



## RMS Queen Mary of 1936

by Tim Ryan

**In recent issues we have covered the histories of two of Cunard's greatest liners the Queen Elizabeth of 1940 and Queen Elizabeth 2 of 1969. Last edition we included a report on one of Cunard's other great liners the Queen Mary currently berthed at Long Beach California, in its role as hotel and museum ship. As next month represents the 75th anniversary of the launching of this great ship, it is appropriate to conclude our series of past great Cunard Queens and outline the seagoing career of the Queen Mary, the "stateliest ship" as she became to be universally known.**

The design of the Queen Mary commenced in the late 1920's with the intention of building a second ship, which was to become famous Queen Elizabeth of 1940, so as to realize Cunard's dream of running a two ship weekly Royal Mail and passenger express service between New York and Southampton. The design of the Queen Mary was a development of the Aquitania and Berengaria both built in 1914 and with which ships the Queen Mary would operate across the Atlantic until the outbreak of war in 1939. Upon completion Queen Mary was in direct competition with other modern ships including the French Line's superb Normandie which entered service in 1935 and the German twins Bremen and Europa which were built in 1930. The Queen Mary was fitted with 24 Yarrow type boilers developing 160,000 shaft horse power through its 4 double reduction geared turbines. By way of contrast the Queen Elizabeth was fitted with 12 boilers while the QE2 was originally fitted with three boilers before it was converted to diesel electric drive in 1987.

The contract for the Queen Mary was signed by Cunard on 1 December 1930 with the John Brown shipyard at Clydebank where the Queen Elizabeth and later the QE2 were built. The keel of the new hull number 534 was laid down on 27 December 1930 but twelve months later, with the onset of the great depression, construction was halted for two years and did not recommence again until April 1934. The Queen Mary was launched on 26 September 1934 by HM Queen Mary accompanied by King George V and also in the presence of Princess Elizabeth, now the current monarch who would later have the honour of launching Queen Elizabeth 2, the Queen Mary's eventual replacement on the North Atlantic.

The decor of Queen Mary included over fifty different woods, collected from all over the world and represented an excellent example of the art deco era at sea introduced by the French Line's Ile de France in 1927. The Observation Lounge and Cocktail Bar which overlook the bow became one of the most popular locations on the ship even in its current static role at Long Beach. Being a three class ship the three dining rooms and galleys were located on Restaurant deck with the main Cabin Class dining room being over 143 feet in length and 118 feet in width with a height of 27 feet. The main restaurant is still in use today and is renowned for the giant map of the Atlantic displayed on the forward wall. The map showed the exact position of the Queen Mary during a transatlantic voyage and when Queen Elizabeth entered service after the war, the position of the two ships could be monitored as they crossed the Atlantic.

The Queen Mary departed from Clydebank under its own steam on 15 April 1936 for the short trip downstream to Gourock for final fitting out prior to sailing to Southampton, arriving there on 27 April for drydocking and final inspection, before being handed over to Cunard on 12 May. The vessel sailed from Southampton on its maiden voyage on 27 May 1936 arriving in New York on 1 June 1936 to a spectacular welcome. In August 1938 the Queen Mary won the Blue Riband, the Hales Award for the fastest transatlantic crossing, which she prised away from the Normandie with a westbound average speed of 30.99 knots. On the return eastbound passage she achieved an average speed of 30.69 knots a record she retained until 1952 when the ss United States won the award with an average speed in excess of 35 knots.

With the outbreak of World War 2 in September 1939, Queen Mary was laid up in New York as a safety precaution since the ship had become a prominent target for German U-boats and the Luftwaffe. With the arrival of the newly completed Queen Elizabeth in February 1940, for a few weeks the three greatest liners ever built, the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth and Normandie, were moored together in New York Harbour for the first and only time. The Queen Mary departed on 21 March 1940 via Rio de Janeiro and Capetown bound for Sydney arriving there on 16 April for conversion into a troopship by the Cockatoo Island Dock and Engineering Company with the capacity of



the ship being increased to carry 5,600 troops. The Queen Mary was to play an important role over the next three years carrying Australian troops to Africa for the Desert campaign along with the Queen Elizabeth which arrived in Sydney for the first time on 21 February 1941 for a similar conversion to a troopship.

The first troop convoy from Australia in which Queen Mary participated included the Cunarders Aquitania and Mauretania, Royal Mail Line's Andes and the Canadian Pacific Liners Empress of Britain, Empress of Canada and the Empress of Japan. The Queen Mary departed Sydney on 5 May 1940 and joined the other ships in Bass Strait which had embarked troops in Sydney, Wellington and Melbourne and the convoy, escorted by the heavy cruiser HMAS Canberra, proceeded to the Middle East via Fremantle.

