

OUR FERRY - THE PLAYTEX PRINCESS

Some people have a history of “stretching the truth”. Texada has a history of “stretching the ferry”.

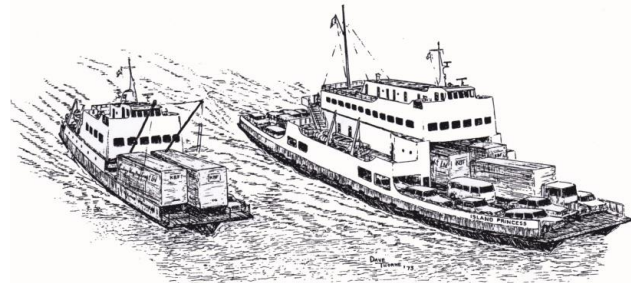
Back in 1913 the Union Steamship *Cheslakee* sank at Van Anda wharf. The ship was then refloated, stretched 20 feet and returned to service as the *Cheakamus*. Our current ferry, the *North Island Princess*, once suffered a similar, but grander, reconstructive steel surgery.

Built in 1958 by Allied Builders of Vancouver, she was named *Island Princess* and was owned by Oswald (Sparky) New's company - Coast Ferries. She was a monohull, about 17m shorter and 7m narrower than now (see drawing) and slow enough to be dubbed “the Island Tortoise”. For 11 years she served the Kelsey Bay to north Vancouver Island coast which had previously been serviced by barges and coastal freighters.

Unfortunately the deck height clearance proved too low for many trucks to drive through and the 20-car capacity soon became insufficient as the north island area opened up to resource development and tourism. As well, the ship's four staterooms were inadequate for the lengthy runs involved.

BC Ferries took over the run in 1969 and the *Island Princess* soon arrived at Burrard Drydock in Vancouver for a remarkable re-fit which attracted world attention.

First, the entire superstructure was cut off, removed and stored. Then the hull was cut into four pieces, lengthened and widened to create a double (catamaran) hull. Engineers expressed some concern about her seaworthiness if the huge sections were not aligned accurately. The superstructure was enlarged and replaced at a greater height to allow for RO/RO (roll on - roll off) traffic. The “Playtex Princess” had been stretched in all directions! In addition two new GM 700BHP engines increased her speed to 12 knots (up from a poky 9) to zip her passengers along.



The Island Princess before and after conversion to a catamaran ferry, yet side by side for comparison purposes

Her name remained the same until 1974 when P&O Cruises sought to register their own *Island Princess* (TV's *Love Boat*). A deal was concocted that resulted in our ship being renamed *NORTH Island Princess* in return for a donation to the Maritime Museum.

In 1979 Captain Stan Fike sailed her to Blubber Bay to begin Texada's long affair with the lady. Initially run by the BC Dept. of Highways, the *North Island Princess* returned to BC Ferries in 1985.

Sturdy and capable in rough seas, many will miss the “Playtex Princess” when BC Ferries eventually replaces the oldest vessel in its fleet.

Peter Lock

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