



FERRY TALE CELEBRATION

Interislander ranks with the Beehive and Edmonds Cookery book

Interislander has become a true Kiwi symbol. Not many New Zealanders can say they have not travelled on the ferry at least once.

The service has become so well known, it featured as the 'I' on The 'A to Z of New Zealand' stamp series in 2008 along with the Beehive, Edmonds and the Haka.

This year we celebrate 50 years of moving freight and passengers across Cook Strait.

On 13 August 1962 the first ferry to link the North and South Island started a once-a-day return service. In her first year of service the *Aramoana* carried 207,000 passengers, 46,000 cars and 181,000 tonnes of freight.

In the intervening years, she and her successors have carried more than 35 million people.

These days, Interislander's three ferries *Kaitaki*, *Aratere* and *Arahura* make around 4,500 sailings a year carrying some 785,000 passengers, 52,000 rail wagons, 72,000 trucks and 210,000 cars.

This equates to over 231 thousand nautical sea miles a year. That's a lot of miles, a lot of passengers and as our customers tell us, a lot of great experiences.

INNOVATION IN A CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT



When *Aramoana* went into service in 1962 she changed the nature of inter-island transport.

Roll-on-roll-off vessels made it possible for rail wagons and vehicles to be loaded directly onto the ship and off again at destination.

It was a step change in meeting the needs of the supply chain and it came at a time when the flow of freight, particularly from north to south, was accelerating.

Aramoana was also a considerable advance in moving people in the age before budget airline tickets and at a time when New Zealand's appeal as a tourism destination was growing.

Providing a service across Cook Strait is all about relevance. It's a matter of providing what customers want when they want it, as far as the vagaries of weather, sea and a rugged coastline allow.

One thing that hasn't changed in 50 years is the physical challenge that Cook Strait provides. Changeable weather, treacherous seas and an unforgiving coastline have tested the skills and endurance of masters and crew.

We owe a considerable debt to the dedication and skills of our crews who do their best to provide comfortable and safe crossings for our customers, regardless of the weather.

The 50th anniversary also gives us an opportunity to acknowledge the support of the commercial vehicle operators and passengers who have been loyal customers over the years, and without whom, there would be no Interislander.

Thomas Davis
General Manager, Interislander

FERRY FACTS

Magnificent twelve

Sixteen conventional and four fast ferries have sailed on Cook Strait in the colours of New Zealand Railways, SeaRail, Interislander Line and the Interislander.

Last orders

Arahanga was the last passenger ship to be built by the famous Clyde-side shipyard of John Brown and Company, builder of such famous ships as the *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth*.

Air supply

One of the stranger episodes in the history of Cook Strait ferry service was the use of aircraft to move passengers and vehicles when sailings were halted by industrial action. Airforce Hercules and SAFEAIR Bristol Freighters operated between Blenheim and Wellington six times between 1969 and 1983.

Mission unaccomplished

Aramoana went to the aid of the stricken Lyttelton-Wellington ferry *Wahine* in 1968 but was unable to provide material help because of the strength of the storm and the difficulty of lifting people from the water.

Strait 'life-boats'

Cook Strait ferries are known as the "life-boats of Cook Strait" because of their role in rescuing people in jeopardy after boating or shipping mishaps.

New Zealanders prefer

The humble New Zealand pie is one of the most popular ferry foods. Passengers eat more than 55,000 pies each year.

First fast

The first fast ferry trip between Wellington and the Marlborough Sounds was made in 1992 by the *Patricia Olivia* as part of a refuelling stop on a journey to South America.

Love affair

The first Director of Maritime New Zealand, Russell Kilvington, came to New Zealand as a Steer Davies Gleave consultant to SeaRail in 1991. He fell in love with the country and decided to stay.

Cook-Strait ferries changed the nature of shipping in New Zealand

The introduction of the first Cook Strait ferry *Aramoana* in 1962, introduced the concept of roll-on-roll-off freight and changed the nature of shipping in New Zealand.

Previously, ships had been loaded and unloaded using cranes. Having said that, rail cargo loaded directly dramatically reduced turn-around times and costs.

