

# AN INTERVIEW WITH CAPTAIN EDWARD PERRIN

By Richard H. Wagner

Captain Perrin decided at a very young age on a nautical career. When QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 was launched in 1969, Captain Perrin's parents took him to see the new ship in Southampton. "I just thought it was the most spectacular thing I had ever seen in my life. And, at the age of four, I set into my mind that what I wanted to do was to go to sea and eventually work on one of those large liners."

"As I was leaving school at the age of eighteen, I still wanted to go to sea but Cunard and P&O, the two big British companies, neither of them were recruiting cadets at the time. So, I ended up going to sea with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, which is a civilian-manned supply division for the Royal Navy. I was very lucky really because I had an excellent training with them. It took me ten years to get my master's certificate from leaving school with two days over the minimum sea time."

Still, outside forces dictated a career change at that point. "I was still very happy working with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary but at the time the country was taking defense cuts. I just looked at myself and thought if I were an admiral and I had to cut, what am I going to cut, my frigates and my aircraft carriers or my supply tankers? I was on the supply tankers so I thought it is time to change. One morning, I was sitting in a ship called the SIR BENEVERE at Marchford military base in Southampton with a very close friend and colleague of mine, and the CANBERRA, the QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 and the old SEA PRINCESS that later became the VICTORIA, came in and came along side. They were right in front of me and I looked over there and I said to my colleague Tony Draper, who is also a captain with us now, and I said 'I'm going to apply to those companies over there.' About a month and a half later, I was working for P&O Cruises on the CANBERRA and never looked back."

CANBERRA was an icon of the British merchant marine. Built as one of the last ocean liners, she

began her career in 1961 on the Britain to Australia run. Over time, as the market changed, she took up cruising out of Britain. She was used to transport troops during the Falklands War in 1982 and was in the heart of the action. Upon her return, the ship remained very popular until her retirement in 1997. "CANBERRA was like a dinosaur but it was lovable. There was a very close together rivalry between the CANBERRA and the QE2. Some people liked P&O, some people liked Cunard. But, the CANBERRA was an old steamship, so she was very uneconomic, which is why she really kind of came to the end of her life when she did. She was very basic, very, very basic. I did one year on CANBERRA and had a great year of my career there."

Captain Perrin's next assignment was another cruise ship icon, this time at Princess cruises, which was then a subsidiary of P&O. "I was due to be going back for what was going to be for pretty much the CANBERRA's last few voyages before being decommissioned. I got a call from fleet personnel in Southampton saying somebody is sick on the PACIFIC PRINCESS and we want you to join in Athens on the PACIFIC PRINCESS, so off I went. And I have never been back to P&O, I stayed with Princess from that time hence, which is now 11 years I think."

For many years, PACIFIC PRINCESS had been used for the filming of a television series that is widely-credited with focusing the public's attention on cruising. She was "the original 'Love Boat' and I have to say that she was a lovely little ship. She had a following of her own. I had pretty well two and a half or three years on there and loved every minute."

At this point, the ship was no longer being used in the television series and no longer making weekly cruises along the West Coast. "It had such a varied itinerary. I felt my Magellan himself, going through South America for the first time. We were always pushing the limits, exploring new places and going to new destinations. Half the time, people did not even



know where they were going, these names were completely new. I ended up as the Safety Officer there, which would be like the Chief Officer [on other shipping lines]."

Continuing the pattern of moving from one iconic ship to another, "I went from the little PACIFIC PRINCESS, to this one, the GRAND PRINCESS in new build in Trieste." GRAND PRINCESS was one of the first ships over 100,000 gross tons. In addition, her design was futuristic and different from anything then in the market. The design has proven so successful that there are now eight ships based on the design sailing for Princess. Indeed, Grand class ships continue to be built with another one, RUBY PRINCESS, due in 2008 for Princess and one, VENTURA, due in 2008 for P&O Cruises.

"That was the first of five new built ships that I did. I did this one, the SEA PRINCESS, the ISLAND PRINCESS, the CORAL PRINCESS and STAR PRINCESS. So, a succession of new builds, which I also thoroughly enjoyed. It took me through those intervening ranks and years from Safety Officer as far as command."

Before assuming command of GRAND PRINCESS, Captain Perrin served for a year on yet another famous ship, Cunard Line's QUEEN MARY 2 as Staff Captain, which is the second in command position. Princess Cruises had recently been acquired by Carnival Corporation and officers from Princess were doing tours on Cunard ships while Cunard officers were serving on Princess.

