



# Ship Fact Sheet



## CANBERRA (1961)

Base data at 19 May 1961. Last amended September 2011

\* indicates entries changed during P&O Group service.

Type	Passenger liner
P&O Group service	1961-1997
P&O Group status*	Owned by parent company
Registered owners*	The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company
Managers*	P&O-Orient Management Ltd
Operators*	P&O-Orient Lines
Builders	Harland & Wolff Ltd
Yard	Belfast
Country	UK
Yard number	1621
Registry	London, UK
Official number	302649
Call sign	GBVC
IMO/LR number	5059953
Classification society	Lloyd's Register
Gross tonnage*	45,720 grt
Net tonnage*	24,399 nrt
Deadweight*	9,910 tons
Length	249.39m (818.5ft)
Breadth	31.24m (102.5ft)
Depth	12.64m (41.5ft)
Draught	9.770m (32ft 8¼in)
Engines	2 British Thompson Houston steam turbine/alternator units driving electric propulsion motors
Engine builders	Associated Electrical Industries Ltd
Works	Rugby
Country	UK
Power	85,000 shp
Propulsion	Twin screw
Speed	27.5 knots (service); 29.27 knots (trials)
Passenger capacity*	538 first class, 1,650 tourist class
Cargo capacity	
Crew	900
Employment	UK/Australia service, and cruising

**Career**

- 20.12.1956: Ordered.
- 23.09.1957: Keel laid.
- 17.03.1958: Name announced.
- 16.03.1960: Launched by Dame Pattie Menzies DBE wife of the then Prime Minister of Australia.
- 29.04.1961: Builder's trials, after which her bow was given extra ballast to compensate for the aft-bias of her machinery.
- 19.05.1961: Owner's trials. Achieved 29.27 knots.
- 19.05.1961: Completed as *Canberra* for The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company at a cost of £17,021,000. At the time she was the largest post-war British passenger ship, and was based at Southampton as she was too large for the P&O fleet's normal base at Tilbury. Named in honour of the capital of Australia, an Aboriginal word meaning 'place by the water' and, by extension, 'meeting place'.
- 02.06.1961: Maiden voyage Southampton/Sydney/Auckland/US West Coast and reverse via Suez to Southampton. During the 1960s, employed on a mixed programme of cruises and line voyages to Australia and the Pacific, including carrying thousands of Britons emigrating under the assisted passage scheme whereby they paid £10 towards the cost of their ticket, also known as 'ten pound poms'.
- 04.09.1961: Arrived at Southampton after maiden voyage.
- 21.06.1962: Work undertaken to alleviate high fuel consumption, reduce soot deposits by extending her funnel uptakes by 1.5m (5ft), and cover the first class stadium turning it into a theatre. Her gross tonnage was now 45,733 grt.
- 01.1963: Suffered a fire which disabled her main engines while in the Mediterranean heading for Port Said, outward bound for Australia. P&O's homeward bound *Stratheden* stood by her until she could make her own way at 10 knots, reaching Malta 12 hours later.
- 14.01.1963: Left Malta for Belfast after temporary repairs.
- 24.05.1963: Resumed service from Southampton.
- 1966: Managers and operators restyled P&O Lines.
- 09.1966: Film star Cary Grant sailed on board the ship with his wife and young daughter from Southampton to Los Angeles.
- 1968: Re-measured. Now 44,807 grt. By the end of the decade, the flow of emigrants had begun to decline and the first Boeing 747 aircraft entered commercial service in early 1970. It became clear that *Canberra* could not survive as a viable economic unit in her traditional role and a new function had to be found for the ship.
- 01.10.1971: Management and operation transferred to P&O Passenger Division.
- 01.02.1973: Made first of disastrous series of one-class cruises from New York which were extremely poorly supported.
- 01.06.1973: Announced she was to be withdrawn and either scrapped or re-engined with diesels.
- 12.07.1973: Ran aground at St George, Grenada.
- 14.08.1973: Announced that she would not be withdrawn after all but would

