

# THE NEW PRINCESS

## THE LATEST MEGA-CRUISE SHIP, CROWN PRINCESS, TAKES UP RESIDENCE in NEW YORK

by Richard H. Wagner (*published in The Log, Navy League of the United States, New York Council, Fall 2006*).

**D**riving down the FDR in mid-July, the Brooklyn skyline appeared to have changed - - there was another large building along the waterfront. Emerging from the summer haze the tall white shape transformed itself into a ship with multi-story rows of balconies. It was CROWN PRINCESS at the Brooklyn Cruise Ship Terminal, preparing for her third voyage to the Caribbean. She may not be the largest cruise ship in the world but at 113,000 tons and nearly 200 feet high, this newest of the mega-cruise ships is massive. Her owner, Princess Cruises, is betting that the new ship is just what is needed for the line to establish a regular presence in the increasingly competitive New York cruise market. Accordingly, the line has committed the ship to sailing out of New York, Spring through Fall, for three years.

### The Line

**I**n an industry that includes such venerable lines as Cunard Line and Holland America, both founded in the 19th Century, Princess Cruises is a relative newcomer. The line traces its origins to 1965 when Stanley B. McDonald leased a Canadian-Pacific coastal steamer named PRINCESS PAT and began providing cruises from Los Angeles to Mexico. McDonald called his

company "Princess Cruises" to reflect the name of the ship he was operating.

The PRINCESS PAT cruises proved a successful business and so McDonald leased a second ship called ITALIA from an Italian bank. He renamed her "PRINCESS ITALIA." Under the lease, Princess received not only the ship but her Italian crew. This was the beginning of a strong connection between the line and Italy. Several of the line's early ships came from Italian sources and Princess' latest ships, including CROWN PRINCESS, were built at Italy's Fincantieri shipyard. In addition, many of the officers and crew on the Princess ships today are Italian.

Princess Cruises achieved some success in the 1960s and early 1970s operating with one or two ships along the Mexican Riviera and through the Panama Canal. The 1973 oil crisis, however, placed considerable financial pressure on Princess and, in 1974, the company was acquired by a long-established British company, Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company, a.k.a., P&O Lines. The P&O connection gave Princess capital to expand and to purchase ships rather than charter them. The British connection remains as Britons make up the bulk of the officers on Princess ships today.

In 1975, however, a connection was formed that would have an even greater impact on the success of the young cruise line, and, indeed, on the

future of the entire industry. Television producer Douglas Cramer persuaded Princess to allow him to use one of the line's ships as the setting for a weekly television series. "The Love Boat" was phenomenally successful and is widely credited with awakening the American public to the idea of going to sea for a vacation. Princess was not shy about advertising its connection with the popular series and it became a major player in the industry.

that resembled a jet airliner more than a traditional cruise ship. Moreover, at 77,000 tons and serving 1,500 passengers, these ships reflected the industry trend toward bigger cruise ships.

In 1998, Princess took center stage in the industry when GRAND PRINCESS entered service. She was then the largest passenger ship in the world at 109,000 gross tons and serving 2,600 passengers. By this time, Princess



P&O acquired Sitmar cruises in 1988 and merged that operation into Princess. This gave Princess several more ships that were already in operation plus two ships then under construction. The two new ships were futuristic-looking with a superstructure

had expanded its itineraries and its ships, along with those of parent company, P&O, were providing cruises all over the world.

At around this time, P&O began talks with Royal Caribbean Ltd. looking toward a merger. The industry leader, Carnival Corporation, had grown much larger than either P&O or RCL both through internal growth of its Carnival

Cruise Lines and through acquisitions of lines such as Holland America, Costa, and Cunard. A combination of P&O and RCL would create an entity as large or even larger than Carnival.

Carnival did not get to be the industry leader by sitting idle while its rivals were acting. Accordingly, Carnival made its own bid for P&O. After much debate, the P&O board of directors wished bon voyage to RCL and P&O and Princess came under the Carnival umbrella in 2003.

Carnival's philosophy regarding the lines it has acquired is to allow them to remain distinct. Each of the lines has its own following and appeals to its own market segment. Thus, while there has been some integration of the Cunard Line operation into the Princess/P&O operation, the lines maintain their identities and are managed separately from Carnival Cruise Line, Costa, Windstar, and the other Carnival operating lines.

Today, Princess operates 15 ships with three more scheduled to join the fleet by 2008. The line offers about 100 different itineraries including cruises to all seven continents and carries more than a million passengers a year.