"It was quite ironic. When I was in France on the construction of the CORAL PRINCESS and the ISLAND PRINCESS, they were right next to QUEEN MARY 2 in the shipyard. All the time, I kept thinking, I must go and have a look around that ship. There just never seemed to be the time. And as I left there on the ISLAND PRINCESS, I thought that was a shame, never got to see it. Little did I know, a year later, I was going to be working on it."

GRAND PRINCESS is now in her second decade. However, she remains at the forefront of Princess' young fleet. "When the ship came out, she was a world leader, she was way in advance of many ships that were built years later. In fact, there are ships that are being built now by our competitors that probably are not as advanced as this one was ten years ago.



*Captain Edward Perrin.*

That said, we have still kept on top. For example, in the last refit we upgraded the navigation system that we had before so that we now have the newest version onboard. As a result she is actually ahead of the CROWN PRINCESS, which is only a year old. Likewise, in the technology in the engine control systems, we are doing small upgrades all the time. Our safety system on here, what I'll call our safety management system, which controls all the fire alarms, the fire doors, the smoke strategies, that was a complete world leader on here when it came out. Nobody had ever seen anything like it when the ship was built and we have just had a few upgrades done on that now. So we are still quite a long way in advance of other ships that are being built today, in fact."

Along with the technical upgrades, there have been upgrades of the passenger facilities and amenities. "We have done things like adding that huge TV screen [over the swimming pool which is used for outdoor movies]. We have changed things like the steak house. When we came out, you could just grill steaks down there. Now, that has been upgraded and the galley can do many other things as well, enhancing the menu there. So, things have moved along and progressed. I believe in the next refit there is going to be a few quite big mod-



ifications, not in terms of safety systems or control systems but in term of passenger satisfaction. There are going to be some additional upgrades."

Many new ships coming into service have Azipod propulsion systems whereas GRAND PRINCESS and the subsequent ships in her class have conventional propeller shafts. "We are lucky on here. All of the Fincantieri Grand class ships and evolutions thereof have big stern thrusters. The two that were built in Japan are slightly smaller but not significantly. We can maneuver these ships pretty well into about 25 knots of wind. If we had azipods down at the back end we would do a little bit better but not significantly. Pods, I'm sure, will be the future but I don't think we are at a huge disadvantage not having them and while there are still technical difficulties with the manufacture of the pods. I have been on a podded ship and it is nice, but it is not essential."

One of the most distinctive features of GRAND PRINCESS is the nightclub that is perched high over the stern. It looks like the spoiler on a racing car and has been discontinued on the most recent ships in the class. "For navigation, it does not really affect it at all other than it creates a huge windage. It makes the ship like a weather vane. You can imagine, there is the big funnel and then there is this big spoiler on the back. If you have a wind on the side, it always wants to turn the bow of the ship into the wind. So, when maneuvering in strong winds, that does create added windage which I don't think is the reason they discontinued it. I think it was discontinued to change the look of the ship a little bit and to give more deck space in back."

There are variations in the design of the various Grand class ships, especially in the passenger area, but there are more similarities than differences. Do each of them have their own following?

"If you had asked me this about six months ago, I would have said 'no'. But, I actually think now that there are passengers who become familiar and like to go back to the same one. I can't tell you how many people who say: 'This is my sixth, seventh, eighth, tenth time on here.' And I say: 'On this particular ship or one of the same?' They say: 'No, no, we like to come to this one.' I didn't think that would be the case but there are numbers of people that just like familiarity."

"Ships have souls, it is true - - without any doubt, they do. [For example, the sister ships] the old CROWN and the REGAL PRINCESS, the two were chalk and cheese. They always were. The people changed but they stayed the CROWN and the REGAL and one was more popular than the other. The old ISLAND and PACIFIC PRINCESS, they were identical

ships. But, people would go specifically back to the ISLAND and people would go specifically back to PACIFIC even though they were identical. When you walk up the gangway of a ship, you do get a feeling."