"The arrival of *Aramoana* was one of the most significant events in the nation's transport history," says Ray Munro, a railwayman who was one of the central figures in setting up the original Rail Road Ferry office and accepted the first bookings for *Aramoana*.

"For the first time, a vehicle or railway wagon could be driven aboard a ship in one island and driven off in the other without having its load disturbed."

He said the service dramatically stimulated inter-island traffic and South Island tourism while it also sealed the fate of conventional coastal freighters.

Aramoana was the result of a decision by the Union Steam Ship Company in 1957 not to replace the ageing *Tamahine* on the Wellington-Picton route.

Owned since 1917 by British shipping

giant P&O, The Union Company was the major player on the New Zealand coast and the trans-Tasman route.

Historian McClean in his history of the New Zealand Shipping Federation says the Union Company's shortsightedness in not introducing a more modern replacement opened Federation members up to the risk of their arch-rival, New Zealand Railways, running a roll-on-roll-off ferry.

"It was a fatal mistake," he says. "Within little more than a decade, almost all general cargo travelling between the islands would switch from conventional coasters to *Aramoana* and her fleet mates."

The Union Company's decision triggered an enquiry by the Cook Strait Transport Enquiry Committee in 1958.

It considered a number of options, including improving the air link for freight between Blenheim and Wellington. But in the end, the committee decided that a roll-on-roll-off ferry service, operating daily except on Fridays, was the best option.

In March 1960, world-wide tenders were invited to build the first rail ferry. Twenty-four tenders were received.

The Scottish firm, William Smith and

Brothers Ltd of Dumbarton on the Clyde was successful, possibly as a result of their long association with Union Steam Ship Company vessels.

Interestingly, *Aramoana* was the last ship to be built at the yard before it closed. The ship was to cost approximately four million pounds and be delivered in May 1962.

Aramoana was launched on 24 November 1961 and entered Wellington harbour on schedule.

At the time, there were plenty of doubters that a roll-on-roll-off vessel would be successful. Hugh Jones was the Marine Department naval architect who designed *Aramoana*.

"The media said the whole thing was a 'red herring,'" he recalls. "In their view, if the Union Steam Ship Company couldn't make the service pay, Railways definitely couldn't."

"People said it wasn't going to work. When *Aramoana* arrived, either the Dominion or the Evening Post described her as the 'ugliest ship in the world,'"

But the so-called "ugly duckling" proved the doubters wrong. In her first year of service, the ship carried 207,000

passengers, 46,000 motor vehicles and 181,000 tonnes of freight.

The numbers were double the target set and in the case of passengers, more than double. By comparison, *Tamahine* had carried

60,000 passengers and only 14,000 tonnes of freight in her last year.

The new service was immediately profitable. In 1967 by the time the second ferry *Aranui* was in service, the profit for the year was almost half a million pounds.



The magic moment. Transport Minister McAlpine cuts the ribbon to allow vehicles to drive off *Aramoana* at the end of her first commercial sailing in August 1962.

No time lost extending inter-island ferry fleet beyond *Aramoana*

Before *Aramoana* had completed her first year's service, the planning began for a sister ship.

Named *Aranui* - in Maori "great pathway" - the new vessel entered service on 9 June 1966.

Arahanga, "the bridge" broke new ground as a "mainly cargo" ferry, although she could carry 40 passengers.

Aratika, "direct path" was built in France at a cost of \$8.8 million. She was similar to *Arahanga* in size and speed and was also intended to mainly carry cargo. But two years after entering service, she was given a \$7 million refit to accommodate 800 passengers as well as cars and rail wagons.

Arahura, "pathway to dawn" entered service in December 1983 as the flagship of the fleet. She was bigger, faster and more comfortable than her predecessors and included innovations such as a helipad, sophisticated navigational aids and stabiliser fins to make crossings smoother.

Aramoana had been withdrawn from service in March 1983. *Arahura's* arrival enabled *Aranui* to be withdrawn in June 1984. In the 1990s, the need to replace ageing ferries became the main driver for fleet management. By 1990, *Arahanga* had been in service 18 years and *Aratika* 16 years.

