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Queen of Prince Rupert at McLoughlin Bay Photo copyright of [Jim Thorne](#) and used with his permission. [Original Photo](#).

Queen of Prince Rupert

Overview

Once the flagship of the fleet and the initial ship on BC Ferries' Inside Passage run, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* continues to be relied upon to provide service to the central and north coast. She is one of the most storied ships in the fleet and is appreciated by the coastal residents she serves. The *QPR* operates on two of the major northern routes: Route 10 (Port Hardy - Prince Rupert), Route 11 (Prince Rupert - Skidegate / Queen Charlotte Islands). She also provides service to the central coast communities in the winter months when the *Queen of Chilliwack* is down south. Unlike the southern ferries, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* has the traditional visor bow in order to better handle heavier seas; Hecate Strait, between Prince Rupert and the Queen Charlottes can have very high waves. Traffic can enter the vessel through the stern doors or through the front; the visor can lift to allow access though the forward end of the ship. While the *Queen* is very plain compared to the cruise ships that ply the same route in the summer, she does have a cafeteria, licensed lounge, gift shop, and cabins. The crew on the *Queen of Prince Rupert* live aboard the ship.

Official No: 0323870
Place Built: Victoria
Builder: Victoria Machinery Depot
Year Built: 1965
Vehicle Capacity: 80
Passenger Capacity: 510
Crew: 34
Overall Length: 101.15 m
Breadth: 17.71 m
Gross Tons: 5864.0
Service Speed: 18 knots
Horsepower: 7,680

History

Built in 1965 for a new service to the north, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* was the pride of the fleet. Launched on September 27, 1965 (Cadieux and Griffiths, pg. 114), she cost approximately \$6 million to build, the most expensive ship built for the fleet up to that time. Garry Bannerman in his book, *The Ships of British Columbia*, relates an account of the launching day of the *Queen of Prince Rupert*:

Queen of Prince Rupert's official launch in October 1965 proved to be the harbinger of a fascinating career. Premier Bennett had eagerly awaited this \$6 million semi-cruise ship to extend the long hand of BC Ferries to northerly Prince Rupert. As a large crowd of dignitaries looked on awaiting the wife of Legislature Speaker W.H. Murray to crash the champagne bottle against the *Queen of Prince Rupert's* bow, a youngster ran past, tripping the wire that triggered the ship's release down the slip. *QPR* started moving toward the water and Mrs. Murray stood in shock. Urged by a shipyard official to fling the champagne bottle hung on a long string, she hurled the bubbly but the bottle harmlessly bounced off as the gleaming new vessel gaily started backing across the harbour. Only the quick action of nearby tugs prevented it from demolishing a government wharf. The champagne finally was broken against her hull at the pier. There was little cause for hurry. The master scheduled to take her north had been suddenly hospitalized for minor surgery, forcing a one-month sailing delay (pg 97).



Photo by Jim Thorne

There were plans for a sister ship to be built as well, but these were set aside due to costs (Cadieux and Griffiths, pg. 40). Her inaugural run happened on May 20, 1966, departing from Kelsey Bay on Vancouver Island on a 20 hour trip north to Prince Rupert. The arrival of the *Queen of Prince Rupert* was celebrated by most residents of the north and the city of Prince Rupert. Even Alaskan politicians were excited at the prospect of a reliable ferry service to the north. According to Cadieux and Griffiths in "The Dogwood Fleet", even then US President Lyndon B. Johnson was impressed with the new ferry and route. He wrote Premier WAC Bennett, "The United States government fully appreciates the importance of the maiden voyage of the B.C. ferry system's *Queen of Prince Rupert* to the city of Prince Rupert on May 21" (pg. 40). Until 1979, the Island Highway only reached as far north as Kelsey Bay (Sayward). Following the completion of the highway, BC Ferries moved the southern terminus from Kelsey Bay to Port Hardy, shortening the trip by several hours. In 1980, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* passed the torch of "flagship" to the newly refurbished and much more modern *Queen of the North*.

With excess capacity in the north in 1980, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* was removed from the BC Ferries fleet and sent south for a new job with the government-owned B.C. Steamship Corporation. She was refurbished, repainted, and renamed *Victoria Princess*; and that summer she replaced the venerable *Princess Marguerite* on the Victoria to Seattle run. The provincial government quickly realized that the *Victoria Princess* was totally unsuited for the route. She was too slow, had excess vehicle capacity and unnecessary staterooms, and did not have the "charm" of the *Princess Marguerite*. She was quickly returned to BC Ferries under her original name, and put to work in the north again.

