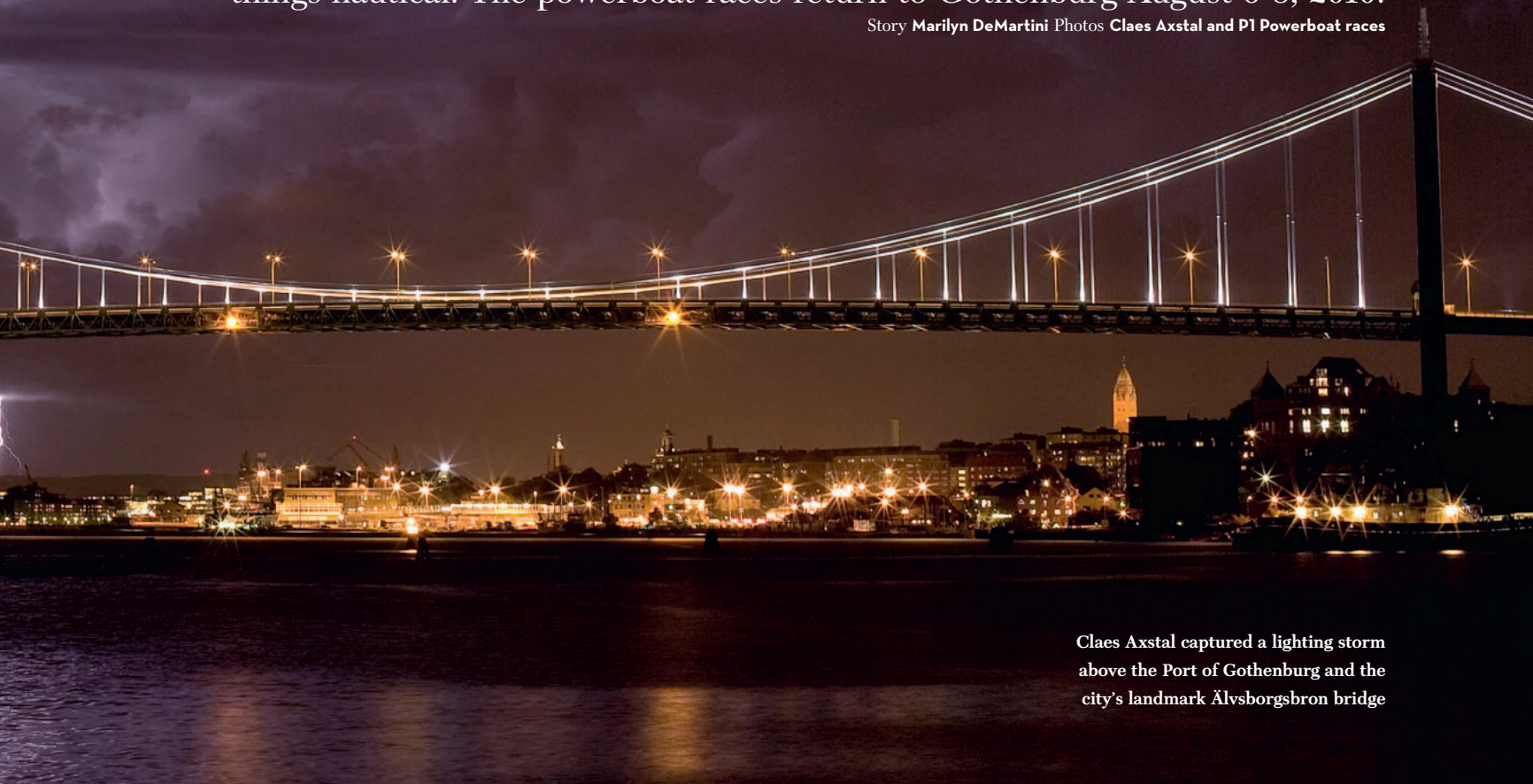




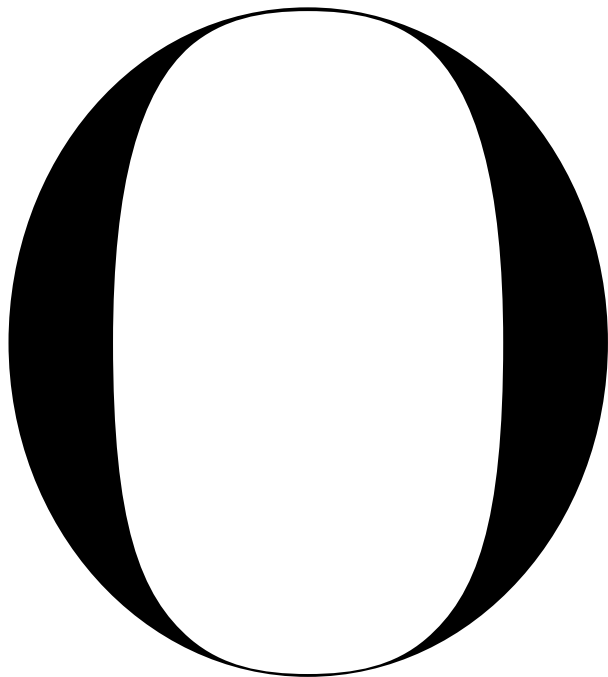
THE LESSER KNOWN SCANDINAVIA **POWER AND SAIL MEET IN GOTHENBURG**

While the West Mediterranean remains, by far, the most requested charter destination after the Caribbean, Scandinavia's extraordinary carved coastlines have attracted a few superyachts in recent years. Rarely, however, is the Swedish port of Gothenburg on the itinerary. Last year, things changed a bit with the first ever Powerboat P1 race to be held there. Marilyn deMartini attended the event and discovered an interesting region with deep roots in all things nautical. The powerboat races return to Gothenburg August 6-8, 2010.

Story Marilyn DeMartini Photos Claes Axstal and P1 Powerboat races



Claes Axstal captured a lighting storm above the Port of Gothenburg and the city's landmark Älvsborgsbron bridge



The Gothenburg Royal Yacht Club's 100 year-old clock tower is a city landmark

On descent to Landvetter Airport in the Swedish town of Gothenburg, clear blue lakes scattered among rolling green hills and pastures captured billowy clouds above. Small islands dot the jagged coastline where modern windmills and buildings seem to have been driven into the coastal rocks. Even from the air, it is possible to sense how important the sea is in the culture of Scandinavia where one in every seven residents owns a boat—and I was there to explore it. In 2009, the Powerboat P1 World Championship held its Scandinavian Grand Prix in Gothenburg (Göteborg), Sweden's largest port and second largest city after Stockholm. The city has an ideal location on the Southwest coast where the Gota Alv River runs through the city before meeting the North Sea. The Powerboat race took place along the coast of Langedrag, the sailing capital of this maritime city, so before the race festivities began, I set out in search of the sea-faring life in Gothenburg.

