



Floating hotel from Pinsk Shipyard proves popular with tourists, sailing the Pripjat

Building modern steamships

Central part of Polesie and, in particular, the town of Pinsk known for building cruise ships

By Yuri Chernyakevich

Obviously, it's not easy to build steamships in countries seas. However, Belarus is blessed with many lakes and rivers and is known for its ship-building. To see for yourself, just visit Pinsk in the Brest Region and drop by the local shipyard.

The enterprise's history is certainly unique, having been founded in 1885 by Countess Julia O'Brien-de-Lacy. This amazing woman possessed a brain for business, building 13 wheeled-steamships between 1892 and 1896: a considerable achievement for the time.

The enterprise continued to prosper during the days of the Soviet Union, when river transportation was in demand. The rivers Dvina, Pripjat, Dnieper — among other Belarusian rivers — carried sand and crushed stone, using ore ships, as well as high-speed hovercraft and hydrofoil vessels. Meanwhile, cruise ships were a regular sight, as I remember from my own childhood. Aged 12, my parents took me on the high-speed 'Raketa' from Pinsk to Kiev, into the capital of Ukraine. It was a common trip in Soviet days but those times are now sunk in oblivion. Barges carrying crushed stones and passenger steamships are a rare sight on our rivers, with most of the old vessels now scrapped. Just one hydrofoil operates — along the Pina River, in the centre of Pinsk.

The Soviet Union's disintegration brought hard times to river transport workers and ship manufacturers. However, the desire to build river vessels never disappeared, notes Mr. Victor Brutsky, Director of Pinsk Shipyard. He has headed the enterprise for thirty years and Bel-



Steamship 'Mogilev'



Finishing touches to the interior of the 'Mogilev'

arus is now the only country where river ships are produced. Mr. Brutsky sought out contracts, proving that the residents of Pinsk can still produce wonderful vessels.

The plant is once again fulfilling its true vocation, building ships. Almost 15 years after the Soviet Union's disintegration, in 2005, it launched the pusher-tug 'Pinsk'. One year later, the passenger steamship 'Neman' followed, with the 'Polonez', the 'Severnaya Stolitsa', the 'Vitebsk' and the 'Mogilev' also launching over time.

The residents of Pinsk are especially proud of the 'Mogilev', which Mr. Brutsky tells us stands out from

its predecessors. It has already drawn attention from investors, being comfortable, with a splendid salon and powerful (yet almost

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silent) engine. It can also navigate the shallowest of river channels. Interestingly, it sailed to its final destination, in Mogilev, completely independently, and has twice navigated beyond



Captain Gennady Smirnov

the borders of Belarus, running over 1,000km down the Pripjat River, the Kiev water storage basin and the Dnieper River.

The enterprise currently has several ships in for repair and restoration, because the whole transport and passenger-carrying fleet of the country becomes out of date, with

trip to different towns of Polesie are that particular 'exclusive variants' which many travellers search for in distant countries. It appears that it is not necessary to search: a unique recreation is quite near.

Forty years ago, Vladimir Korotkevich, a well-known Belarusian writer, dreamt of boating along the Pripjat, from Brest to Kiev. Who wouldn't enjoy a leisurely cruise past mellow river-banks and bird-filled marshes, listening to the sounds of nature? Such holidays are very popular abroad and Polesie's waterland environment is surely perfectly suited for such relaxation, being rich in flora and fauna.

No doubt, boating along the Pripjat River will one day draw tourists from near and far. Already, tour agencies in the Turov District are marketing cruises in a floating hotel. The Pinsk enterprise is hoping to build a large-sized cruise liner with sleeping compartments, sports facilities and relaxation lounges, for excursion transportations along the Brest-Kiev route.

"Construction will be carried out within the state programme for socio-economic development and diverse use of natural resources in Polesie," notes Mr. Brutsky. "It's too early to speak about concrete terms, as the project is still under development."

If the ambitious plan comes true, then Polesie workers will become well-known shipbuilders in a landlocked country. Though already famous, with ships ploughing rivers across Belarus, boating and shipbuilding in Belarus will surely be revived, going from strength to strength. Anything can be achieved with fair seas and a following wind...

separate parts of vessels corroding and hulls often requiring dire attention. Pinsk shipbuilders 'patch them up' and lovingly name them 'river swallows'. Mr. Brutsky emphasises that the enterprise is now always busy but that building new ships is the ultimate aim, rather than only repairing old ones. "Our Belarusian ship-building enterprises were considered the best in the USSR," he stresses.

Besides making river steamships, the enterprise also boasts an experience of constructing floating hotels.

It could become a true 'zest' for tourists, because recreation in a small house sailing across rivers and a