- replace the older *Orsova* on her 1974 cruise programme. The decision had been reversed as demand for open class cruising grew, in part due to the effect international currency fluctuations were having on European package holidays. On the same evening driven aground in a squall at St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands. Refloated with bent propeller tips.
- 1974: Transferred to P&O's cruise programme from Southampton, operating alongside *Oriana* and *Himalaya*. Converted to offer one class cruising with all public rooms and facilities open to her 1,737 passengers.
- 01.1976: Began first of an (almost) annual series of world cruises.
- 05.04.1982: In the Mediterranean bound for Southampton at the end of a world cruise when she was requisitioned for trooping during the Falkland campaign.
- 09.04.1982: Sailed for the South Atlantic with over 2,000 troops after a 2-day conversion at Southampton including construction of helicopter flight decks over the forward observation deck and the midships swimming pool.
- 21.05.1982: Served as a reserve troopship for the first landings at San Carlos.
- 19.06.1982: Landed Argentine prisoners-of-war at Puerto Madryn.
- 11.07.1982: Arrived back at Southampton. During her 94 days with the task force, she steamed more than 25,000 nautical miles, and landed most of the ground forces who went into action on the Falkland Islands. Her nickname 'the Great White Whale' was reputedly coined by the ITV journalist Jeremy Hands who travelled aboard her during much of the campaign.
- 09.1982: Returned to commercial service after refurbishment.
- 11.02.1986: Operating company became Canberra Cruises (P&O Lines Ltd, managers).
- 01.07.1986: Operating company restyled Canberra Cruises Ltd.
- 25.11.1988: Ownership transferred from The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company to P&O Lines (Shipowners) Ltd.
- 31.12.1990: Passenger capacity now 1,750 passengers.
- 15.03.1991: Sold by P&O Lines (Shipowners) Ltd to Abbey National March Leasing (1) Ltd and then leased back.
- 09.03.1992: Managers P&O Lines Ltd renamed P&O Cruises Fleet Services Ltd.
- 01.01.1994: P&O Cruises Fleet Services Ltd replaces as managers by P&O Cruises (UK) Ltd.
- Early 1994: During her world cruise, she steamed across the Arabian Sea between Bombay and the Jordanian port of Aqaba in the Red Sea, that an emergency call for assistance was received from a liquefied gas carrier, *Hilli*, which was en route from the Persian Gulf to Japan. The *Hilli* reported that a Maltese-flagged oil tanker, *Stolide*, which had loaded 65,000 tons of crude oil for South Korea, was in trouble. The *Stolide* had suffered a massive explosion and fire which killed 18 of her crew and badly injured at least 11 others. Five of the most seriously injured were transferred to *Canberra*. Two of the seamen were taken to Djibouti by French military helicopter to receive appropriate medical attention.

- 04.06.1994: Departed Southampton to take part in a Spithead Review by the Queen the next morning. Following the review, *Canberra* went to the French coast for a remembrance service around the Bonito Pool for the veterans and their families to commemorate the anniversary of the D-Day landings.
- 11.07.1994: New certificate following re-measurement. Now 49,073 grt, 25,190 nrt.
- 07.12.1994: Drifted for an hour in the Solent after a power failure at 0145 hrs, before anchoring off Ventnor.
- 1996: Withdrawal announced.
- 06.01.1997: Began last world cruise.
- 10.09.1997: Began last cruise Southampton/Haifa/Istanbul/Athens/Naples/Cannes/Palma/Southampton.
- 30.09.1997: Arrived at Southampton for the last time. P&O Cruises estimated that *Canberra* had sailed nearly 5 million km (more than three million miles) and carried nearly one million cruise passengers, some 6,500 troops and 3,167 prisoners of war during her 36 years in service.
- 10.10.1997: Sailed for Pakistan.
- 29.10.1997: Sold for \$5,640,818 by Abbey National March Leasing (1) Ltd to Eckardt Marine GmbH, Hamburg, for breaking up.
- 31.10.1997: Beached at Gadani Beach, Pakistan, for demolition by G M Brothers, although she had run around too far out for dismantling work to go ahead properly. Attempts were made to winch the ship closer inshore proved unsatisfactory.
- 31.10.1998: Demolition completed.

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