A moat circles the 17th century city's inner core, and the town, laced with canals and built by Dutch construction consultants, has a little something of Amsterdam. Forts built for the coastal town's protection have stood the test of time along with many churches, statues and ornate bridges. Like in Amsterdam, walking and bicycling are commonplace and an extensive electric tram system runs throughout the area. Nine ferries also travel throughout the area and "paddan" sight-seeing boats offer an ideal perspective of the city's architecture and history from the water.

The spirit of the sea is most prevalent in the southwestern part of the city called Langedrag, where the Gothenburg Royal Yacht Club, Nimbus Boats showroom, the Swedish Cruising Association, Sea Rescue center and the Sea Sports School are all located together. The Yacht Club's restaurant and a new Langedrag Inn add an elegant social element to the marine atmosphere. The nearby harbor hosts converted offices and warehouses along the wharf, dotted with charming cafes and small restaurants. Boats of all types line the shore but RIBs are plentiful as the ideal boat to navigate the rocky, rough waters. Nimbus Boats are also numerous throughout Scandinavia, as this company has been building boats to serve the area's hearty seafaring lifestyle for more than 35 years. New owners recently incorporated the brands Ryds, Storebro and Paragon Yachts under the Nimbus Group, making it a diverse mid-size boat manufacturer with dealers throughout Europe, Russia and Australia.