One of the ways passengers get to know the character of a ship is through interaction with the ship's officers. Over time, several factors have made it more difficult for passengers to develop relationships with officers. "[First], the ships have got so much bigger. CANBERRA had about 1,500 or 1,600 passengers and that was considered a massive ship. Whereas now, this is 2,600 so it is not quite double but it is a lot more. The PACIFIC PRINCESS only had 700 passengers. On the little ships, by virtue of being small, there were not so many people around. You bumped into people more frequently. [Second], the CANBERRA and the PACIFIC PRINCESS did longer cruises. On a seven-day cruise, you only scratch the surface." Third, the structure of a cruise has changed. For example, "all the senior officers would dine with the passengers every night and you got to know your table. Whereas now we have Personal Choice Dining in which people have dinner whenever they fancy, so you don't get to know people so well."

Still, Captain Perrin feels that it is important for the captain to maintain contact with passengers. "Now, you do have to get out there and work at it more to be seen. I make it my point to get out there and try and see people. I wander through the buffet when people are having breakfast and just casually wander through the tables and say 'Good morning, good afternoon' and try to become visual. It was much easier on those smaller ships, it was an easier task to be visible and to form those relationships but it is not impossible now."

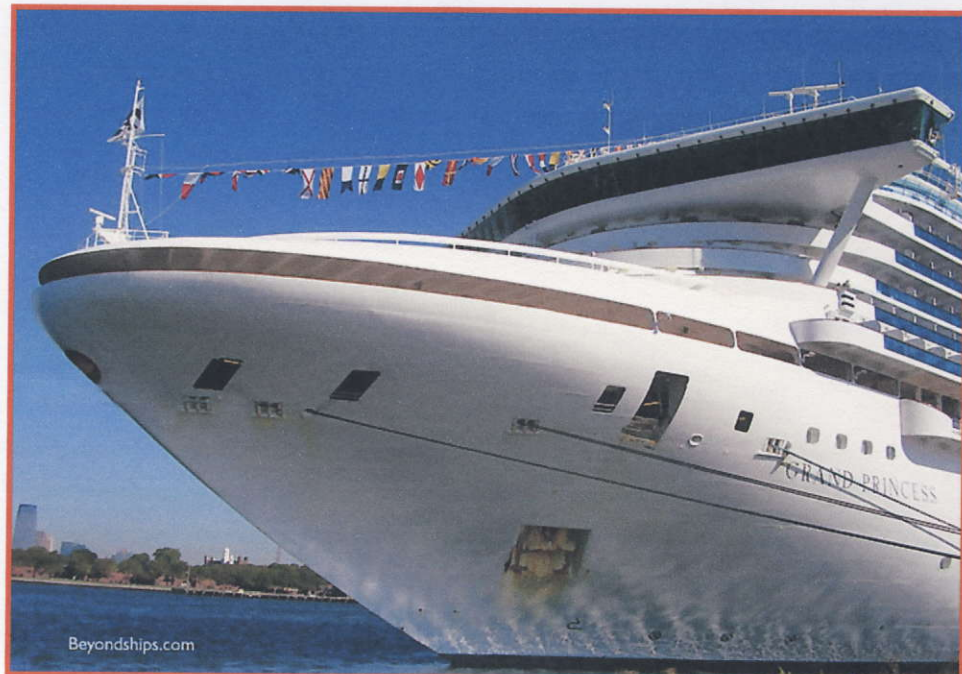
In addition, while passenger satisfaction and revenue production lies most directly within the ambit of the hotel manager (called Passenger Services Director on Princess ships), all officers have a part in passenger relations. "You have to become involved. Really, the more senior you get, you have to think in terms of what we are trying to achieve as a company and that it is a floating resort that we are navigating. [For example,] the arrival and having the gangways down in a timely fashion and running the tender services in a smart and tidy and timely way [have an impact on passenger satisfaction. Deck officers also must] think about the departure and the shows on tonight so we need to set a decent course so the dancers do not fall over. [They must also consider] the stability of the ship and how we can have all the swimming pools functioning and the work that is going on around the ship. It is impossible to separate."

By the same token, "someone could have run the most expensive hotel in the world ashore and you



just can't dump him onto a cruise ship and say run that resort because it does not work that way. He has got to understand that the ship is going to arrive late, do clearance with customs and immigration, that there is going to be technical issues from time-to-time. You can't just pick up the phone and call in the local plumber to unblock a pipe or whatever. So, it works in all directions, in all ways."

"Every cog has to fit together in a tight-fit frame. We are so lucky on here because our Chief Engineer, Hotel Manager and Staff Captain, we are together and singing from the same hymn sheet. It is a case of working very much together and understanding every ones problems."



*GRAND PRINCESS.*