The *Queen of Prince Rupert* wasted no time in making history again. On November 16, 1980, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* performed the inaugural run of BC Ferries' new service to the *Queen Charlotte Islands*. Although not universally welcomed at first by the residents of Haida Gwaii, she has become an important lifeline to the islands that is depended upon for both the movement of people and goods. Talks of a replacement have been ongoing for over a decade. The *Northern Expedition*, which is currently under construction in Germany (2008), will most likely take the *Queen's* place in early 2009.

Timeline

1965 - September 27 - Launched from the Victoria Machinery Depot.

1966 - May 20 - Amid much fanfare on British Columbia's north coast, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* makes the inaugural run of BC Ferries' Inside Passage route. The 20 hour trip from Kelsey Bay on Vancouver Island ended in Prince Rupert the next day.

1967 - August 11 - At 6:00 in the morning, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* became stranded on Haddington Reef, close to Alert Bay on Cormorant Island. All 300 passengers were taken to Alert Bay and the ferry was towed off the reef without incident (Bannerman, 108).

1970 - July 29 - The *Queen of Prince Rupert* came to the rescue of the Alaska State ferry *Taku*. The Alaskan ferry had run aground on West Kinihan Island, near Prince Rupert. With the help of tugboats, the *QPR* was able to come astern of the *Taku* and allow passengers and cars to switch boats.

1980 - Summer - Renamed *Victoria Princess* and operated by the provincial B.C. Steamship Corporation between Victoria and Seattle in place of the temporarily retired *Princess Marguerite*. After losing money all summer, she was returned to BC Ferries and took back her rightful name, *Queen of Prince Rupert*.

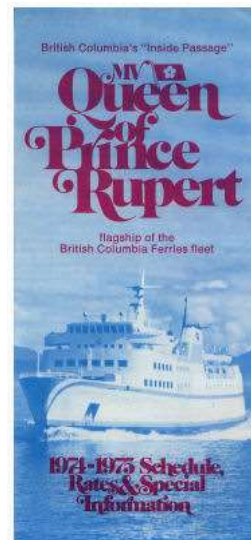
1982 - August 25 - The *QPR* became grounded in Gunboat Passage near Bella Bella. Although the *Queen* sustained half a million dollars in damage, she was able to make way to Bella Bella under her own power where the 300 passengers were transferred to the *Queen of the North* (Bannerman, 111). She later sailed to Vancouver for repairs.

1989 - October - The *Queen of Prince Rupert* was offered by BC Ferries to help transport people and vehicles in San Francisco following a major earthquake on October 17. The offer was declined. **1994** - June 30 - BC Ferries two northern vessels, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* and the *Queen of the North* were pulled from service because of a tsunami warning issued along the coast following a large earthquake in Japan.

1994 - October - The two northern *Queen's* had their bow visor doors welded shut following the *Estonia* disaster in the Baltic Sea (a ferry with a similar design). This temporary measure required all traffic to be loaded and unloaded from the stern of the *QPR*.

2000 - September 16 - Four teenagers were rescued from Dodge Island, near Prince Rupert, by the crewmembers of the *Queen of Prince Rupert*.

2006 - April 19 - The *Queen of Prince Rupert* made the first sailing north from Port Hardy after the sinking of the *Queen of the North*. At the time of the sinking, the *QPR* was undergoing a refit in Victoria, leaving no ships to service the northern routes. The *Prince Rupert's* was rushed back into service and was the only boat up north until the arrival of the *Northern Adventure* in March 2007.



BC Ferries pamphlet, 1974

Origin of Name

Queen of Prince Rupert - Named after the city of Prince Rupert, British Columbia's largest northern port city. The city is located on Kaien Island and features a large sheltered harbour. The city has rail links to the rest of the country and is home to both BC Ferries and Alaska State Ferries terminals. The city is named after Prince Rupert of the Rhine, son of the king of Bohemia with ties to British royalty. He became the first governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. According to the Encyclopedia of British Columbia, the city's name was chosen in a contest. ("Prince Rupert" - [Encyclopedia of British Columbia](#))

For Further Reading

Bannerman, Gary and Patricia. The Ships of British Columbia. Surrey: Hancock House Publishers, 1985.

Favelle, Peter. The Queens of British Columbia: a detailed account of the ships in the B.C. Ferry fleet. North Vancouver: Discovery Magazine, 1974.

Griffiths, Garth, and H.L. Cadieux. Dogwood Fleet. Nanaimo: Cadieux and Griffiths, 1967.



Photo by Jim Thorne

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Jim Thorne of Kitimat, BC for permission to use his photos of the *Queen of Prince Rupert* on this webpage. These photographs are his property and only to be used with his permission. More of his great photography can be seen on [Jim's Photobucket Album](#)



Stan V. Wright postcard from the 1960's

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