Adjoining the Nimbus Boats spacious showroom and service center is the inviting Gothenburg Royal Yacht Club (GKSS). With more than 4,000 international members and 550 moorings, the club hosts visitors from Germany, Britain, Belgium, Holland, Russia and the U.S. Though peak season is June-August, boat dwellers can use the marina's facilities all year thanks to an airflow jetty system that prevents ice-build-up below the docks.

The GKSS is committed to the sport of sailing; it hosts sailing camps and classes for children and adults and boasts many world event competitors—12 of the 15 Swedish Olympian sailors were GKSS members. The club hosts some 1,200 students per year with classes fit for beginners to advanced sailors training for the Olympics, Match

Racing and offshore boats races such as the Volvo. “The essence of sailing is very much alive here,” says representative Martin Sohtell. Guests are welcome to moor motor boats or sailboats here, although there is an eight-year member waiting list. The club’s 100 year-old clock tower is a city landmark and its 20-year old clubhouse warmly welcomes guests and members—there is no letter of recommendation required. The dining facility has a warm fireplace and numerous windows to take in the view; the King Room offers meeting space and houses numerous and priceless trophies dating back to the 1920s and earlier. The GKSS, which will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2010, is part of the worldwide Royal Club network and has sister clubs in New York and Boston.

A short walk away a new building complex houses a group of independent, but related businesses. The 80 year-old Swedish Cruising Club has 40,000 members and is “dedicated to long-distance cruising at sea,” acting as a resource center offering maps, charts and cruise itineraries. It also offers sailing camps aboard technologically updated turn-of-the-century ships where both youth and adults learn seamanship, navigation, environmental issues and cultural history under the tutelage of a Master, mates, boatswain and instructors. Each participant takes turns working at the helm, in the galley and in the engine room. The club also organizes charters, social gatherings and rallies. Though not onsite, a Swedish Racing Club brings a similar concept to powerboating. In the past four years, more than 1,200 children have participated in classes teaching the sport’s safety and techniques. Upstairs from the Cruising Club, the 40-year old Sea Sport School (Sjösportsskolan), an affiliate of the International Yacht Training School, headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., caters to professional captains. Private charters are available, including a Viking sailing tour to nearby Marstrand. With the complex nature of the coastline, such training and private touring seems a must for these rocky and often treacherous waters.

Off to Sea

The Powerboat P1 racers were to learn this as well; the balcony of the Sea Sport School doubled as race control for the August weekend of races and offered a perfect view of the challenging racecourse: four nautical miles looping with chicanes around large menacing rocks. Navigating at high speeds around the small rocky island was a test for drivers and navigators and ensured two days of exciting racing action for this penultimate race of the Powerboat P1 series.

I felt the tough personality of the Southwest coastal waters while traveling to Marstrand on a windy, cloudy day, with Skipper Will Wright of Mare Nostrum, a company that specializes in deliveries, charters and various ocean transports. Wright expertly navigated through the open waters from Gothenburg to the tiny island of Astol, a fishing village known for its family-owned smoked fish and seafood restaurant. There, the sun emerged as we ate smoked and steamed shrimps with fresh bread, washed down with cold Swedish ale. “Give me a summer’s day in Scandinavia and there is nothing better in all the world,” said Wright who has traveled a great deal of it.

We then worked our way through rocky channels, some laden with seals who excitedly jumped into the water to take a closer look at the passersby. The seals may be a menace to the fishermen but seemed playful and offered surprise entertainment. We arrived through a narrow approach at a small rocky dock on the even smaller island of Hamneskar, some six miles from Marstrand, home to the 1781 lighthouse “Pater Noster”, which allegedly got its name from the fervent prayers of sailors who navigated the treacherous area.

Racers discovered a challenging course during the 2009 Powerboat P1 race



NAVIGATING AT HIGH SPEEDS AROUND THE SMALL ROCKY ISLAND WAS A TEST FOR DRIVERS AND NAVIGATORS



The small island of Hamneskar, near Marstrand, is home to the 1781 lighthouse “Pater Noster”

King Oscar II created the resort island of Marstrand; gingerbread houses face a quaint harbor

Several wooden structures on the island built for the lighthouse keeper and attendants have become part of a trendy private resort that attracts small groups seeking isolation and contact with the sea. In sparsely furnished rooms, resort guests enjoy an outdoor hot tub, the sight of the towering lighthouse and scrumptious seafood meals, including the specialty of the house, cold-water oysters and lobster served with champagne. Views of the constantly churning seas among scattered rocks rewarded a 140-step climb to the top of the recently renovated lighthouse. Ancient Vikings using only the stars as their guides must have lost countless ships, lives and cargo navigating these treacherous seas.

