
Welcome to Trollywood: Cinema, Saabs and the Creation of Modern Sweden in the City of Trollhättan



*How a Swedish city's storied background in
manufacturing and beyond led it to become a major
Nordic film center—and why it's known
internationally throughout the film world today*

By Rowdy Geirsson



Stellan Skarsgård's bronze star from Trollhättan's Walk of Fame along Storgatan.



The Saab Car Museum in Trollhättan.



A view of Trollhättan Falls, with Olidan Power Station above.



A SMALL CITY OF NEARLY 60,000 INHABITANTS, LOCATED 75 kilometers northwest of Gothenburg, the Swedish city of Trollhättan may not seem its likeliest to be a bustling hub of filmmaking. Long-associated with industrial activity and previously best-known as the home of Saab, Trollhättan, like so many other former centers of heavy manufacturing in the Western world, has since seen those days largely pass it by. But thanks to a unique set of factors that coincided in the late 1980s and early 1990s—and directly linked to the success of the rising film production company Film i Väst (Film in West)—Trollhättan is now known throughout the cinema world as headquarters of acclaimed productions ranging from the Academy Award-winning Swedish film *A Man Called Ove* to Lars von Trier’s English-language films *Melancholia* and *Dogville*, where on any given day one might be as likely to spot Stellan Skarsgård, Kirsten Dunst or Nicole Kidman as any local. Trollhättan has become Trollywood.

But Film i Väst is not Trollhättan’s first enterprise to distribute its products far beyond Sweden’s borders; in that sense, the company follows a long line of others who have seized other opportunities for innovation. Dating back as early as the 15th century, Trollhättan has been a ripe center for activity, in part owing to its geologic and geographic location just south of Lake Vänern along the Göta Älv river. And while visitors today may flock to capture their photos on Trollywood’s own Walk of Fame, the rich chapters of history that precede Trollhättan’s film stardom have helped pave the way for its inventiveness today.



Göta Älv and the Fall
& Slussområde with Olidan in
the center, viewed from the
vantage point of Kopparklinten.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

ONE OF THE MOST VISUALLY STUNNING LANDMARKS OF Trollhättan is its Trollhättan Falls, located at the start of Malgö Bridge, where the Göta Älv drops 32 meters. In days of yore, the falls inspired the city's name—Trollhättan's earliest inhabitants believed that trolls lived within them and that the rocks and islands protruding from the water were their hats or hoods. But they were also of great significance to Sweden's early industrial development, as their high potential for water-power attracted activity beginning in the 15th century with the first appearance of sawmills.

The founding of the city of Gothenburg in 1621 created additional opportunities for commerce between Trollhättan and the coast. As better transportation routes became necessary, early plans for a canal system to bypass the falls drew consideration, eventually culminating in a series of locks and canals in 1800 that have since expanded several times and, in conjunction with the longer Göta Canal, form part of the extensive canal system that cuts through Sweden from coast to coast.

As factories established themselves in the city during the 1800s and 1900s, Trollhättan became the home of NOHAB (Nydqvist och Holm AB), a major manufacturer of locomotives that began operating in 1847. But perhaps the most significant and lasting of all of Trollhättan's industrial achievements involved the construction of Olidan, the first large-scale



Built with 13 generators, Olidan now has nine in operation producing electricity via hydropower.

PHOTO: PER PETERSSON/IMAGEBANK SWEDEN

hydroelectric power plant built in Sweden, which began operation in 1910 and is still in use today. In addition to the electricity it continues to generate, the most enduring aspect of Olidan's legacy is its role in helping establish the modern state of Sweden.

This was because the construction of Olidan involved the consolidation of the necessary land and water rights by the Swedish state (primarily the purchase of property associated with the existing locks and canals), which then created its own company to handle the financing and operation of the hydroelectric power plant. This event marked the first instance that the Swedish state assumed the role of entrepreneur and business owner. Still wholly owned by the Swedish state, the company is now known as Vattenfall and operates hydroelectric, nuclear, biomass, coal and gas power plants as well as solar and wind farms throughout Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The WWII era also marked a significant turning point in Trollhättan's industrial development. In 1937 Svenska Aeroplan AB—Saab, for short—was founded in the city to manufacture bomber planes for the Swedish Air Force as international tension escalated. As the war ended, Saab turned its attention towards car manufacturing, initially in the city of Linköping. Beginning in 1949, the company began producing the Saab 92 model at its Trollhättan factory and gradually built a reputation as a manufacturer of reliable vehicles.

