



NEW HOVERCRAFT FOR CROSS-SOLENT OPERATOR

WHILE THE REMAINING TWO

BHC SR.N4 Mk3 hovercraft are struggling for their lives at Lee-on-the-Solent (*CFF News February 2016*), only a few miles away the future for the hovercraft looks much brighter.

So much so that established operator Hovertravel will be taking delivery of two vessels of a new design from Griffon Hoverwork, a sister company to Hovertravel, later in the year. The first of these, Griffon 12000-01, was rolled out and successfully hovered for the first time at the manufacturer's site at Woolston late last month. The trials programme commenced shortly thereafter, including take-off and berthing procedures at Hovertravel's terminal at Southsea.

Designated Griffon 12000TD, the new hovercraft has a length overall of 22 m and beam of 10 m and will be fitted out for 88 passengers. Powered by a pair of MAN D2862 diesels, the design has a maximum speed of 50 knots.

In developing the 12000TD, particular focus has been given to improving fuel economy and reducing noise levels, both in the passenger cabin and from the outside. Boarding and disembarkation is through two doors at the front allowing for speedy passenger flow.

In the region of £10 million has been invested by Hovertravel in the project .

The introduction of the new craft takes place in Hovertravel's 51st year of existence in the Solent. The Southsea-Ryde, Isle of Wight route was inaugurated in



Top + Right : *The first of a pair of Griffon Hoverwork 12000TD hovercraft ordered by Hovertravel on trials off Southsea on March 2 / MATT FORBES photo, both*

The BHT 130 Solent Express prior to entering service in 2007. The craft is no longer operated by Hovertravel and is for sale / CHRIS HUNSICKER photo



August 1965 using SR.N6 hovercraft built by British Hovercraft Corporation. These were superseded in 1983–84 by the BHC AP.1–88 design, the prototype of which was launched in 1982. Several of these have seen service with Hovertravel over the years and two remain with the operator, *Island Express* and *Freedom 90*. The former was built in 1984 and originally operated across the Oresund between Copenhagen Airport, Denmark and Malmo, Sweden. It was extensively refurbished and re-engined before entering service across the Solent in late 2001. The other was delivered to Hovertravel as a newbuilding in 1990 and has since also been upgraded.

The pair of 95-seat AP.1-88s were joined in 2007 by a BHT 130 hovercraft, *Solent Express*. Larger and more powerful, this had been developed and built by Hoverwork and Aluminium Ship Builders (the hull). The 130-seat craft operated with Hovertravel until recently and is now up for sale and available for operation at short notice.

Since its inception almost fifty-one years ago, the year round service has carried more than 29 million

passengers. Trip time for the only 4 nautical mile route is a mere 10 minutes, and the current winter timetable schedules some sixty single crossings between 0615 and 2100.

At going to press, the names of the new craft were announced. The first, Griffon 12000-01, will be named *Solent Flyer* and the second unit *Island Flyer*. **cff**

Below : The oldest of Hovertravel's AP.1–88 hovercraft, *Island Express*, was built in 1984 and entered service across the Solent in 2001 / MATTHEW DAVIES photo



The first **Griffon Hoverwork 12000TD hovercraft**
for Hovertravel on trials at Southsea in March 2016



All photos: **MATT FORBES**

