

NORWAY

An impressive **CRUISING AREA**



Text and photographs by André Suntjens

Norway captures the imagination of many holidaymakers – regardless of whether they're travelling by motor home, car, motorbike or boat. Norway is a great country, whether you like walking, winter sports, fishing, culture or sailing. It's a unique opportunity and a great privilege to tour this impressive cruising area in a fantastic Linssen Grand Sturdy 500 AC Variotop.

On Whit Monday, 25 May 2015, the ЧЕРНЫЙ ПАУК II (Black Spider II), a Grand Sturdy 500 AC Variotop Mark II, pulled out of the Nautilus marina in Roermond. On board were Alexander (owner), Kris (his girlfriend), Michela (a member of Alexander's staff), André Suntjens (captain) and his partner Henriette Scheepers.

Once they arrived in Oslo, only André and Henriette would be remaining on board until the return journey to the Netherlands, sometime in August/September...

PREPARATIONS

We would be undertaking a trip with an unplanned route so as to be able to anticipate weather conditions. Later, during the trip, we found that long-term forecasts (for one week ahead) were not always reliable, especially in terms of wind

force. Our preparations included navigation charts, safety equipment, spare parts, provisions and clothing because it is even hard to predict the temperature and likelihood of rain in this northerly part of Europe.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

Having listened to the weather forecasts and studied them carefully, we decided not to take the much faster route via Heligoland and the west coast of Denmark, but an alternative route via Groningen to Delfzijl and then set course, via the river Ems, for Cuxhaven on the Ems in the hope that the north-westerly wind would drop in the German Bight. However, this didn't happen, so we sailed into Emden to take the Ems-Jade Canal to Wilhelmshaven, a very rural and narrow canal with a lot of bridges and country smells. We spent the night in Cuxhaven before sailing into the Kiel canal via Brunsbüttel

lock; at the waiting place there we called up "Kiel Canal I" and waited for the continuous white light! The canal is almost 100 km long with the Kiel-Holtenau lock at the end: there we called "Kiel Canal IV" and again waited for the continuous white light to indicate that we could enter.

LABOE

For us, Laboe was the starting point of our actual adventure through the unknown cruising areas of Denmark and Norway. About the same size as the Netherlands, Denmark consists of the large Jutland peninsula with a few hundred small islands around it, so it has a long coastline with many beaches. On the eastern side, where we were sailing, were a few fjords, flatter and more wooded than their counterparts in Norway. We decided to sail round Lolland and the first Danish port we entered was Kragenaes, a small marina/harbour

Oslo



in an area with hardly any infrastructure. These southern islands are also known as “the South of the North” because of their mild climate. And, indeed, the weather was glorious and sunny. We then sailed north of the islands of Fejø and Femø, which was a circuitous route but there was no alternative due to the shallow water. This route through the Masnedsund and the Ulvsund was very narrow in places and only partially buoyed. The old saying “to sail here you need strong belief and wide feet” definitely applies to this cruising area, which is full of hazardous shallows. Good navigation charts are by no means an unnecessary luxury. It therefore became an exciting, but also interesting, day trip to our next stop, Fakse Ladeplads. This was another small harbour in a charming rural setting. Just as in a number of the harbours that followed, it had precisely one mooring that was big enough.

COPENHAGEN

It is of course worth spending a few days in Copenhagen. Having sailed past the Little Mermaid, the statue based on Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale (which, incidentally, was smaller than we had imagined), we found a mooring at the Nyhavn quay. Copenhagen is linked to Sweden by the Øresund Bridge, which is almost 8 km in length. We stayed in the city for three days, wandering through the shopping district and enjoying the sunny weather on the convivial and bustling terraces in front of the colourful restaurants.

The next leg we had planned was to Anholt, a small island in the middle of the Kattegat. The wind forecast was 4-5 Beaufort westerly, but the sea quickly became rough, with steep, short and high waves. As a result of different currents meeting there, the water in the Kattegat and Skagerrak often becomes very

turbulent. The power and violence of the water is awesome and if you are not properly secured, you will literally be thrown back and forth. Although the stabilisers do ease the conditions, our guiding principle is that all members of the crew should sail in comfort. In order to avoid the still considerable swell, we turned 90 degrees to starboard and headed for Mölle (Sweden). It was the right decision and we sailed into the small and very welcoming harbour with a great sigh of relief.