From there, we approached Marstrand. King Oscar II built the resort island whose quaint harbor is full of motor and sail boats of all ages and types. The lovely 1886 Social House Resort and the Carlsten Fort, overlooking the gingerbread houses and harbor-front restaurants and shops, are the first obvious landmarks. With no cars allowed, the island offers a step back in time and a literal breath of fresh air—a Scandinavian signature. Preferred means of transportation include walking, biking, motorcycling and a ferry between Marstrand and Koon. Local businesses and residents also fashion creative carts hooked up to two-wheel vehicles, adding to the personality of the town peppered with beautiful hotels and homes. Beaches, parks, rock cliffs and a forest add to the charm of this island perfectly suited for leisurely days. When Match Racing or an event like the Volvo Ocean Race come to town, however, the port bulges with hundreds of thousands of visitors, turning the quiet island into a self-contained party. But even in the bustling city of Gothenburg or the relaxing islands between it and Marstrand, there is a calm about this area, perhaps created by the summer breeze, gliding clouds and the genuinely pleasant demeanor of its people. The cleanliness, beauty and artistic architecture contrasted against the stark, dark rocks makes it feel all the warmer—at least in August—as a city embraced by the sea.



What to do in Gothenburg

Shopping, dining and entertainment are available throughout the city, especially on the main avenue, Kungsporsavnya. At the end are Lille Bommen, the public marina, the Opera House, an open air park and the Barken Viking sailing ship. Now a bar with live music on deck, it is an ideal spot to observe the city life, which flourishes until sunset—after 9:30 pm in summertime. Haga, the “old city,” originally built as wooden housing for the poor, is enjoying a new life as a high-end, quaint two-story residential and commercial building on cobblestone streets with classic eateries and shops. Old public baths have also been transformed into stylish spas like Hagabadet or the Kallbadhuset. Parks and gardens are plentiful and busy on a sunny summer day. Sun bathers and picnickers abound along canals, sea-side rocks and the central ornamental garden, which was built in 1842. A rose garden features 2,500 varieties and the Palm House, a huge greenhouse, was modeled after the Crystal Palace in London. “The Fish Church” a large fish market with a restaurant that was built in 1873 to resemble a church is a popular attraction. Adjacent is the Salsa Boat, another entertainment vessel that draws people to the water. A large fish auction also takes place on weekday mornings, attracting locals and visitors alike. Since fishing is central to life here, fresh seafood and shellfish are plentiful and delicious. Shrimp Sandwiches are trademarks for many restaurants scattered through the city but there are five, Michelin Star restaurants in this city of more than 500,000 people. Everything is close to the central city and available by tram. The sea is a big part of people’s lives as they enjoy the brief summer on the water. Everyone either owns a boat or has a friend who owns one. Thousands watched the racers skirt the archipelago at high speeds over race weekend. Though the pronunciation of the words may be tricky, most of Gothenburg’s signage is in Swedish but fairly understandable. Most people speak excellent English making the travel easy. ●

RESOURCES

GKSS Royal Yacht Club - Göteborgs Kungliga Segel

Sällskap - GKSS.se

Nimbus Boats - nimbus.se

Swedish Cruising Club

Svenska Kryssarklubben sxk.se

Sea Sports School

Sjöspatskolan - sjosportskolan.se

Swedish Racing Organization

Svenska Racerbåtförbundet - SVERA.org

Sea Rescue Organization

Sjöräddningssällskapet - sssr.se

Astol Smokery & Seafood Restaurant

Åstols Rökeri - astolsrokeri.se

Pater Noster Lighthouse

kurspaternoster.se or marstrandevent.se

Marstrand

marstrand.se 011 46 303 61053 guest harbor

Private Marine Transport

Mare Norström William@wright.se

Scandinavia is in vogue but few yachts stop in Gothenburg, as did *Samar* months ago