### The ship

**C**ROWN PRINCESS is sometimes referred to as the second ship of the CARIBBEAN PRINCESS-class and sometimes as the fifth ship of the GRAND PRINCESS-class. Her captain, Andrew Proctor, explained to *The Log* that both are correct. "[CROWN PRINCESS] has the same hull as the GRAND PRINCESS but the additional deck makes her the same class as the CARIBBEAN PRINCESS. The CARIBBEAN has one more passenger

deck [than GRAND PRINCESS] and so does the CROWN but the hull is the GRAND-class hull. . . . The configuration of the ship has also evolved since 1997 [- - the year GRAND PRINCESS was built]." As a result, CROWN PRINCESS is 4,000 gross tons larger than the lead ship of the class and can carry approximately 400 more passengers. There are also various passenger amenities that differ from the earlier ships of the class. In addition, CROWN PRINCESS has better lines, she does not have the appendage jutting out from her stern that gives GRAND PRINCESS something of the look of a shopping cart.

PRINCESS is building two more of the class: one to be called EMERALD PRINCESS, will go into service in 2007, and the other, still unnamed, will join the fleet in the Fall of 2008. "There may be changes to the configuration and rooms, perhaps, but the next two ships will be sisters to this one."



*CROWN PRINCESS' cockpit-style bridge.  
(Photo: R.H. Wagner).*

At the time of our visit, CROWN PRINCESS had not encountered any rough seas. However, based on his experience commanding other ships in the class, Captain Proctor had no

concern. "It's a very good sea keeping ship."

Like her sisters, CROWN PRINCESS is 951 feet long and has a beam of 118 feet. As noted earlier, she has one more deck than the earlier ships in the class (except CARIBBEAN PRINCESS) giving her 19 decks. Her draft is 26 feet.

The ship is propelled by two fixed pitch propellers each driven by a Siemens electric motor of 19 megawatts maximum output. The motors, as well as the rest of the ship, receive electricity from six generators driven by six diesel engines. This propulsion system gives CROWN PRINCESS a maximum speed of the ship of 23 knots. However, the itineraries are planned so as to allow the ship to travel at 21 knots. Three bow thrusters help to maneuver the ship when docking.

CROWN PRINCESS is driven from a spacious, fully-enclosed bridge with floor-to-ceiling windows. From two black leather chairs in the center of the room, the watch officers can view several computer screens. "It is a paperless bridge", one of the officers told *The Log*. There are no paper charts, all the navigation is done with the computers. In addition, there are computer displays showing the interior of the ship. If a passenger is smoking near a smoke detector or if one of the chefs flames a fillet, the officers on the bridge will know it. As an additional low tech back-up, there are observers on each of the bridge wings watching the balconies of the passenger cabins for any sign of smoke. All of the cruise lines have become particularly concerned about fire since a fire on STAR PRINCESS last Spring.

Situated between the officer's chairs is the ship's wheel. It can be

moved up and down to adjust to the height of the helmsman. However, the primary control for the ship are joy sticks located on the console near the officers' positions.

On 18 July, CROWN PRINCESS suddenly listed to her starboard side after leaving Port Canaveral, Florida. The unexpected movement resulted in injuries to about 240 people and caused others to believe the giant ship was about to capsize. In reality, the list was only about 15 degrees and there was no danger to the ship.

The "tipping" incident caused a wave of debate in the media about the safety of CROWN PRINCESS and other modern cruise ships. With their numerous decks and rows of balconies, these ships look top-heavy. However, that is an illusion. With the engines, the fuel tanks, the water tanks, and the supplies located in the hull, the center of gravity of these tall cruise ships is quite low. Moreover, Captain Proctor pointed out, "they are also very long and very wide and so they are very stable."

The reason why some passengers thought the ship was turning over does have something to do with the height of the ship, however. To someone standing near the waterline, a list of 15 degrees is not going to seem like much. However, 19 decks above, the same list is going to seem much more pronounced because the distance between that part of the ship and the water is going to be much less than it is when the ship is upright. It is like a metronome, the arc is much greater at the top than it is at the base.

The immediate cause of the list was that the ship turned quickly. As anyone who has watched a sailboat race can testify, a vessel will list toward the side it is turning to when it executes a

quick turn. When *The Log* visited CROWN PRINCESS, her officers pointed out that the ship is very responsive to her helm due to the fact that she has two rudders. It would seem to follow that a small error in steering might be magnified into a significant incident.