You have to be flexible when sailing. Sweden was not originally on the programme, but you have to be flexible when sailing... Despite the wind, we had a pleasant trip to Anholt with the waves diagonally on the bow. Anholt is one of the “never-visit-in-season” ports, with boats moored up to eight rows deep. It’s a fishing port and, like many Scandinavian ports, has a barbecue area which anyone can use. It’s a charming small island with only 160 inhabitants and an unspoiled beach but, unfortunately, it also rains quite often. Onwards to Skagen, the last stop before Norway, or at least that’s what we thought. But after leaving the fishing port of Skagen, where dozens of sea-going vessels lay at anchor, we sailed north along the peninsula and quickly decided to alter course to Stavern, to the Swedish coast. After all, we were not in a hurry and this way we would be sailing the last stretch well sheltered between the hundreds of small islands.

THOUSANDS OF SMALL ISLANDS

The Norwegian and Swedish coast consists of thousands of small islands, known as the skerries. Many are uninhabited and some are connected to the mainland or a larger island by a bridge. You often see only one or two houses at the water’s edge and a boat is therefore an essential requirement for making

contact with the rest of the world. This multitude of islands and the tideless sea makes it a relatively sheltered cruising area.

But it is often a maze and, without good, up-to-date navigation equipment, you will become hopelessly lost or fix a wrong position. Sailing here requires concentration, but this is also necessary on open, rough seas. During the last few miles to Strömstad, again in Sweden, we were even escorted by the Swedish water police, who were coming to check our documents and the boat in the harbour. It was probably the Russian name on our yacht that caught their attention. Of course, everything was OK. Strömstad is very popular with Norwegian alcohol tourists who come here by the shipload (including with ColourLine/StenaLine) to really stock up. Norway is not a member of the EU and the importation of alcohol and cigarettes to Norway is limited to a certain amount per person. The price of alcoholic drinks is kept artificially high by the government in order to minimise consumption, but the result is that people sometimes take refuge in home-made drinks...

OSLOFJORD

The next day, while we were on our way to Oslo, we were subjected to another check in the Oslofjord, this time by Norwegian customs, who came aboard to check very thoroughly for alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. However, it was a very friendly occasion and, with hindsight, we could have used a few hidden rooms...

As we approached Oslo, the fjord became narrower and the surroundings even more impressive.

On the advice of the Norwegian customs officers, we called at the Aker Brygge marina, near the centre, and this was indeed a good suggestion. It was situated in a great location near the waterfront but it was particu-



Harbour entrance, Strömstad

larly busy. We later found out that a regatta with 200 participating sailing yachts would be starting the next day. Despite this, we were allocated a fantastic mooring. All of us spent two more days on board until we (Henriette and André) “had to” stay behind on our own. Every day we explored Oslo and the surrounding area on foot or by bicycle and did a lot of sightseeing.

We gradually learned more about the Norwegians and the city itself: Norwegians (as we got to know them) are friendly, somewhat reserved initially and helpful; they speak perfect English (second language); they generally have a fairly high standard of living and usually have a holiday home or polyester yacht somewhere in Norway. They are rightly really proud of their own country (which they show by flying the Norwegian flag). They are very positive about Dutch people and all have some kind of connection with our country.

Oslo is home to 10% of the 6 million Norwegians. It’s a lively, exciting city with many cultural attractions within walking distance. It has fantastic, busy shopping streets such as Karl Johans Gate, with street theatre, musicians, artists and stalls. The city is also a popular destination for many large cruise liners. What is noticeable, in the negative sense, are the many beggars who sit at every street corner, almost all of them from the Eastern Bloc countries, to the annoyance of the Norwegians. This has now become a priority issue for the government.

