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DREAMING ABOUT A BOAT

It is a privilege to be able to own a boat with an impressive pedigree – and to be in charge of a bit of cultural heritage. Just as purchasing a classic car is about more than acquiring an object, it's a ticket to a journey filled with both past and future adventures, in new places and in new contexts.

This book tells the story of *Andante*, a Storebro Royal Cruiser 38 Baltic with flybridge, manufactured by Storebro, a prestigious Swedish boatmaker. Her first owner was none other than Benny Andersson of the pop group ABBA. Benny placed his order in 1977 and took delivery of the boat the following year. By the 1978 Midsummer holiday, she was moored alongside the jetty on Viggso, an island in Stockholm archipelago. The other members of ABBA and the group's manager Stig 'Stikkan' Anderson enjoyed spending their summers there too. It was also where Björn and Benny wrote many of the group's songs. *Andante* is an especially seaworthy vessel that boasts excellent design, comfort and reliability. She makes every voyage a pleasure, no matter what the conditions may be.

Andante is also concrete evidence of Benny Andersson's central position in Swedish culture and the Swedish concept of *folkhemmet*, which translates as 'the people's home' – a social model in which everyone contributes and looks after each other. To the uninitiated, the boat might appear rather modest or *lagom*, another uniquely Swedish term meaning 'neither too much nor too little'. But if *folkhemmet* represented the increasing prosperity available to many in Sweden after the Second World War, *lagom* discourages Swedes from conspicuous consumption. Instead of hogging everything for yourself, it's better to include other people and make sure everyone is doing well. The word *lagom* is said to date from the Viking era, when warriors would celebrate by sharing a tankard of mead. Each person was supposed to

Carina and me on the flybridge after *Andante*'s departure from the Henån boatyard.

Previous pages:

2–3: From a bird's-eye view, it's easy to appreciate just how many islands there are in the Stockholm archipelago. This is Stora Nassa, where the surrounding islands provide a sheltered overnight berth.

4–5: *Andante* setting out from Västervik last summer, after we'd spent the night at Slottsholmen, the hotel owned by Björn Ulvaeus.





THE BOATYARD IN THE FOREST

In the spring of 1978, workers at the Storebro boatbuilding yard put the final touches on yet another Storebro Royal Cruiser 38. With her gleaming mahogany flybridge and shiny brass fittings, she was ready to launch.

The buyer was Benny Andersson of ABBA. Together with his fiancée Anni-Frid Lyngstad (better known to ABBA fans as Frida), he would soon be able to take a break from life in the spotlight and enjoy life at sea, away from the crowds. To ensure their privacy, they had decided their boat would not have a name – they would be incognito on board.

Two years later, the group released their song entitled ‘Andante, Andante’ on the album *Super Trouper* with music and lyrics by Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus. It’s highly likely their voyage to sea went at that easy pace – *andante* is a musical term meaning ‘moderately slow’. The boat travelled the last 70 km on a trailer to the launch at Västervik, the town on Sweden’s east coast where Björn had grown up.

As the owner of a Storebro boat, Benny was in good company. The boat-maker had an excellent reputation, with celebrities and affluent business leaders among its customers. No less a personage than Sweden’s King Carl XVI Gustaf has owned several Storebro boats – meaning the company has earned the status of Purveyor to the Royal Court of Sweden.

How could boats built in a workshop in the woods become such must-have items? Nowadays you might be able to pay online influencers or a trendy PR firm to achieve something similar, but Storebro’s glory days were long before social media came along.

Aerial photos of Swedish towns and estates were popular in the 1940s and '50s. This view of Storebro shows the dammed section of the Stångån River as well as Storebro Park, where ABBA performed in 1975. Storebro Manor is in the centre of the photo. It served as the boatyard’s main office for many years. Storebro has long been a familiar name in the boating world, despite being around 60 km from the Baltic Sea.





THE BOAT THAT BENNY BOUGHT

‘It’s the boat with everything – except a Hammond organ,’ as Benny Andersson put it in 1978, commenting on his brand-new Storebro Royal Cruiser 38 Baltic with flybridge, serial number 2400.