Other large cruise ships have experienced similar incidents when they executed a quick turn. For example, GRAND PRINCESS "tilted" off of Galveston, Texas in February when the ship executed an emergency turn in order to bring a passenger who had suffered a heart attack to a waiting Coast Guard cutter for immediate medical attention. Thirteen people were injured when a rudder malfunctioned on a Holland America ship in 1999. A Norwegian Cruise Line ship listed when she turned as a result of an error in her autopilot. The investigation into the CROWN PRINCESS incident concluded that it resulted from human error. In a statement, Princess said: "appropriate personnel changes have been made."

### Life onboard

One of the concerns that is often expressed about the mega-cruise ships is that one will have to endure the indignities of being with a large number of people, e.g., becoming lost in the crowd and having to wait on long lines. Princess has come up with an interesting way to address this concern. Relying on the fact that not everyone has the same tastes, Princess has divided the public areas in CROWN PRINCESS into a number of relatively small venues, each designed to appeal to different tastes. Thus, rather than have one giant theater that can accommodate the entire passenger list, the ship has a good-sized

theater but also several large lounges that feature shows of various types, and an outdoor movie theater. Along the same lines, there is not one massive dining room but rather, three dining rooms and two specialty dining venues as well as some casual alternatives. CROWN PRINCESS has a typical pool area, a pool area for families with children, and a "sanctuary" where kids are prohibited. Captain Proctor commented: "It is remarkable how much space the passengers have to go out and enjoy themselves and not feel crowded onboard the ship. Quite often you hear people say that they don't feel crowded. There is a lot of space."



*The casino features slot machines built into the bar for those who want to drink and gamble simultaneously. (Photo: R.H. Wagner).*

Embarking and disembarking 3,000 people within a reasonable time is a challenge. "It takes a lot of logistical planning." There have to be sufficient inspectors to do customs and immigration inspections and sufficient space to move the large amounts of luggage on and off the ship. Fork lifts carrying containers full of luggage drive in and out of the ship through doors in the hull. "We can comfortably turn the ship around, arriving at seven in the

morning, and be ready to sail by five in the evening. This new terminal in Brooklyn is managing to accommodate us. The terminals up in midtown Manhattan, they really couldn't cope with that."

Although most of the officers and senior managers are British or Italian, the ship is designed to appeal to an American market. Passenger Services Director Martin Ford noted: "We have the two formal nights per cruise, and generally people are pretty good with that. A lot of our passengers are American and they like to be a lot more casual than Europeans would. The tux is not quite so popular. Especially, if people work at home in an office and they wear a tie and a suit everyday, the last thing they want to do is come on holiday and put it back on again. We're very relaxed."



*The Terrace pool offers a spectacular view of the Manhattan skyline. (Photo: R. H. Wagner).*

Indeed, the line calls its style "Personal Choice Cruising." The object is to eliminate regimentation and, according to Princess, give the passengers "a host of multiple dining options and locations; flexible and varied entertainment selections;

renowned customer service; and a full complement of onboard activities." For example, two of the dining rooms are "anytime dining" while the other dining room has traditional shipboard seating. It is up to the passenger to decide which one best suits his or her desires.

For many people, dining is a major part of a cruise. We sampled the fare in the Michelangelo restaurant and found it excellent, particularly the pasta, as was the service by the European waiters.

CROWN PRINCESS, like all of the other Princess ships, is registered in Bermuda. Not only does this reflect the line's British connection but it allows the captains of Princess ships to do something they otherwise could not - - perform marriages. Contrary to popular legend, ship captains have no inherent authority to marry people. For a line with a heritage that includes The Love Boat, this was a distinct problem. Indeed, there is considerable demand for onboard marriages. To overcome the legal obstacle, the Princess captains hold marriage officers' licenses from the Bermuda government, which give them authority to perform marriages onboard a Bermuda-flagged vessel. As a result, a couple married on a Princess ship off the coast of Alaska will receive a Bermuda marriage license. However, a passenger cannot simply meet someone in one of the ship's bars and proceed to the marriage chapel Las Vegas style. It takes about six weeks for the bands to be read in Hamilton, Bermuda and the paperwork processed by the Bermuda government.

Overall, the atmosphere of CROWN PRINCESS seemed to be one of relaxed luxury. There was no shock and awe Las Vegas glitz as in the central atrium of FREEDOM OF THE SEAS.

(*See The Log*, Summer 2006 at p. 9). Rather, the often sumptuous Italian Renaissance-influenced décor indicated that the ship seeks to attract sophisticated people. At the same time, Princess' youthful approach to cruising seems less formal than on Holland

America's NOORDAM (*See The Log*, Spring 2006 at p. 9) or on the Cunard Queens. She is an exciting addition to New York's cruise ship fleet.

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