AKER BRYGGE

Aker Brygge marina is situated on the bustling waterfront in a shopping and entertainment district. The name is taken from a shipyard which went bankrupt in 1980, after which the whole district was the subject of an ambitious conversion. The marina was renovated some years ago and is now a place in which to be seen.

It’s actually typical of all Norwegian marinas, which are accessible to everyone. They don’t have fences around them. Harbour dues are to standard level, except in the bigger cities (Aker Brygge is very expensive but you can negotiate the price if you’re staying for longer). Water is included, which means you are allowed to use drinking water to wash the salt off your boat. Passing boaters can often moor free of charge during the day to go shopping, fill up with water and recharge the batteries (EU connector). The bigger marinas are well equipped and there is almost always a place available. Many harbours don’t have a harbour master and we had to pay by debit or credit card at the pay station.

As soon as we arrived in Oslo we were surprised by the very short nights (it only gets dark for two hours). In order to avoid problems getting to sleep, we taped over the portholes in our cabin with black



Marina Aker Brygge, Oslo



Bergen

plastic during our stay in Norway. It's lucky we brought rubbish sacks with us...

ONWARDS TO BERGEN!

We thought it would be a particularly nice trip to sail via the south coast to Bergen, as it's a city that everyone should see. As far as Kristiansand, we sailed through a magnificent area with a lot of islands and a lot of sunshine, some days with the Variotop open in the very clean air under a massive blue sky. It was a fascinating landscape with an enchanting sea surrounding countless smooth islands that turned red with the setting sun. Sometimes we sailed over wide stretches of water and then through narrow passages with clear water and breathing in the very clean air. You don't get bored for an instant and it's really fantastic to sail through these island formations instead of following the coastline on the open sea. These skerry coasts form an impressive natural landscape and are a Valhalla for boating enthusiasts. They often have terraces, barbecue areas and walking routes which can be easily reached by dinghy. You have to remain alert when sailing between the islands and along the skerry coasts even if you have detailed navigation charts and recent plotter charts. In shallow places, there is a black pole on the rock below to indicate shallows. Above water there is often a sort of

signpost to indicate which side of the pole you have to pass on – keep your distance and go slowly! Things can therefore get quite tense when sailing through narrow passages. Also worthy of note are the small harbours and anchorages and the many wooden houses, mostly painted brown, yellow, red and green.

THE OLDEST TOWN IN NORWAY

We visited Tønsberg, which – according to its residents – is the oldest town in Norway. It has the only lift bridge we saw in Norway. In Stavern, there was a pleasant harbour with a fantastic female harbourmaster who was particularly helpful. It was there that we attended the celebrations for the longest day, when a large bonfire is set alight when the sun reaches its lowest point – a tradition in Norway. In the harbour, we encountered a Linssen Grand Sturdy 40.9 AC, the Odegard.

In the white town of Risør we had a bar opposite us with a magnificent Scottish-themed interior. There, a rock whitewashed by the Dutch in the 17th century was used as a navigation sign for the seafarers of that time.

Arendal has a pleasant town harbour, with the old town of Tyholmen and the customs island of Merdø. This island has no roads, but it is particularly authentic, with a living open-air museum. In summer, it's the hotspot for the local population.

Kristiansand, Norway's fifth-largest city, is a popular holiday destination for the Norwegians themselves and has a large fish market (fiskebrygga). By now we had almost reached the most southerly point of Norway and would therefore be going north to Bergen along the west coast.

However, there are few marinas on this stretch until Stavanger and the usual northerly or westerly wind can play tricks on you. We therefore remain alert to the wind forecasts. We sailed to Flekkefjord, a trip that took almost twelve hours via a glorious navigation route through the fjord. There was a tiny harbour in an otherwise abandoned village. No restaurants were open, even on a Saturday! A salmon farm caused some confusion as it was not shown on the chart, but there were hundreds more to follow.

The following morning, after an hour of sailing, we sailed into a thick fog, which accompanied us for the rest of the day. We now had to rely on radar, and AIS in particular. We had previously found that AIS is a fantastic navigation aid for avoiding dangerous situations.

We reached Stavanger. It's a pleasant town, but unfortunately we were there just too early for the Gladmat (a massive food festival).

