Out of service – never!

by Marek Błuś

Although steam overtook wind in propelling ships in the 19th century, some 100 years ago the 'forest of masts' still towered over many ports, especially small Nordic harbours where schooners used to load wood. In the 1920s and 30s, this 'sailing woodland' became thinner and thinner, to eventually disappear in the 1950s. Well, almost! There are 33 tall ship masts that still proudly rise above Baltic quays, plus another 23 pieces if we add training vessels carrying three masts or more and if at least one of them is rigged with yards.



Gorch Fock I, photo: Wikimedia Commons

These 33 masts equal ten sailing vessels moored or permanently docked in Baltic ports, working as either museums (eight of 'em) or hotels. To be surgically precise, we ought to call them 'hulks' (though they are incredible, they have nothing to do with the Marvel universe), not ships. That's because they are disabled; yet, given their perfect condition, noble service, and bright future – brighter than that awaiting many modern freighters, may we add! – let us be poetic when discussing them.

The Port of Turku is most probably the most mast-blessed, so to say. Here we have the bark *Sigyn* (378 grt; built in 1887) and the full-rigged *Suomen Joutsen* (2,393 grt; 1902), three masts apiece. The former is also the oldest civilian vessel as well as the only such constructed from wood. However, the oldest one and the only fighting vessel in the honourable fleet of Baltic retirees is the Danish sail and steam (!) frigate *Jylland* armed with 44 guns (that is, at the beginning of her service). The vessel was constructed in 1860 – also from wood, she is therefore permanently dry-docked in Ebeltoft (we exclude the Swedish *Vasa* because of many reasons, i.a., her rigging isn't complete).

Coming back to sails without steam and guns, the nine remaining vessels can be divided into three explicit and even groups on the basis of their original purpose: windjammers (all four-masted), ordinary cargo 'draught horses,' and training ships. By definition, windjammers are the largest; they were built along the concept of a modern bulk carrier (but the economies of scale were in their instance limited by the scale of rigging). The Baltic trio of four-masted barques are moored as follows (in order of tonnage): *Passat* (3,091 grt; 1911) in Travemünde; *Viking* (2,959 grt; 1907) in Gothenburg; and *Pommern* (2,376 grt; 1903) in Mariehamn. Till the very end of their sea service, they sailed without auxiliary engines and although changed owners and flags, they didn't abandon the merchant duty.



Jylland, photo: Sebastian Nils/Wikimedia Commons



Viking, photo: Wikimedia Commons



Af Chapman, photo: Holger Ellgaard/Wikimedia Commons


Dar Pomorza, photo: Wikimedia Commons


Jarramas, photo: Henrik Sendelbach/Wikimedia Commons


Passat, photo: Rosa-Maria Rinkl/Wikimedia Commons

Two 'draught horses' were already mentioned, *Sigyn* and *Suomen Joutsen*. The latter may seem to be a bit bigger than *Pommern*, but in fact, that's not true (*Suomen Joutsen* was measured according to stricter regulations). In order of dimensions, she is followed by the full-rigged *Af Chapman* (1,425 grt; 1888), docked as a youth hostel in Stockholm. Contrary to windjammers, *Suomen Joutsen* and *Af Chapman* hoisted naval flags in the 1920s and served as training and depot ships. Though *Sigyn* is the smallest, she, like her larger cousins, cargo-crossed oceans, calling to ports outside northern Europe, including the eastern shores of America and Bangkok.


Pommern, photo: Wikimedia Commons


Sigyn, photo: Wikimedia Commons


Suomen Joutsen, photo: Wikimedia Commons

Finally, the three full-riggers never smelt the dust of bulk (with grains, guano, and coal topping the 20th-century commodity list). But as pure training ships, they attracted special attention of the press, landlubbers, and VIPs. *Dar Pomorza* (1,561 grt; 1909) is preserved in Gdynia; *Gorch Fock I* (1,392 grt; 1933) in Stralsund, and *Jarramas* (350 tonnes displacement; 1900) in Karlskrona. The last of these is also the world's smallest three-masted full-rigger – and the only among Baltic 'mast' heritage that never hoisted an ensign other than naval. For us, she also keeps an additional "record," namely her service was the most boring… She sailed within the waters of northern Europe only and was spared any serious sea adventure. It appears that a long service doesn't have to be automatically an interesting one. On the flip side, nothing bad has ever happened to *Jarramas* either, which means we can admire her during a maritime field trip to southern Sweden.■