

## Great Ships of the Seas: The *Queen Mary*

The Cunard *Queens*, the illustrious *Mary* and *Elizabeth*, were the best known superliners of all time. They were popular, prestigious, and immensely profitable for most of their lives. They led the post-war Cunard Line fleet, assuredly the biggest on the Atlantic. In those years, and until the mid-sixties, Cunard was legendary and its ships unsurpassable.



The *Queen Mary*, designed in the twenties, was the first thousand-foot ocean liner, the first to reach 75,000 tons, and the first intended to run a five-day schedule. Laid down in December 1930, and then subjected to a long delay because of the Depression, she was not ready for launching until September 1934. She was the focus of superb workmanship, of advanced design, of power, of combined effort, and hence, enormous pride. She was a conservative liner, one very much in the tradition of a fine hotel. She was warm and comfortable, with far less of the massive grandeur of France's *Normandie*, her arch rival.

After several years of successful service, the *Queen Mary*, now painted grey, steamed off to Australia in 1940 to start off her war service. In all, the *Queen Mary* carried over 810,000 wartime passengers. She was released from war duty in September 1946, underwent extensive restorations, and began her career again in 1947. There were to be good times and bad.

In 1949, she went aground off Cherbourg, but in 1951 Winston Churchill crossed the Atlantic on her, as did many celebrities over the years, and by the mid-fifties Cunard was at its post-war height. But in October 1958, the first commercial airliner had landed in London, and within a year the airline industry had secured 63% of all Atlantic passenger traffic. By 1961, both the *Queens* were registering losses; by 1966, Cunard had slipped further and further into the red;

and in 1967, it was announced that the *Queen Mary* would be withdrawn from service. There were a number of bids for her, but she now sits as the *Hotel Queen Mary* in Long Beach, California. [

Reprinted from  
1996]