Its big break on the international scene came in 1959, when a Saab 93 was one of only 13 vehicles to complete the 24 Hours of Le Mans sports



A Saab 93 raced by Sture Nottorp and Gunnar Bengtsson marked Saab's first appearance in the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1959.

car race, the world's oldest vehicular endurance-based racing event. As the company's international profile increased, so too did its sales. Between 1978 and 1998 more than one million models of the Saab 900, generally considered to be the company's most iconic car, were sold. The Trollhättan factory remained its primary automobile production facility throughout the 20th century, including through General Motors' gradual acquisition of Saab's automobile division, until its eventual bankruptcy in the wake of the Great Recession.

INDUSTRIAL DECLINE AND THE EMERGENCE OF TROLLYWOOD

BEGINNING IN THE MID-1980S, TROLLHÄTTAN'S MANUFACTURING industries faced a series of challenges, beginning with the permanent closure of NOHAB in 1986. Not long after, Sweden experienced a sharp economic crisis in the early 1990s, leading to its joining the EU in 1994. But rather than spiraling downward in a state of irrevocable economic stagnation, Trollhättan reversed the decline by using its circumstances to reinvent itself in a unique way.

That reinvention is directly linked to Film i Väst, which was founded in 1992 by Älvsborg county's Landsting: a public entity akin to a county government responsible for funding and decision-making related to development, transportation, healthcare and cultural events within its territory, which has since been replaced by Sweden's Region framework. Film i Väst's original

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name, Västernfilm (Western Film), referenced the organization's location in western Sweden originally in the municipality of Alingsås. The original purpose of Västernfilm was to establish a publicly funded pool of money for local filmmaking mainly intended for amateur filmmakers, as well as to provide filmmaking educational opportunities and film screenings for the local population.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR VÄSTERNFILM CHANGED ITS NAME to Film i Väst and over the next several years gradually grew, acquiring better technology, postproduction facilities and some increased financing while maintaining its focus on working with young, aspiring filmmakers. Its future impact for Trollhättan occurred in 1996, when it acquired funds from the EU as part of the EU's Structural Fund Objective 2 initiative. This initiative focused on declining industrial areas of its member states, one of which was the Fyrstad region of Sweden, comprising the "four towns" of Lysekil, Uddevalla, Trollhättan and Vänersborg. Consequently, Film i Väst would be required to relocate from Alingsås, which did not qualify, to one of those four municipalities.

This would prove serendipitous for Trollhättan, whose leaders were actively looking for new ways to reinvigorate the city. The former NOHAB location's large facilities, now closed, were viewed as ideal for Film i Väst's productions. A decision was made shortly thereafter, and Film i Väst was essentially able to hit the ground running shortly after it arrived.

And hit the ground running it did. Now wholly owned by Västra Götalandsregionen (the replacement for Älvsborg Landsting), in 1997 it produced its first two full-length feature films, *Hela Härligheten* (renamed as *Love Fools* in English) and *Sjön* (*The Lake*), and by 2006 it co-produced *Arn: Tempelriddaren* (*Arn: The Knight Templar*). Based on the novels of Jan Guillou, *Arn: Tempelriddaren* is the most expensive Swedish film ever made, and it received wide international distribution. Other hits followed thereafter and cemented Trollywood's reputation, with popular and critically-acclaimed television series and films including *A Man Called Ove*, *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out a Window and Disappeared*, the Swedish adaptation of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* trilogy and the first season of *The Bridge*.

As a result, the old area of NOHAB's facilities, also known as the Innovatum district, have since seen a revival. In addition to Film i Väst's Studio Fares (the second largest in the Nordic nations), the Innovatum district is home to predominantly 19th-century brick buildings that currently house the Saab Car Museum, Konsthallen (the local art museum) and



The main entrance
to Film i Väst's loca-
tion in Trollhättan.



Artist Kent
Karlsson's large
rabbit stands watch
outside Konsthallen
Trollhättan.



Film i Väst's build-
ing in Trollhättan.



Innovatum Science Center (an educational science museum for families and children). As *Film i Väst* has now co-produced more than 600 films since its inception in 1992, it has been the filming site of many other successful Swedish television and film productions—drawing many stars of the screen to Trollywood, including Swedish stars such as Mikael Nyqvist, Helena Bergström and Lena Endre, to name just a few. As a result, Trollhättan now features its own Walk of Fame along Storgatan (one of the main pedestrian thoroughfares in the center of town), replete with bronze stars cast into the pavement, emblazoned with the names of the actors and actresses who have visited the city.

