

# TURNING ON THE HIGH SEAS

*Threaded Boxes, Bowls And Nautical Frolics*

BOB PETITHOMME

THE TRIP WAS BILLED AS THE AMAZING Woodturning Cruise, and it certainly was. On board were amateur and professional woodturners from the USA, Canada, Holland, England, Wales, Scotland, New Zealand, Sweden, Norway and Japan, plus demonstrators representing five companies that develop and manufacture tools and equipment for woodturning, woodcarving and other types of woodworking.

We departed from Stavanger on the southwestern coast of Norway, cruised up through the fjords past the Arctic Circle to Tromso and returned, via an alternate route, to Stavanger.

Before the trip, early arrivals enjoyed the Rainbow Hotel Maritim, a very nice reasonably priced hotel situated within walking distance to the waterfront and the downtown area. I welcomed having a few days to get used to the change in time zones. (nine hours for the folks like me from California)

There were 114 people signed up for the cruise on the MS Gann. The brochure was correct when it said: "You will enjoy breakfast, lunch and dinner everyday which is included in the price. And the food is really good. The meals on the Gann are worth the whole cruise!"

English was the common language so it didn't take long to meet everyone. Communication generally was not a problem. On the ship and throughout Norway someone was always handy to help with translations.

Most of the first evening on board was spent checking out the cruise ship, getting to know everyone, and looking over the lathes and other equipment. Most of the lathes and a scroll saw were set up in a large room at the aft of the ship just behind the dining area. Several lathes were set up outside on the aft deck and there

was a band saw, planer, radial arm saw, and router set up on the covered upper aft deck. All the equipment was strapped down to prevent it from falling if the sea got a little rough.

There were seven lathes on board: two Oneway, two Woodfast, a Vicmarc, a Nova 3000, and an Axminster M330 for us to use. The demonstrators were available for personal instruction in the evenings or in the morning, if time was available before arriving at the next port. The atmosphere was informal and dress was casual. As trip organizer Odd-Erik Thjome said: "We're all woodturners, you know."

As we left port, the evening was beautiful, the sea was calm and the scenery and sights were unbelievably fantastic. The wind was gentle and not strong enough to blow away the light mist that seemed to hang in the area. We watched the lights of Stavanger fade as new lights appeared along the shore as we passed the small communities along our route. We were far enough north that it was still daylight at 10 p.m.

With all the excitement of the evening, meeting woodturners from the far reaches of the globe, making new friends and starting out on a new adventure, it was difficult to think about turning in for the evening. It was after midnight before we settled down in our cabin for the night. Trying to sleep in a gently rocking ship while listening to its big 10-cylinder



Turning Viking Style: Asmund Vignes demonstrates. Photo by author.

engine took getting used to, but after the second night it got easier.

We woke up around 6:00 a.m. the next morning to the sound of four lathes in action in the demo area above our cabin. Some of the woodturners just couldn't wait to get started.

I got up and dressed and went to see what woodturning was like aboard a ship. Everything looked normal. Nothing different about turning here, I thought. I found out different, however, that evening when Allan Batty gave me my first lesson on thread chasing.

The list of demonstrators was impressive. Allan Batty and Stuart Mortimer from the UK were the two big-name turners. Jimmy Clewes, also from the UK, and Peltter Herud from Norway are two new and outstanding full-time woodturners that I hope will visit the U.S. Asmund Vignes is a local woodturner and I am sure we will be hearing more about him if he breaks into woodturning on a full time basis. Bob Neill, a well known

UK Pyrography specialist was on hand to demonstrate the art of decorating wood with wood burning. Dale Nish of Craft Supplies, USA, demonstrated small object turning. For the carvers, Norwegian Rolf Taraldset demonstrated and had extra wood for those that wanted to try their hand at carving.

Representing inventors and manufacturers of tools and machinery were Tim Clay, Oneway Mfg. Co.; Harry Memelink demonstrating his Exocet hollowing tool; Elizabeth and David Powell, co-founders of DMT; Arthur Aveling, from King Arthur Tools. Also Tor Nyhus demonstrated King Arthur's Lancelot wood carver and Kjell Musland demonstrated carving with the Arbortech.

### A Typical Day On board

Breakfast was served at 7 a.m., then it was on to the demonstration area to see who was turning and if there was a lathe available. When you needed a break from turning, you could go out on deck and take in the scenery or go to the lounge area.

We have some grand state and national parks in the U. S. but nothing to compare with the Norwegian Fjords. It's mile-after-mile and day-after-day of "Photo Opportunities." Lush green mountains, sheer rock cliffs that you can almost reach out and touch, a never ending abundance of waterfalls, and many summer cottages dotting the shore.

Going back to the demo area you might see Allan Batty or Stuart Mortimer giving advice or demonstrating a turning technique. You could always find Harry Memelink demonstrating his Exocet hollowing tool or the Sorby texturing tool. No problem if you wanted to try them yourself. This was truly a hands-on experience, whether it was Memelink, Vignes with ring tools or any of the other pros demonstrating. Jimmy Clewes was so popular he had to start a sign



Stuart Mortimer demonstrates hollow form turning. The United Kingdom turner will be a featured demonstrator at the AAW Symposium in Providence, RI, June 28-30. Photo here and next page: Arthur Aveling.

up sheet for the turners wanting some personal instruction.

