

# PAELLA WESTERNS

## Theatric Tourist FRANCIS REID Rides into Yucca City

It was raining and the stunt men were on holiday. But then, as this series has so often noted, it is the lot of the theatric tourist to arrive the day after and depart the day before. Nevertheless I did a macho-crash through the saloon's swing doors (their hinges authentically misaligned by some careful propman) and advanced on the bar, my pentax motor whirring, to spit out my order: 'Cafe con leche, por favore'. No Betty Grable clone come hithered me from the galleried upstairs, and no dude ranger came crashing through the bannisters —

although the cartwheel chandelier was obviously just waiting for some athletic cowboy swinger to upset the plans of the unshaven visitor from outa town.

This was Yucca City on the (normally) arid dusty plains of Almeria in southern Spain. It was built to facilitate the production of spaghetti westerns — the "spaghetti" being a reference to the ethnic origins of the directors rather than to the cuisine favoured by mediterranean cowpersons.

Here you can find every location needed to

make a western movie. There is a saloon to wreck and a hotel to stay in while you contemplate which of the several banks to rob. The sherriff has an office and a saddler to outfit the posse. The gaol is somewhat cramped, but not to worry — there is not one gallows but two and the second one, although a little way from city centre is a triple job. The cemetery is close at hand. For the more law abiding there is lots of commerce including, of course, the general store. Alas the architecture and furnishings of the church suggest that the more affluent members of Yucca society are not seekers after salvation. But perhaps the new school will change that.

The township's facades are convincing and most have interiors which need but minimal dressing to become authentic sets. Construction, painting and, above all, the expertise with which the sets have been distressed are a tribute to the film designer's art and craft: everything looks genuinely weathered.

This is where westerns such as *Fistful of Dollars*, *Nightriders*, and *The Good The Bad and the Ugly* were made. The sets include every urban location likely to be required, and the surrounding landscape is not only wild west look-alike but is sufficiently arid to be lightly populated and therefore available for the U.S. Cavalry to take on the Injuns without fear of disturbing the locals or getting their TV aerials in shot. Until, that is, the local people began to feel, with justification, that they were being exploited. They soon discovered just how easy it was to provoke an anguished scream of *CUT!* by driving their cars, or even just pushing their prams or bicycles into shot. This helped to bring the era of Almeria as a cheap movie location to an end some years ago. But the area is now back in action: not just for feature films but for videos of the kind that market cars as suitable furniture for a lunar landscape.

In making Yucca City at Tabernas into a tourist attraction, marketed as *Mini-Hollywood*, the temptation to tart it all up has been resisted. It could so easily have been turned into some sort of Disneyland model village. The saloon has an active bar to lay dusty throats and one apparently authentic building on the outskirts was not, I think, common in the pioneering days of the west: a Helladaria selling ice cream. I did not see and therefore cannot speak for the stuntpersons, surviving refugees from the great days of filming, who normally perform a daily shoot-out on horseback. But



Movie sets in Spain's Yucca City.