Over the course of the next three years the Queen Mary transported Australian troops to the Middle East returning with prisoners of war and wounded servicemen interspersed with voyages between the USA and Britain. The ship also visited Hobart and Gage Roads off Fremantle and on 18 April 1942 it was reunited with the Queen Elizabeth with the ships meeting off Sydney Heads. The Queen Mary sailed from Sydney for the last time on 22 March 1943 bound for New York via Capetown and Rio de Janeiro.

Between 1942 and 1945 the two Queens conducted the GI Shuttle from New York to Britain carrying up to 16,000 troops at a time. On 2 October 1942 in the North Atlantic the Queen Mary collided with the light cruiser HMS Curacoa which was escorting the giant liner on the final stage of its troop voyage. The Curacoa, was sliced in two and tragically, from the 430 crew members aboard the cruiser, only 101 survived. Although damaged the Queen Mary with over 11,000 troops on board could not stop to assist due to the threat of marauding U-boats in the vicinity. Between April 1941 and March 1946 the Queen Mary had transported 765,429 military personnel and steamed 569,529 nautical miles.

On 29 September 1946, the Queen Mary was released from Government service to be refitted at Southampton. The ship departed from Southampton for its postwar voyage on 1 August 1947, and for the first time the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth were able to commence Cunard's much anticipated weekly service between Southampton and New York as crack transatlantic express liners. Over the next twenty years the Queen Mary would complete 1001 crossings of the Atlantic and later in its career operate a number of cruises from New York and Southampton. The 1950's represented the grand era of transatlantic travel for Cunard and it was common for movie stars, industrialists and royals to travel between Europe and the United States as passengers aboard the Cunard Queens. However the impact of jet travel by the end of the decade greatly decreased the number of passengers crossing the Atlantic by sea.

In 1958 the Queen Mary was fitted with stabilizers and underwent a major refit to make the vessel more suited for cruising and the ship conducted its first cruise from Southampton to Las Palmas in 1963. However in early 1966 the disastrous Seamen's Strike disrupted the British Merchant Marine which eventually spelled the end for the Cunard Queens. The Queen Mary was withdrawn in 1967 and sold to the City of Long Beach, California for use as a museum and hotel ship a role it currently performs.

The Queen Mary sailed on her final departure from New York on 22 September 1967 and on 28 September 1967 arrived in Southampton on her last Eastbound crossing. The ship had carried over 2,114,300 million passengers (in addition to troops carried during her war service) and had steamed 3,790,722 nautical miles over the period since entering service. The Queen Mary, flying a 310 foot paying off pennant, was farewelled by thousands of spectators as it sailed from Southampton for the final time on 31 October 1967 for its delivery voyage to California via Cape Horn. The trip was marketed as the final great cruise and included visits to Lisbon, Las Palmas, Rio de Janeiro, Valparaiso, Callao, Bilbao and Acapulco – a total of 14,500 nautical miles.





Arriving off Long Beach on 9 December 1967, the ship was welcomed by an immense armada of pleasure craft as it berthed for the final time after 31 years of sterling service for Cunard. After a \$US100m refit, where much of the machinery and boilers were removed, the ship was opened to the public in 1971 incorporating many of the former cabins for its hotel accommodation. Most of the superb public rooms were retained including the cabin class dining room and the ship still retains much of the ambience of its Cunard days.

Cunard introduced the new Queen Mary 2 in 2004, which was named in honour of the original ship and as a modern version of the great transatlantic ocean liners it was a worthy successor to the earlier Queens. The two Queen Marys met at Long Beach in 2006 in a nostalgic rendezvous surrounded by an armada of spectator craft hooting horns in unison with the blasting steam whistles of the two great liners.

The Queen Mary 2 visited Australia in February 2006 for the first time and again earlier this year. In February 2011, the new Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mary 2 will rendezvous in Sydney Harbour exactly 70

years after the arrival of the original Queen Elizabeth in 1941. The meeting of the Queens in 2011, will equal if not exceed, the spectacle in 2007 when the QE2 and Queen Mary 2 met in Sydney Harbour and again in 2008 when QE2 on its final voyage to Australia greeted the new cruise liner Queen Victoria on its inaugural visit to Sydney.

## QUEEN MARY VITAL STATISTICS

Gross tonnage	81,237 tons
Length overall	1,019 feet
Breadth	116 feet
Draught	39 feet
Service speed	28 knots
Main Engines	Steam Turbines
Stabilisers	4
Propellers	4
Crew	1,315
Passengers	2,240 regular passenger capacity (3 classes)
Decks	13
Registry:	Liverpool, Great Britain

Queen Mary Stern 1941 T Ryan Collection



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