



*So far the last hydrofoil to see service between the U.S. and Canada was Boeing 929-115 Jetfoil Spirit of Friendship introduced in March 1985 by Island Jetfoil.
/ Photo supplied by Mike Dunham–Wilkie, taken by the late DAVE WILKIE*

Pacific Northwest hydrofoils

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It was not just in Europe that the interest for the commercial hydrofoil began to take off in the 1960s. For instance, one area in which several attempts have been made over the years to establish a hydrofoil service is in North America's Pacific Northwest, linking Seattle, WA in the U.S. and Victoria and Vancouver in British Columbia, Canada. Five services, all of which rather short-lived, were operated over a span of twenty years between 1965 and 1985, using four different vessels. It should be said, however, that since 1986 catamarans have been running successfully on the international Seattle–Victoria route.

The pioneers

Already in 1961 Northwest Hydrofoil Lines, based in Seattle, was planning on introducing two hydrofoils in the Puget Sound and north to Vancouver Island. It was not until four years later that the service got underway and not with two but one hydrofoil, *Victoria*, designed by Gibbs and Cox and constructed by Maryland Shipbuilding & Drydock. It is interesting to note that this builder was on the opposite side of the United States, in Baltimore.



The first hydrofoil introduced between Seattle and Vancouver Island, in 1965, was Victoria.

With a length overall of just under 20m, *Victoria* featured a fully submerged foil system of canard configuration and was powered by a pair of LM100 gas turbines. A total of 75 passengers would be carried in aircraft-style seats in one saloon. At a designed cruising speed of 37 knots, the 74-nautical mile Seattle to Victoria, Vancouver Island route was scheduled at 90 minutes. This was a worthy competitor to the airlines, when ground time to/from the airports is included, but it would appear *Victoria* used closer to two hours to cover the distance. Still, it was much faster than the up to five hour travel time on the conventional ferries on the route. Also, the fare of \$8-\$10 one way on the hydrofoil was less than that charged by the airline companies.

As is always the case with a single vessel operation with no backup available, cancellations of services are almost inevitable and thus fatal to the operator as such immediately produce bad publicity. Northwest Hydrofoil Lines was no exception and following an incident where *Victoria* hit a log in the Puget Sound resulting in one of the foils being knocked off the service was terminated altogether later in 1965.

Victoria was subsequently relocated south to operate between Los Angeles and Catalina Island. This operation also lasted for only a few months, in the summer of 1969.

You've got to try it

It would be another eleven years before the next hydrofoil appeared in the area. From mid-September to early-November 1976 a Boeing Marine Systems 929-100 Jetfoil, *Flying Princess*, was demonstrated on the Seattle-Victoria route prior to the vessel being shipped overseas to operate with P&O Ferries between London and Zeebrugge, Belgium. *Flying Princess* accommodated 224 passengers on two decks in an arrangement similar to that of a wide-body aircraft. The main deck saloon seated 136 and the upper 88, all in one-class.

The test-market operation on the Seattle–Victoria route was a collaboration between Boeing, the British Columbia government and Georgian Gulf Cruises, the latter of which was the operating company. The six-week trial service was successful with almost 18,600 passengers carried on eighty-eight flights. Only two trips were lost due to fog: mechanical reliability of the craft was one-hundred percent. Passenger satisfaction as to the quality of the ride was likewise high.



Flying Princess was briefly operated in the Pacific Northwest prior to being shipped to P&O Ferries in the U.K..
/ BMS photo

Marketed as 'You've got to try it', one daily round trip was operated during the period, leaving Seattle at 0900 and Victoria at 1730 (September 17–October 1) or 1630 (October 2–November 1). Scheduled travel time was 1 hour 50 minutes. Adult fares were \$16 one way and \$30 round trip, children up to 11 years were half price.

Following its charter to P&O Ferries in the U.K., *Flying Princess* was leased to Spanish operator Trasmediterránea in 1980, renamed *Princesa Voladora* and as such operated in the Canary Islands for about a year. It was back with Boeing in 1981, only to be sold to Far East Hydrofoil in Hong Kong that same year and renamed *Urzela*.

The second Princess...

Two years on, in the summer of 1978, another Jetfoil demonstration was carried out. This time by the Washington State Department of Transportation/ Washington State Ferries which leased 929-100 *Flying Princess II*, built that same year, from BMS to operate various commuter routes in the Seattle vicinity as well as north to Port Angeles and Friday Harbor (both WA) and the international route to Victoria, BC. It was hoped that these trial commuter services would prove that there was a market for introducing, on a permanent basis, passenger-only fast sea transportation to ease the pressure on the conventional ferries and roads.

