

# The Woodturning Boat



Pyrographer Bob Neill sends a postcard report from the Norwegian fjords of life on board the 'Woodturning Boat' and its second Arctic cruise.

Getting a group of wood craftsmen together with over 100 fare paying passengers, sailing on a cruise ship from Stavanger in the south up the Norwegian coast into the land of the midnight sun and the Arctic Circle, and then on as far as Tromsø all seemed like a dream.

But it was a dream that had been carefully thought up and realised by Odd Erik Thjomøe of the woodworking and woodturning company [www.Verktøy As](http://www.Verktøy As) which is based in Stavanger. And this trip was the second, if deferred cruise, of the Tredreiebåten or 'Woodturning Boat'. Fortunate to be one of the invited

**Above: The motley crew of demonstrators including: Rolf Taraldset, Jimmy Clewes, Alan Batty, Bob Neill, Mette, Odd Erik, Dale Nish, Petter Herud, Stuart Mortimer, Harry Memelink and Kjell Mus.**

demonstrators on board. I and my wife were able to take in the 12 day voyage in which we travelled over 1700 nautical miles. The ship, the MS Gann, is one of the famous Hurtigrute vessels which used to travel along the Norwegian coast all year round providing transport and communication for remote fjord and coastal communities; today it is a school ship providing education and training in seamanship for young men and women and it also takes in summer cruises.

## Turning and burning at sea

During the voyage from harbour to harbour the demonstrators gave instruction and demonstrations to the passengers, and when the demonstrators were not at their lathes or workstations then the passengers had free use of the equipment. However, in each port the MS Gann became a floating exhibition and it was open to visitors who arrived in large numbers, and these

The Woodturning Boat and training ship MS Gann.





**Pyrographic memories are made of this.**



**Stuart Mortimer at work with Jimmy Ciewes at his lathe station in the background.**

Norwegians were always enthusiastic and appreciative. During these static sessions, most of the demonstrators were busily at work with big crowds around each lathe, carver, pyrographer, router user etc. This is not so surprising as each town or city is built around the harbour, so when we docked we were at the centre of things, and there is also a great craft tradition in Norway. In fact woodturning is now a very popular hobby and business for many Norwegians and, just as in the UK, they are always looking for new ideas.

My wife, Del, and I demonstrated and organised the pyrography workshop, and as this was situated inside we were kept busy and warm. The occasional visit out on deck to take in the fresh air and wonderful landscapes was very refreshing, and this was where the visitors could find the use of rotary carving tools demonstrated by Arthur Aveling from America or try their hand at using the Exocet turning tool with Harry Memelink from New Zealand.

The on-board passengers came from a variety of countries that included the UK, Norway, Holland, USA, Canada, Japan and



**Petter Herud demonstrating small boxes.**



**Asmund Vignes of Norway does his turn.**

Wales, and after 12 days together we had certainly got to know each other well and we enjoyed the social life as much as the turning and burning.

### **Crossing the Circle**

Special moments of the cruise included crossing the Arctic Circle when it is the custom to be splashed by Arctic water, and another was when Harry Memelink organised the 'Instant Gallery'. This was an exhibition of work typical of the style of the demonstrator's usual pieces, and each of us had to come forward and talk about the piece describing the influences, inspiration, technique and points of interest. From the applause I received I felt I should have won, but the American bribed the judge!

Another aspect of the cruise was the guided tours available to passengers when we came into port. Unfortunately, it was more difficult for us as demonstrators to take advantage of these, although my wife and I managed to join the others at Tromsø where there is an excellent Polar exhibition and a very modern church with very colourful stained glass. We also took the coach at Molde to go along the Atlantic Road, and on a sunny day this would have been quite beautiful although for us it was overcast and dull. At Ålesund a bus trip to



**Bob Neill in his pyrography workshop.**

Aksla gave us a great view over the city and surrounding mountains and sea, and at Atlanterhavspaken we visited one of Northern Europe's largest aquariums.

### **Memories and the future**

All in all it was a wonderful experience and we have many memories of new friends, new places and unusual foods. It just goes to show that there is more to life than woodturning and burning wood and for this we were all grateful to Odd Erik and his assistant Mette for all the hard work they had put in to planning and organising the event. Most of us are now looking forward to 2004 when Odd Erik is planning to run the third Woodturning Boat cruise.



**Overlooking the town and harbour of Ålesund.**



**Trollfjorden Fjord where the mountains come down into the sea.**