AMONG THESE NEW AND STAR-STUDDED LANDMARKS, THE legacy of Trollhättan's earlier industrial achievements lives on. The Olidan hydroelectric dam remains an imposing and magnificent granite structure, drawing tourists particularly during the month of July, when its sluice gates are opened and the water of the Göta Älv comes storming down the rocky ravine. The surrounding area—the Trollhättan Fall & Slussområde, as it's called in Swedish, which is located immediately across the Trollhätte Canal from the Innovatum district—features walking trails and pedestrian bridges that crisscross the jagged terrain, while the main course of the Göta Älv and its man-made tributaries weave through the landscape.

Well-preserved buildings from Trollhättan's industrial past blend with the thick woods to create a tranquil atmosphere of a bygone era. In addition



The Olidan hydroelectric plant viewed from the Fall & Slussområde.

to the visual appeal of the historic buildings and infrastructure, the area also features the attractions of Kanalmuseet (a history museum about the locks and canals), Skulpturrundan (a series of public artworks integrated into the trail system), Kungsgrottan (a massive stone that members of the Swedish royal family have been inscribing their names upon since 1754) and boat rides on an authentic 19th-century vessel through the locks and canals during the summer months.

Meanwhile, other aspects of Trollhättan's industrial history are poised to make an impact elsewhere, just as Film i Väst has brought new ones in. Despite its dissolution as an automobile manufacturer, Saab continues to live on within various Saab Clubs around the world, as well as the current production of electric vehicles. Since it was founded in 2012, National Electric Vehicle Sweden AB, a Chinese-owned company registered in Sweden, has acquired Saab's assets including its name. While operating under a different moniker, it is presently conducting research and development for electric vehicles at Saab's former production facility in Trollhättan, continuing the thread of development from where Saab had been at the time of its legacy with the current NEVS 9-3 EV model, a successor to the Saab 9-3. Meanwhile, the separate Saab Group is still based in Sweden, where it continues to manufacture aircraft, radar systems and other military and defense equipment.

As filmgoers eagerly await the next cinematic masterpieces to be delivered from Trollywood, the city itself thus continues to contribute elsewhere beyond its municipal border and those of Sweden; and in decades to come, new chapters of innovation will be sure to follow.

TROLLHÄTTAN TIMELINE

1400s	Sawmills begin appearing along the river at Trollhättan (then known as Stora Edet).
1500s	Logging has become a thriving business; timber from Värmland is floated downstream through Trollhättan to Kongahälla and Lödöse for shipmaking, a demand that only increases with the founding of Gothenburg in 1621.
1700s	Smaller sawmills begin consolidation into larger ones.
1800	A first canal is built to bypass the falls.
1844	Following the 1832 completion of the Göta Canal between Vänern and the Baltic, the canal system at Trollhättan is expanded to enable larger boats to bypass the falls.
1847	NOHAB (Nydqvist och Holm AB) is founded in Trollhättan for the purpose of manufacturing water turbines.
1847	Trollhättan becomes its own parish (previously part of Gärdhem's parish).
1865	NOHAB produces its first locomotive, which becomes the company's specialty.
1904	The existing canal system is purchased by the Swedish state, which had already previously owned the water rights.
1907	The Olidan hydroelectric power station is complete.
1916	An additional expansion of the canal system is completed; this system is the one still in use today; Trollhättan officially becomes a city.
1930	NOHAB Flygmotorfabriker is founded as a new company in a joint effort by the Swedish state and NOHAB for the purpose of manufacturing airplane motors.
1936	Swedish arms manufacturer Bofors acquires NOHAB.
1937	Saab is founded to produce planes; it acquires Bofors' shares in NOHAB Flygmotorfabriker.
1941	Volvo acquires NOHAB Flygmotorfabriker; its name changes over subsequent years to Svenska Flygmotor, then Volvo Flygmotor, then finally Volvo Aerospace Corporation.
1942	Hojumstationen hydroelectric power station is completed to complement the power already generated by Olidan.
1949	Saab begins making cars in Trollhättan.
1975	Saab Car Museum opens in a very small, hard-to-find location in Trollhättan.
1986	Bofors permanently shuts down the NOHAB operations.
1987	Saab Car Museum relocates to the NOHAB area.
1997	Film i Väst establishes operations in the NOHAB area; this same year Innovatum is also founded in the NOHAB area, which includes the business park and science museum under its umbrella.
2004	Film i Väst establishes Studio Fares.
2011	Saab Automobile goes bankrupt.
2012	NEVS acquires Saab Automobile assets; it maintains research and development in Trollhättan.
2012	Volvo Aero Corporation is bought by British GKN Aerospace; manufacturing still exists in Trollhättan under the name GKN Aerospace, Engine Systems Sweden.



Storgatan in Trollhättan, home to the city's own Walk of Fame.



Sign along Trollhättan's Walk of Fame featuring Nicole Kidman for her work in *Dogville*.

PHOTO: ROWDY GEIRSSON

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