Råbelöv

The district around the Råbelöv estate was already populated in the Bronze Age, as witnessed by several large burial mounds and extensive archaeological finds. The estate’s medieval history is unknown, but it is certain that a manor farm existed on the present estate in the early 1500s. The owner is said to have been the privy councillor, Claus Steensen Bille, at that time one of the province’s richest men and a member of one of Denmark’s most well-known noble families. He took part in several conflicts, both between the Swedes and the Danes and in Denmark’s internal struggles. For instance, he joined Frederick I and the forces that took on his opponent Christian II in their fight for the throne. As thanks for this service, he was also given Wanås, which was confiscated from the owner, Niels Brahe, as he backed the wrong king in the internal conflict. Bille died in 1558, after which ownership passed to his son, Steen Bille.

When the Kalmar War broke out in 1611, the next generation of the Bille family owned Råbelöv. He had several assignments from the Danish king, including the command of the Danish-Scanian forces that successfully fought the Swedish king Gustav II Adolf’s troops in the final stage of their plundering campaign in north-east Scania. An event, which almost cost Gustav II Adolf his life, took place when Anders Bille’s forces carried out a successful attack against the Swedes on 11 February 1612 in Vittsjö. Around 1,200 Swedes were killed and the king was rescued from the icy waters of the lake, Vittsjön, after he had been forced out onto the thin ice.

Five years later, Råbelöv was sold to Christopher Knudsen Ulfeldt, who in 1637 built a new manor farm on the estate. Parts of the structure still exist as a long, two-storey brick building bearing Christopher Ulfeldt’s and his wife Margarethe Urup’s name plaques. The new manor farm consisted of an almost closed square, with the manor house separated from the barn by a wall across the castle courtyard.

Råbelöv remained in the Ulfeldt family until 1684, when through marriage Carl Gustav Skytte took over. One of the Ulfeldt family owners, Ebbe Ulfeldt, had an adventurous life, which is described in the Ovesholm section. After owners from the Skytte family sold Råbelöv in 1732 to Ludvig Gustav von Böhmen, the estate was inherited within the families von Böhmen, Ridderschantz and von Rosen until 1863, when the last of the von Böhmen family passed ownership of the entailed estate established in 1763 to the Kennedy family, which had married in. The family still owns Råbelöv through the estate owner, Douglas Kennedy.

The estate contains an area of natural beauty, Balsberget, and its own medieval church.

The Råbelöv Grand Prix years

On 14 September 1952, a crowd of 35,000 expectant people gathered on the Råbelöv estate. They had come to see the premiere of what was the biggest sporting event to date in north-east Scania, a TT (Tourist Trophy) for motorcycles on the newly-built Råbelöv track. Several of the time’s leading riders were there, including the world champion, Siegfried Wünsche, from Germany. He rode a three-cylinder DKW 350 cc and won by more than a minute, despite a time penalty for a false start. The heavier 500 cc class was won by the Englishman, Dudly-Ward, but the show was stolen by the local riders ”Varg-Olle” Nygren and Kuno Johansson. The fought a tough duel for the honour of being the best Swede, and in the end it was Varg-Olle.

The event’s main arranger was the motorcycle club, SMK Kristianstad, and the race area was on the Råbelöv estate. The owner, Douglas Kennedy, was positive about the event, but had a condition that the club would set aside a proportion of the proceeds for a fund to build a pensioners’ home in Fjelkestad.

A year later in 1953, another race was arranged at Råbelöv and this time the favourites were the Englishman Armstrong on a 500 cc Gilera and Wünsche on a DKW 350 cc. Both won, but for Armstrong it was only after heroic efforts by the local master mechanic, Evert Nilsson, who despite the Italian mechanics’ doubts, succeeded in repairing his engine, which had broken down in
training. A crowd of 60,000 saw the race on 13 September that year.

1954 was an off-year, as Milan had the audacity to arrange a World Championship event on the same day and therefore deny Råbelöv the world’s elite riders. Even so, the year’s event was a success, as official observers were present to see whether it was possible to arrange a major car race at Råbelöv the next year. It was to be the first event for cars and the offer was accepted with great enthusiasm, even though some within the SMK were worried that public interest would not be sufficient for two big events in the same year.

The popular “motoring prince”, Bertil, took on the role of competition manager. He visited Råbelöv in the spring and soon had contracts with several drivers from the world elite including the successful Mercedes duo, Juan Emanuel Fangio and Stirling Moss. In sporting terms the event was a big success with brilliant driving by Fangio and Moss in their Mercedes 300 SLRs. The Swede, Joakim Bonnier, gained a popular victory in his class after a dramatic contest with the Italian, Leto di Priolo. Three days of racing attracted 80,000 people.

The next year, 1956, was to be the Råbelöv track’s big breakthrough, as the race on 12 August was an event in the Sports Car World Championship. All the big racing car names came to Råbelöv led by Ferrari, Maserati and Mercedes and the crowd was ecstatic as Fangio, Moss and all the other top drivers reached speeds of 270 km/hour.

It was another sporting success seen by 60,000 people. However, this was not enough to cover the considerable costs and the event, which was won by the Frenchman Trintignant, was a financial setback. That year a Grand Prix for motorcycles was also arranged. The main 500 cc class was won by the Englishman, Duke, with his colleague Armstrong in second place.

After a lot of discussion it was decided to arrange another event in the Sports Car World Championship in 1957. The reputation of the event had now reached the international media, so news teams from 10 countries were on the spot in Råbelöv. The race was won by the pair, Stirling Moss and Jean Behra.

This was the last sports car race at the Råbelöv track, but motorcycle races were arranged for a few more years. Both the remaining races, in 1959 and 1961, had Grand Prix status and were part of the World Championship.

On Sunday 17 September 1961 the last roar of the motorcycle engines was heard at the Råbelöv track, and on Saturday 12 May 1962 the remaining items from the track and events went up for auction. The only thing that remains of the Råbelöv Grand Prix years is the pensioners’ home in Fjelkestad.