drive from Aguilas itself.

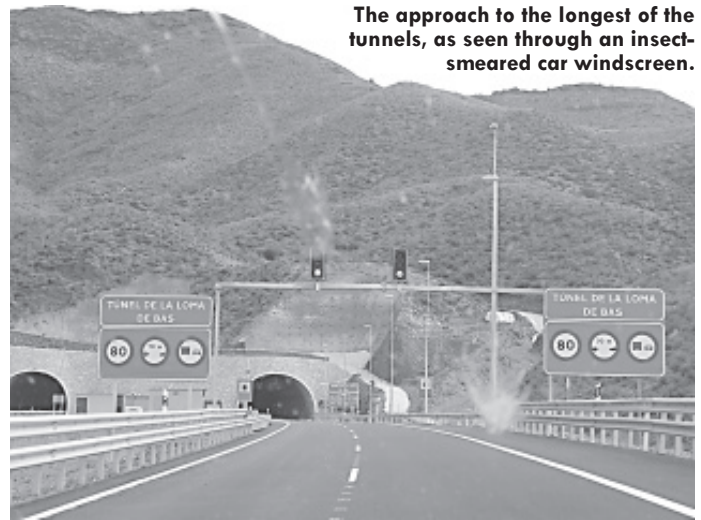
Exit 866 goes to Calabardina and Cabo Cope, two sleepy, unspoiled coastal villages which will now have their golden opportunity to be "awakened" by promoters of so called civilization.

Climbing from here you reach the longest of the tunnels, 1,820 metres. The road through the tunnel is corrugated, probably in a deliberate attempt to persuade drivers to respect the 80kph speed limit. The next exit (857) leads to Cañada de Gallego, Ramonete and Puerto Calnegre, beautiful countryside crying out for "dream homes" in the sun. Perhaps I should point out to advertising executives that nightmares are also dreams!

After a short, 220 metre, tunnel came the exit for Totana and Mazarrón (845). After this, traffic, though still negligible, became heavier, indicating that Mazarrón's residents are already using the motorway for access to Cartagena. The fourth, and last, tunnel is another "shorty" at 395 metres in length.

Forty minutes after the Vera toll station I was looking out over the plains of Fuente Alamo, served by exit 829, as is also Las Palas and Tallante.

I reached the Cartagena toll station exactly 50 minutes after setting out.



The approach to the longest of the tunnels, as seen through an insect-smearred car windscreen.

The toll was 11.50 euros. (This is reduced to 3.90 if you travel between 1am and 7am.) Exit 810 joins the A-30 which runs from Cartagena to Murcia and, from here, the motorway is free. The new section ends at km 802, after 110kms of truly easy driving. Now comes a bit of a "squiggle", as you negotiate a true "Spaghetti Junction". Follow the signs for "Aeropuerto" and La Manga but **beware! At one point you are on a single lane road which merges into another single lane road, and there is an easily missed "Stop" sign.** You eventually join a busy dual carriageway which being "autovía" has more strictly enforced speed limits.

Keep following the signs for "Aeropuerto". To your right you will see the bay of La Manga, with high buildings that appear to be rising out of the sea a mile offshore.

Road signs now mention San Javier, as well as "Aeropuerto". Traffic is quite heavy but, being dual carriageway, progress is not badly delayed.

Turn off at km 784, following the sign for Aeropuerto and San Javier. At the roundabout follow the road signs for the airport. This is a two way road so remember the speed limit is 90kph. Go straight across at the next roundabout and, to your surprise, you will realise that you are actually at the entrance to San Javier airport. It took exactly one hour and ten minutes from the Vera toll station, without at any time "pushing" the speed limit. The more "adventurous" motorist should complete the journey in a tad over an hour - not that I'm naming names, Linda! The overall distance from Vera is 133kms.

San Javier airport has expanded greatly in the last couple of years and alterations are still ongoing. It has many UK destinations, including Gatwick, Stansted, Edinburgh, Newcastle and Cardiff, not to mention other European capitals. The airport has pay-parking, but the ticket machine is not very well marked. Instead of being near the barrier, or at least in the public car park, it is opposite the exit from the arrivals hall, in the area reserved for hire cars. There are hourly, daily and long term rates.

When leaving Murcia airport, go straight ahead at the first and second roundabouts, passing beneath the dual carriageway, and follow the signs for Cartagena. At the third roundabout turn left on to the AP-7, still following the signs for Cartagena and Murcia.

**Twenty kilometres or so after leaving San Javier there is an easily missed sign for Almería and Murcia. Turn off here, otherwise you'll end up in Cartagena city. However, a little further on you'll see a turn-off for Murcia, which you ignore, as you are already on the road to Vera. The toll station is about 35kms after San Javier airport and takes about 20 minutes to reach. The toll is presently 11<sup>50</sup> euros.**

Residents of the Almanzora Valley wishing to use the new road will probably find it quickest to go down the N340 (A-7) motorway to Lorca, then turn for Aguilas and join the Cartagena motorway there.

Happy motoring, and if somebody does find a sneaky way of getting on to the Cartagena motorway from the Vera junction itself, do please let us know.

P.F.

The exit toll at Pulpí

