

# No laughing matter

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Believe it or not, there exists an airport called Jackass Aeropark, although it is no longer in use. It is situated northwest of Las Vegas and was named after an area in the Amargosa Valley where wild jackasses once gathered to graze. It was initially listed on the charts with an unpaved runway of first 4,700ft, then 5,000ft, although no one seemed to know how it grew. (Maybe it was because all of a sudden there were two unpaved runways...) Then it was not depicted at all; perhaps it had been closed for unknown reasons.

You would think that this was quite an important airport when you consider that a new 6,250ft runway was constructed, making three runways. However, two were abandoned and the new one was also described as unpaved. Then a USGS topography map presented it as a paved runway. The Department of Transportation depicted it several years later as a dirt runway. Pictures show that it was actually paved. It seems to me that all the depictions were as risky as the outcome of a game of blackjack.

The chairwoman of the Amargosa Valley Advisory Board proudly reported in 2004 that Jackass Aeropark was the only airport in the county capable of taking jets. A Boeing 737 has on at least one occasion landed there, she claimed. The Amargosa Valley residents believed that the ramshackle airport might be a golden opportunity for economic development but county authorities had a different view and the FAA deactivated it in 2004.

As for the airport facilities... The charts made mention of a windsock and even a hangar, which is a big word for a wooden construction with a tin roof and the look of an open carport. When the airport was still operational, a visitor mentioned that he was impressed by its “simplicity”. I bet he was. And I still cannot figure out how and why that 737 may have gotten there.

I'm sure you all know of laughing kookaburras, right? They are Australian birds that were originally known as laughing jackasses.

They would be laughing their beaks off if they heard what had been accomplished in Spain in 2008: a brand new privately owned airport, designed to accommodate 10 million passengers and 47,000 metric tons of cargo annually. Runway length 13,120ft, width 197ft, and an industrial zone of five square miles. Wow, sounds like it would rock as a top hit in the billboards. ‘How come I've never heard of that one?’ you may say. Maybe because it never hit the billboards as it turned out to be a major financial disaster, mainly due to over-optimism.

It was like organizing a party and no one came. Around 10 million *pasajeros* were anticipated, however the airport saw only 55,550 pax in the first year of operations; second year 33,520; based on the currently available figures, the estimate for this year is 28,000 pax, maybe. The only remaining airline servicing the airport twice a week is a low-cost carrier. That in itself will tell you something about revenues.

Aeropuerto Central Ciudad near Madrid (if you consider 50 minutes ‘near’) was developed with a construction budget of US1.5 billion. People who can count only with an abacus would know even without using the instrument that this represents a major financial catastrophe.

The kookaburra birds would fall out of the trees laughing if they heard that this airport was originally called Don Quijote Airport. You know? After the Man of La Mancha who fought against the windmills, and who was quoted as saying, “Dost not see? A monstrous giant of infamous repute whom I intend to encounter. Canst thou not see the four great arms whirling at his back?” Sounds a bit like a turboprop propeller to me. He may have been one of the first airport opponents then. Wasn't he also riding a jackass? It's a small world, I tell you. ☺

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