Stuart Mortimer's spiral twist demonstrations on small stem goblets were not to be missed. Petter Herud demonstrated lidded box making and elliptical turning. He made things a little more interesting because his boxes were turned (they were actually hexagonal) off center and the lids were threaded. Petter said he took thread chasing lessons from Allan Batty and learned spiraling from Stuart Mortimer.

Then there was an announcement from Odd-Erik, saying it was time to clean up the area before docking, when local woodturners would be coming aboard to see the demos and to purchase tools and woodturning supplies.

Bus tours were arranged for most of the days we spent in port. Passengers also could opt to stroll through the port cities at their leisure or stay on board for the demos put on for the local Norwegian woodworkers.

After lunch it was back to the

demo area to watch Bob Neill texturing or painting on wood. Everyone knew Bob was originally from Wales because he flew the Welsh flag anywhere on board he could find a place to attach it.

Jimmy Clewes always drew a crowd and might be seen giving one of the locals a lesson on using a bowl gouge or doing some really fancy thin wall turning on green wood.

Tim Clay often demonstrated his company's Coring System or their sharpening jig.

Dale Nish was always ready to mix a little humor in with his demonstrations. He liked to turn small objects and demonstrated the art of hollowing a small neck vase through a small hole in its base.

Out on the deck Kjell Musland would be using an Arbortech to carve the bust of a Viking or maybe one of the Trolls the Norwegians like. When Kjell was ready for a break he might get his accordion out and play several tunes. Harry Memelink would generally join with his harmonica.



Kjell Musland and Harry Memelink during an impromptu concert in Molde.

Elizabeth and David Powell were always on hand to demonstrate their diamond knife and tool sharpeners. I noticed some of the kitchen staff brought in their knives.

Rain or shine Harry Memelink was always outside turning and demonstrating hollowing. His signature piece was a large disk shaped hollow form embellished and textured with the Sorby texturing tool.

Supper was always a good meal, then we returned to the demo area. That's when I got a lesson on thread chasing from Allan Batty. I said earlier that woodturning on the deck of a cruise ship was no different than turning in my studio at home. Well, I was wrong. When I took my turn at the lathe, the ship was rocking a little more than earlier. I wished I had three hands — one to hold on to the lathe and two for the thread chasing tool. Allan got me started and said I should not blame the rocking of the ship for my difficulties. After several false starts, I finally got the rhythm and produced a respectable thread. I practiced for about an hour and then gave up the lathe for someone else to use. More practice at home and I eventually should become proficient.

Terje Broadhurst from WWW VERKTOY, which organized the cruise, was demonstrating the Delta scroll saw and he produced many interesting products, signs, etc.

Before the cruise ended, everyone had an opportunity to use a lathe

and many platters, bowls, hollow forms, goblets, etc. were produced. Bob Neill was on hand to add his magic to the pieces and decorated many platters with designs commemorating the cruise.

#### **Bonuses !!**

Yes-sir-e! Bonuses were included in the cruise and at no extra cost. It was bonus after bonus. I wish I had kept a log because I am sure I won't remember them all.

Here are just a few — talking, one on one, with Tim Clay about the Oneway lathe. Sharing our lunch table with Allan Batty and Stuart Mortimer and their wives and discussing various tool profiles and grinds. Clapping our hands to the tunes Kjell Musland and Harry Memelink played for us. Catching a big cod fish in port one day, from the bow of the ship, with a fishing pole Asmund Vignes loaned me. The time that captain Clausen stopped the ship at his favorite fishing spot and provided fishing gear. We caught enough cod (largest one was over 8 kgs) for the kitchen crew to make fish soup for lunch the next day.

Then there was the ride up the funicular in Bergen and lunch at the restaurant on top of the hill overlooking the city. There were the evenings we went into town and had a beer at a local pub. And when we saw the marker at the point we crossed into the Arctic Circle. What about the Cap-

tain's breathtaking side trip up a fjord so narrow I'm sure I could have touched the sides with a 10-ft. pole?

We can't forget all the stories and jokes Harry told us or the time he picked up Kirsten and carried her, fighting and kicking, to the stern of the ship for the "Crossing the Arctic Circle" initiation ceremony. She got even the next day when she doused Harry down with cold water from the ship's fire hose.

What about the big mystery on the cruise? Who was drawing caricatures of the demonstrators? New drawings would appear every morning. This went on for several days, then an inquiry was initiated, involving two expolicemen and lots of humorous actions. A trial was held and a crew member identified the artist — Odd Erik, was sentenced to walk the plank in Molde harbor. Mette jumped, as well, screaming: "Don't leave me alone with all these turners!" They both wore survival suits and did not feel the 12° water. But it's a good thing the crew was standing by in a life boat to rescue them.

Then a big personal surprise! I ran into a neighbor from Fresno. He and his wife were on a different cruise and their ship tied up right in front of ours in Alesund. With all the people on the two ships it was a real coincidence that we ran into each other.

But most of all the big bonus was meeting all the fine folks on the cruise, making new friendships and the memories that will last forever.

A new cruise is planned for 2004. If you want more information contact Odd-Erik at [tredreie@ogreid.no](mailto:tredreie@ogreid.no), subject Woodturning Cruise. Include your e-mail address, name, and full postal address.

Or send a letter/fax to: WWW VERKTOY AS; Sjøhagen 2; 4016; Stavanger, Norway; Fax + 4751886810

*Bob Petithomme is a turner in Fresno, Ca.*