In retrospect, this appears to have been a too ambitious, or jumbly if you like, project as none of the services was operated for long enough during the seven-week period to become known to the public and interesting to prospective users. None the less, a survey concluded the public being highly in favour of a State operated hydrofoil service.

Some 66,000 passengers were carried on a total of 437 flights. Reliability was 97.8 percent. One of the few mechanical mishaps was that of debris clogging the Jetfoil's waterjet pump system on a departure from Victoria resulting in passengers having to be returned to Seattle on a conventional ferry.



Flying Princess II appeared on the Seattle–Victoria run on two occasions, in 1978 and 1980.
/ RICK HAWKINSON photo

...times two

Two years later still, *Flying Princess II* was back on the Seattle to Victoria run. Chartered by BMS to British Columbia Steamship and a purpose-formed company called Flying Princess Transportation Corporation, the 250-seat Jetfoil was operated from mid-May to mid-November 1980. In the spring and fall seasons two daily round trips were operated. An early morning departure from Seattle at 0600, returning from Victoria at 0830 and an afternoon crossing from Seattle at 1600 and back from Victoria at 1830. During the peak summer months a third round trip was added in between these.

Again, craft reliability was very good; 98 percent. In the region of 1,000 services were carried out, carrying a total of 135,000 passengers. The average load factor was 53 percent, while a peak load factor of 80 percent was reached in August.

After the six-month spell with the above companies, *Flying Princess II* went back to Boeing and was later sold to Far East Hydrofoil in Hong Kong, which renamed it *Ponta Delgada*, and again later sold to Miraejet in Japan.

That's the spirit

So far the last attempt on running a scheduled hydrofoil service in the Pacific Northwest, at least which has gone beyond the planning stage, happened in 1985. However, already in the fall of 1982 it was announced that a Canadian-based company, Island Jetfoil Corporation, had been formed to introduce a Jetfoil service the following Easter linking Seattle, Victoria and Vancouver on the Canadian mainland. A 929-115, to be named *Island Jetfoil One*, was even prepared by BMS but later went to another customer

A significant difference of the Island Jetfoil operation as compared to the previous ones was that it would be permanent and run year-round. Another was that the craft, *Spirit of Friendship*, was of the second generation Jetfoil hydrofoils, designated 929-115, also known as Block II craft. It was launched at the Boeing Marine Systems plant at Renton, just outside Seattle, in January 1985. It was not an entirely new vessel though, having originally been delivered to Argentinian hydrofoil operator Alimar, as *Montevideo Jet*, in 1980. The service on the River Plate did not last long and the vessel was back with Boeing the following year, was renamed *Aries* and as such acted as BMS's demonstrator until sold to Island Jetfoil.

Sporting a striking blue, red and white livery, *Spirit of Friendship* entered service in March, 1985. Originally two daily round trips were offered between Seattle and Victoria and one between Victoria and Vancouver. Departures were 0700 and 1200 from Seattle and 0930 and 1930 from Victoria (to Seattle) with the mainland service leaving Victoria at 1430 and Vancouver at 1700. Scheduled quay-to-quay journey times on both stretches were 2 hours. However, the timetable was altered during the summer and trip times were reduced to 1 hour 45 minutes. Fares were also lowered, considerably so on the Victoria–Vancouver leg. This would prove to be the beginning of the end as Island Jetfoil closed down not long thereafter.

Following the collapse of Island Jetfoil, *Spirit of Friendship* was bought back by Boeing at auction in September 1986 and eventually sold in Japan in January 1987 where it entered service with Jet Line as *Jet 7*. It has since been sold on to Tokai Kisen and renamed *Seven Island Ai*.

Planning it is half the fun

In the fall of 1997 it was reported that a pair of Jetfoils in service in Hong Kong with Far East Hydrofoil were likely to be transferred to Canada to operate the Vancouver–Victoria route in cooperation with Clipper Navigation, the company which had operated catamarans between the U.S. and Canada since 1986. These plans were never carried into effect.

There have been other fast ferry services between Vancouver Island and the mainland, at least one of which we have reported on in past issues of *CFF*. We may come back to these at a later date. **CFF**

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