LYSEFJORDEN

Although Bergen was in sight, we

decided to take a detour via the Lysefjord with its world-famous Preikestolen (Pulpit Rock), Kjerag (suspended boulder) and Flørli stairway. This stairway is 1,470 metres long and has a gradient of 740 metres. It has 4,444 steps and is one of the longest in the world. Henriette went up 100 of these steps (due to lack of time of course...).

After spending the night in Lysebotn deep inside the fjord, we went to Skartveit on the island of Halsnøya. We visited it because of a publication that we had seen. It was primitive in the nicest sense of the word and authentic, with great people. We spent two days there.

Population of 110 and one car Haugesund has a harbour seafront but the town centre is very run-down. We had a VIP place at the quay during the "Iron Man", a triathlon in a European competition which was being held at the time. We took a boat trip to the island of Røvaer which has a population of 110 and, apart from one car, is completely car-free. We went via Leirvik and Uskedalen to Norheimsund in the Hardangerfjord, which has pleasant harbour. Osøyro was our last stop before Bergen.

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

In Bergen, we had a mooring at the quay in Bryggen, the striking view of the town that appears on the UNESCO World Heritage List. With a relatively small centre, this colourful town has a rich heritage dating from

the times of the Hanseatic League and the status of European city of culture. There's a lively but expensive fish market. We eventually stayed there for six days without a spot of rain, despite the fact that Bergen is known for its rainy weather...

The city is situated between seven hills, two of which we climbed, one of them up 900 steps made of boulders and we thought that was an achievement. A visit to this city is really worthwhile. Norway's biggest fjord, the Sognefjord, begins just to the north of the city.

BACK TO OSLO

We decided to sail back to Oslo along the coast at a relaxed pace and we also called in at a few places we had already visited. New stops for us were Fitjar, Egersund and Mandal. Fitjar is situated near perhaps the most beautiful area of skerries in Norway, which has attractive, idyllic anchorages. Norway has many skerries, but not as many as Sweden. Egersund is a large fishing port with a long entrance and Mandal is a pleasant town, where we spent three days.

Henriette flew home once we were back in Oslo as she was about to become a grandma for the second time and naturally wanted to be with her daughter. This meant I had to spend three weeks alone on board in Oslo until Alexander and Chris flew over for the return journey. However, it is certainly no trial to remain behind alone in this location. The Grand Sturdy 500 with Variotop

appeared to be a real object of curiosity. I received many compliments and had to explain 287 times why the boat had a Russian name, combined with a Dutch flag.

Because the wind forecasts were initially very favourable to take the shortest return route along the west coast of Denmark via Harlingen or Den Helder, Henk, a friend, flew in so as to be able to sail back with three skippers (two on and one off). However, on the day before our departure, storm warnings were issued for Heligoland, so we changed the plan and returned via the east coast again. After all, you have to be flexible when sailing. We sailed thirty hours non-stop from Oslo to Grenaa via Skagen and then in day trips to Juelsminde, Sønderborg, Holtenau (the Kiel lock was out of service!), Cuxhaven, Norderney (the north German Wadden Sea), Groningen, Burgum, Volendam and Amsterdam, where Alexander was attending a conference.

In early October, we sailed into our temporary home port at Nautilus Roermond, happy but a little homesick.

Stavanger



Haugesund



Norway on a Grand Sturdy 500 Variotop® Mark III

BERGEN NORHEIMSUND

STAVANGER

KRISTIANSAND

LANGSUND

OSLO

STRÖMSTAD

SKAGEN

ANHOLT

KOPENHAGEN

LABOE

GRONINGEN

KAMPEN

MAASBRACHT

A few of the many interesting places to see:

Copenhagen:
The Little Mermaid

Sweden:
Anholt island (www.visitanholt.dk)

Norway:
Oslo (www.visitoslo.com)
Aker Brygge (www.akerbrygge.no/marina)
Tønsberg (www.visittonsborg.com)
Risør (www.risor.kommune.no)
Kristiansand (www.kristiansand.no)
Lysefjord (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lysefjord)
Bergen (www.visitbergen.com)