

INSIDE VIEW:

THREE SHIPS

**A conversation with Captain Roger Gustavsen,
Master of Norwegian Gem.**

by

Richard H. Wagner

Captain Roger Gustavsen comes from a small town just south of Oslo, Norway. His father was a sailor and the young Gustavsen's ambition was to follow his father to sea. However, when it came time to go to college, "it was not a very good time for sailors" so Gustavsen studied marketing and accounting instead. Not long after he graduated, conditions began to change and so "I decided to go to maritime college also."

Since 1997, Captain Gustavsen has worked for Norwegian Cruise Line. Founded in the 1960s, NCL has been responsible for introducing many innovations to modern cruising. Accordingly, I asked Captain Gustavsen about three of the ships that he has served on during his career at NCL..

SS Norway

One of the innovations NCL introduced to the industry was large ship cruising. It did this in 1979, when NCL purchased the giant ocean liner SS France. Built in 1962, this ship was one of the

last great ocean liners. As the sun set on the heyday of transatlantic crossings, the France had been retired in 1974. After an extensive refurbishment, which cost over \$100 million, NCL put her into service doing cruises from Miami as the SS Norway. The ship was far larger than any of her cruise ship competitors and her success proved the viability of large ship cruising thus opening the door for today's mega-cruise ships.

Gustavsen did four contracts on the Norway as Chief Officer. "For me to work on a ship that was built two years before I was born was amazing. [She was a] totally different style, totally different design [from today's cruise ships.]".

"That ship was made for Atlantic crossings and she had a completely different hull shape compared to [modern cruise ships]. When we had a little bit of bad weather, the way she moved through the ocean was fantastic "

"She had limitations. [Because of her 11 meter draft], she could not get into [most Caribbean ports]. We were always at anchor."

Her steam turbine power plant required that actions be planned out well in advance. "When we got to the pilot station in Miami, we would call down to the engineer and tell him one and a half hours in advance to start to reduce the r.p.m.s so we could start operating the engines from the bridge [for docking]."

Built in another era, the Norway did not have all of the amenities of a modern cruise ship. "Of course, that ship did not have Freestyle Cruising. We had two dining rooms and the Bistro in addition to the outdoor restaurant. But it was very nice dining in the old style [with] a big staircase coming down"

Living conditions for the crew were also much different. Only ten percent of the crew cabins had toilets and showers en suite. These were allocated to the female crew members. The men had to make do with common toilets and showers in the corridors. "Still, the crew was so happy. They loved that ship. They did not want to leave it, they really enjoyed it. They live much better on the newer ships but they really loved the Norway and would have stayed there forever."



Captain Roger Gustavsen

Norwegian Sky

Just prior to his current command, Captain Gustavsen was master of the Norwegian Sky, which does short cruises from Miami to the Bahamas. "If you compare it to other ships that do three and four day cruises [to the Bahamas], Sky is absolutely the best."

Indeed, from a seaman's perspective, Captain Gustavsen has nothing but praise for the Sky. "Technically, the Sky is fantastic. She has six engines. She has two stern thrusters and three bow thrusters. She is very powerful. She is a very nice ship to handle."

The Sky is the sister ship to Norwegian Sun but the two ships are not identical. The difference is most apparent when one looks at the balconies. The Sky "was originally [going to be] a Costa ship, the Costa Olympia. But the shipyard [where she was being built] went bankrupt and Costa decided that they did not want to take the ship. NCL bought that ship and an option to build another one the same. When NCL bought the Sky, the hull was more or less finished [and] they didn't have

the opportunity to do so many changes."

One thing NCL saw as vital, however, was that the ship have balconies. Her original Costa design did not call for balconies. But during the years since the ship's keel had been laid, "the balcony was more and more a must have on cruise ships so it was absolutely the right thing to do - - the balconies were added."

In contrast, the Sun was built for NCL from the start. "That is why on the Sun, the balconies look different with the sliding doors. The Sky has a door and a window. It has to do with the construction."

Norwegian Gem

Captain Gustavsen is also pleased with his current command. "We have a rather new fleet at NCL. The Gem is one of the newest, it is the second newest."

Each winter since she came into service in



2007, Gem has been cruising from New York to the Bahamas and the Caribbean. "It is a good chance for people to get away from the cold weather a little bit. You can be in a place where it is minus 4 or 5 degrees [centigrade - - about 32 degrees Fahrenheit] and we can bring you to plus 22 [71 degrees Fahrenheit] in a day."

"It is cold in the beginning [of the cruise]. It can be windy. We go as fast as we can away from it. We will as soon as possible be in the warmer weather. We can do 26, maybe 27 knots. We do not need that to get to Port Canaveral on time but we use it for the first night just to get south."

What if the ship should encounter a winter storm while heading south? "These ships are strong today and they are big. They can handle the weather. It is never close to unsafe. You can have bad weather in other parts of the world too - - hurricane season in the Caribbean. You have to deal with it."

"To me, the bigger challenge is the current in the Hudson River and getting the ship into [the berth]." The piers at the Passenger Ship Terminal in New York are perpendicular to the Manhattan shoreline. Therefore, a ship coming up the river and wishing to dock at the Passenger Ship Terminal must make a 90 degree turn.

When it does the strong current of the river pushes against the side of the ship. As the ship enters the berth, its bow is suddenly sheltered from the current by the piers upriver. However, the aft section of the ship is still subject to the river's current. This has caused more than one ship's side to bump a pier.

The Gem, however, has an azipod propulsion

system. The ship's propellers are mounted on two pods suspended below the hull. They can be turned independently in any direction. "It is very nice to have a powerful stern when you put the bow in and you have the stern out in the current."

The propellers are turned by electric motors inside the pods. The electricity is generated inside the hull by five diesel engines "with approximately 20,000 horsepower each. There is always one in spare. We never use all five. [On a cruise, we run] four engines, three engines and even two between the islands."

Leaving Gem's technological prowess aside, why should people select the Gem over other cruise ships sailing from New York? "I would say that they should try NCL because of Freestyle Cruising. What we can offer with the specialty restaurants is a unique thing. I have been in this company since before Freestyle was implemented and today, I would say that anything else does not make sense. That you should tell people on vacation where to eat, when to eat and to eat together does not seem like 2011."

One of the other cruise ships sailing out of New York is Gem's sister ship Norwegian Jewel. "Which you choose does not really matter, they are more or less the same."

Style of command

Captain Gustavsen's experiences on these ships and others in the NCL fleet have helped to shape his style of command. Consistent with the inno-

vative philosophy of the company he works for, Captain Gustavsen does not believe in the traditional, rigid, authoritarian style of command.

"I can't see how that is going to work today with an organization of 1,080 crew. [You cannot] sit there at the top and think you are going to run the show by yourself. We are a team. One man cannot do anything."

"My style is very casual too. If a utility attendant would like to talk to me the door is open."

"For a senior manager on a ship, your main task is to keep the crew happy. If we do not take care of the crew, they will not take care of the guests. We keep the crew happy and they will make sure the guests are happy."

"We have a lot of things that we try to do for the crew outside working hours. When we meet them we talk and try and keep a casual tone between us. You will always get respect because of your position but that kind of respect is completely worthless. You need to get respect from the way you are and the way you do your job."