

The Viking Rally – Part 2

by Charles Colvin

A report on 'British Car Week' in Gothenburg appeared in Part 1 (September 2004). Some of our party now departed for UK, while we who remained carried on with 'week two'.

A convoy drive to Lake Vänern, accompanied by our Swedish hosts, was enlivened by an en route 'pit-stop' at a modern filling station and shop at which we could buy coffee. On the site, to one side, was the original Shell station, still carefully maintained as part of the town's heritage, and in the workshop at the back were an Austin Healey and two Jaguars (E Type and XK 140). Clearly, the proprietors are classic enthusiasts.

On arrival at Kinnevik on the shores of Lake Vänern, we started a pre-arranged visit to a rather special project. Lars, the project leader, met us. He, together with his wife and son, was in Viking working dress and we were invited to have a look around. He then asked us to find seats aboard the vessel – the *Sigrid Storråda* – an accurate replica of a Viking longship. He stood aft, by the steering oar and said, "I'm sorry, my English is not so good, but perhaps you help me out when I get stuck." He spoke for an hour-and-a-half; it seemed like only ten minutes and nobody had to 'help him out' – like most Swedes, he spoke English



extremely well. One of the early points he made was that the Vikings are usually thought of as an undisciplined horde of raving berserkers. He then said, "Having taken this ship to sea, I don't believe it! Someone on board had to give the orders and when he did so, the others had to do what they were told. When you eat together, sleep together and s*** [*he pronounced it 'sheet'*] together for over a fortnight, there is no room for anarchy! There must be order in the ship's company." [*Valuable insight for long-distance runs like the RBRR and 10CR? – Ed.*]

He also explained that a longship was not a fighting ship for battles at sea. The keel, in relation to the ship's beam and draught, was much too long for tight manoeuvres and it could turn in only a very wide arc. His conclusion was that the longship had been designed as a troop transport and landing craft – large enough to carry 40 or so fighting crewmen. It has a shallow draught for beaching and an extremely efficient hull shape that causes little wake (or drag). A wide, low sail would make the most of any wind, without the pitching or rolling moments of a tall sail. No provision for a lateral stabiliser (deep keel or centreboard) has been discovered.

Mostly, when a chieftain died, he was laid in his Longship and the vessel was set ablaze on the water. The original, on which this replica was based, had suffered a different and unusual fate – the chieftain, his horse and his dog had been laid out, and then the whole ship was covered with earth in a large mound. Fortunately



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for us, the local soil had been blue clay, which was impermeable to oxygen and water. When excavated, everything was in near-perfect condition for archaeological analysis.

Lunch was served in the boathouse (shiphouse?) seen behind the ship. The longship was built in 1994–95 and launched in 1995. She is taken 82 km down the Trollhätte Canal, linking Lake Vänern with the Kattegatt, and has completed a number of voyages, notably one to Hamburg. I am aware that a comparatively large number of column inches have been devoted to this ship; this is a reflection of the impact it had on most of us who were privileged to see it. For more information, visit the website about the ship: <http://hem.passagen.se/hakanlar/Engelska.html>.

Leaving Kinnevik and the *Sigrid Storråda*, we said ‘Goodbye and thank you’ to our Swedish hosts and then made our way to the lakeside town of Lidköping (‘Lee-cherping’ to you and me!), where we were booked in to a very pleasant hotel.

Next morning, our brief was blissfully simple: ‘No more convoy driving’ (hip-hip-hurrah!); ‘You can make a leisurely start’ (more cheers!); ‘Be at the ferry terminal at Strömstad not later than 4 pm – it’s just over 100 miles’ (all right!); ‘The Saab museum at Trollhättan (about 40 miles away) is opening early at 11 am for us, so be there at 11 if you want to look round it’ (so we were – and did!).

Unusually, the use of cameras is allowed in the Saab museum, but there were too many exhibits to photograph them all. Of particular interest to Triumph enthusiasts was the display of the

Triumph 1700 cc (later 1854 cc) ‘slant four’ motor sold to Saab for the 1968 Saab 99. It looks just like half a Stag engine! [*Funnily enough... – Ed.*]

Another 60 miles or so saw us at the ferry port at Strömstad, in company with many Norwegians who had been on a ‘booze cruise’ day trip to Sweden – the availability of alcohol in Norway is strictly limited and the price is horrendous – so most were ‘heavy laden’.

Later that evening we disembarked at Sandefjord in Norway – an old whaling port – and stayed in the same hotel we had used in 2002, when it had been a model of hospitality and service to an unexpected and late-night influx of Brits.

Sadly, we think it must have changed hands since then, as we were disappointed by our experience this year. Jean and I visited the Whaling Museum in the town the following day. One giant exhibition of the taxidermist’s art was a complete Blue Whale (about the size of a railway carriage) slung from the ceiling of one of the display halls.

Next day we left to drive 120 leisurely miles down the coastal E18 to catch the ferry home from Kristiansand. The scenery in this part of Norway is very pretty and, even on this major trunk road, the speed limits (which the Norwegian police really mean) give you plenty of time to admire it. On average, it was 70 kph (44 mph). 90 kph (56 mph) was a treat for a couple of miles or so on (I think) three occasions! So, if you’re going touring in Norway 150 miles a day (with some sightseeing) is a reasonable planning assumption, but it’s still very worthwhile.