The answer was *Aratere*, "quick path" built for Tranz Rail in 1998 by Spanish ship-builders Astillero Barreras at a cost of \$132 million. She came into service in 1999, replacing *Aratika*.

Arahanga remained in service for another two years. When she was withdrawn, her commercial vehicle cargo role was filled for almost three years by the chartered vessel *Purbeck*.

By 2005, Toll New Zealand was operating the interislander ferry services. The company chartered the 181-metre long *Challenger*, renamed *Kaitaki*, to carry vehicles and passengers but not rail wagons.

Buck stops with the Master on the bridge

Responsibility for the efficient and safe sailing of ferries rests with one person - the master.

In the early days of the Cook Strait ferry service, Masters worked for the Union Company under an agreement with Railways. That agreement ended in 1971 and later masters, like *Aratere's* Mike Swatridge have worked for Railways ferry businesses - SeaRail, Interislander Line and Interislander.

Mike Swatridge's story is the classic tale of a young man who ran away to sea in Britain, came to New Zealand and fell in love with the country.

"I had fallen in love with New Zealand from the first time I arrived and so with a brand new Mate's coxter and after a brief period on British coasters to save money,



I arrived in New Zealand at the tender age of 21," he says.

"I am retiring in October, drawing to a close a career at sea which I have always enjoyed. If I had my time over again, I would make it the same decisions."

He's had his own hand on the tiller of history, taking *Aratere* to Singapore last year for her 30-metre extension.

While masters are expected to be conversant in their judgement, some have earned colourful nicknames, none more so than Captain Adam Gullen who became "Gale Force Gullen" after a particularly stormy crossing.

Like Railways, the ferry service has its own close family ties. *Kaitaki* Engineer Darren Peake is the grandson of the legendary Captain Eric Peake and he says it was his grandfather who inspired him to pursue a career at sea.

"I always felt Granddad standing at my shoulder giving me a nudge and saying, 'go on, do your (engineering) ticket,'" he says.

Fast ferries brought speed, colour and drama to Cook Strait



The arrival of fast ferries in 1994 triggered a decade of what is often described as the "ferry wars" - a battle of technology and marketing.

"Passengers loved the faster trip but they also loved the advanced technology and the idea they were part of something new and exciting," says Interislander General Manager Thomas Davis.

Seagull branding was the visual centrepiece of the Tranz Rail advertising campaign. In television commercials, a family of seagulls perched on the bow of

the vessel and then hung on for dear life as its speed increased.

The "ferry wars" broke out when Christchurch businessman and original Pacifica Shipping founder Brook McKenzie formed Sea Shuttles NZ in mid-1994 and announced his intention to introduce a fast ferry to Cook Strait.

The new owner of the ferry business, Tranz Rail responded to the challenge by chartering the English based Holyman Ltd vessel *Condor* 10.

She was renamed *The Lynx* and painted in the familiar Interislander Line colours.

In her first year of service, *The Lynx* made 686 crossings, carried 212,334 passengers and 34,195 motor vehicles. Only four percent of sailings were cancelled.

At times, Cook Strait's weather tested *The Lynx's* capability, earning her the description, "vomit comet". Heavy seas in both 1997 and 1998 disrupted sailings.

But by 2000, the tide was turning on the fast ferries. Fuel prices were rising along with environmental consciousness of the damage caused by ferry wake.

In 2000 the Marlborough District Council imposed an 18-knot speed restriction between Picton and the entrance to Tory Channel. The Wellington harbourmaster had earlier imposed a speed restriction in the harbour to reduce ferry wash.

MILLION MILES FROM MINCE ON TOAST

Ferry food has come a long way since the early days of mince on toast and beetroot sandwiches in white bread. Interislander Retail Manager Michelle Hobson would like to go further, but she's aware that ferry food has to stay in touch with its market. "Fish and chips are

still far and away our biggest seller," she says. "Occasionally we get people asking us why we're not providing more up-market, café-style food. The reality is that the majority of passengers are looking for comfort food of the good, standard, New Zealand variety."