There are many factors that might have influenced Benny to choose a Storebro boat, but let’s backtrack to Friday 4 July 1975. ABBA had a gig in Storebro Park in Småland in southern Sweden. They had won the Eurovision Song Contest with ‘Waterloo’ the previous year, but they still opted to play a small venue instead of larger stages. Niels Kvistborg, the event organiser, placed an ad in the local newspaper advising concert-goers to arrive early. Tickets were priced at 20 kronor. Also on the bill were Saints, a local dance band – as if ABBA weren’t enough of a draw.

Whereas most performers drove to the site, ABBA arrived by boat. They travelled along the Stångån River to Lake Storebro, right behind the charming little stage. Of course, the boat was a Storebro.

Lennart Ivarsson, managing director and co-owner of the boatyard at the time, recalled, ‘Lars Bjuréus, the sales director, helped us to hoist a Storö 34 into the Stångån. That sort of thing used to happen in those days!’

‘The plan was just to transport the four of them in the boat,’ Ivarsson continued, ‘but on the way, Björn and Benny asked, “Could we also get changed here on the boat?” Of course we let them, so when we pulled up near the stage, all four were on the foredeck in their stage outfits – platform boots and all.’

The band members thought it would be nicer to use the boat as a dressing room instead of getting changed in the small red shed that normally served that purpose for performers.

‘Then they got off the boat and went right up on stage,’ Ivarsson said.



Above: When word got out that Benny Andersson had purchased a Storebro boat, it made headlines in Sweden. ‘Benny’s luxury boat cost a million kronor and has everything but an organ’, shouted the *Expressen* tabloid. Benny, Björn and ABBA’s faithful sound engineer Claes ‘Clabbe’ af Geijerstam went to Västervik in person in 1978 to take delivery of the boat. They would go on many voyages together.

Left: Benny Andersson, proud boat owner. His new Storebro Royal Cruiser 38 can be seen in the background.



Janne Strömsten was a local DJ who happened to have his camera with him at ABBA's concert in Storebro Park on 4 July 1975. He also captured the band's tour leader from EMA, Stefan Lundin, and Frida in this shot. The four members of ABBA changed into their stage outfits on board the Storebro boat that had transported them to the concert site.







ON TO NEW ADVENTURES

The 2024 season is now nearing its end, and we can look back on our second summer together with *Andante*. I suppose we had always reckoned it would take at least two winters to get her into the shape we wanted, and planning for winter number two is already underway.

Rather than reel off a long list of what still needs doing, let's return to 9 May 2024, as dusk set in over the Falsterbo Canal and we could breathe a sigh of relief. We had met our deadline and *Andante* would arrive on time so we could take our friends to Malmö, where the Eurovision Song Contest would take place on Saturday 11 May at Malmö Arena.

A silent drizzle fell on the canvas top as Jens Sønnergaard, who had captained *Andante* since she left the Henån boatyard on 25 April, summed up his impression of our restored boat. '*Andante* is a piece of cultural history! Not just because her first owner was famous, but because these Storebro boats have so many details you never see on new vessels these days.'

'Look at this,' he said, pointing up towards the ceiling. 'You don't see mahogany ceilings anymore. Now they use different, less interesting, materials. To say nothing of the new teak deck. With all its detail, it's the boat's stand-out feature.'

Sweden didn't go on to win Eurovision in Malmö, but we had brought our boat to our local area. Now we could revel in the fact that most things are so much prettier when viewed from the water than from land. One memorable trip this summer took us to Denmark. On the little island of Møn, south-east of Sjælland (the large island where Copenhagen is located), is Denmark's most impressive natural feature: the Møns Klint chalk cliffs. The cliffs rise up 128 metres (420 ft), straight out of the azure waters. It's a dizzying sight that can take anyone's breath away, especially if you approach from the sea.



Carina on her way up to the fly-bridge for another adventure on board *Andante*. On this summer's day, the destination was Denmark.



