Ocean Liners

Ocean liners are ships that provide regular, scheduled passenger transportation across oceans. They may also carry mail and cargo. They are sometimes used for other purposes such as troopships and cruise ships. Cargo vessels that run on a schedule are sometimes referred to as liners. Ships that travel short distances, such as ferries and cruise ships, are not considered ocean liners. Ocean liners were the primary mode of intercontinental travel from the mid-19th century to the 1960s, when they were finally largely replaced by jet airliners.

North Atlantic Ocean Liners

Due to the vast hoard of Europeans immigrating to the United States, the North Atlantic Ocean route dominated the industry. It is widely regarded as the most dangerous stretch of ocean in the world. Winter storms can produce 40- and 50-foot waves, which required ocean liners that sailed this route to have very high freeboard (tall sides).

Ship Prefixes

Most ocean liners carry the prefix "SS" before their names, which means both "Steam Ship" and "Screw-driven Steamship." Paddle steamers usually carried the prefix "PS," but if used as ocean liners, they carried the "SS" prefix. "RMS" stands for "Royal Mail Ship." These are ships that carried mail under contract with the British government.

Flag denotes the nationality of the ship.

Austria · Canada · France · Germany · Italy · Netherlands · Norway · United Kingdom · United States

The Blue Riband

This is an unofficial accolade given to a passenger liner crossing the Atlantic Ocean in regular service with the highest speed. The record is based on average speed rather than passage time because ships follow different routes. Traditionally, a ship is considered a record breaker" if she beats the eastbound speed record, but is not credited with the Blue Riband unless she also wins the more difficult westbound record against the Gulf Stream. The SS *United States* won the Blue Riband on her maiden voyage in 1952 and has held it ever since. Winners are marked with a blue ribbon icon on this poster.

James Monroe
1816. Black Ball Line. 110 ft.

Following the War of 1812, there was a constant flow of travelers between Great Britain and New York, so a small group of enterprising New York Quakers established the Black Ball Line. It began with four packet ships: *Amity*, *Courier*, *Pacific*, and *James Monroe*. One was to leave Liverpool and New York the first week of each month. They were the first ships to provide scheduled passenger service.

SS *Savannah*
1818. Scarborough & Isaacs. 98 ft.

Savannah was converted to steam while under construction. As the little ship cross every very little than the steam engine was only to be used when there was little wind. Many were afraid to get on the ship because of the fire-driven engine. On her first voyage, she sailed without any passengers. She successfully crossed the Atlantic, reaching Liverpool in 29 days. However, other ships, which took 40 days. Sirius was the first ship to win the Blue Riband. To reach New York she had to burn all her fuel and then her furniture. She was clearly too small for an Atlantic crossing. She made only one more round trip and then resumed her previous london to cork route.

SS *Sirius*
1837. B&A Steam Navigation Co. 200 ft.

In 1837, the *Great Western* was under construction, and the owners of the *Sirius* were determined to beat her across the Atlantic. *Sirius* left Cork, Ireland, on April 4, 1837, and arrived in New York 18 days later. This was a big improvement over sailing ships, which took 40 days. *Sirius* was the first ship to win the Blue Riband. To reach New York she had to burn all her fuel and then her furniture. She was clearly too small for an Atlantic crossing. She made only one more round trip and then resumed her previous london to cork route.

SS *Great Western*
1837. Great Western Steamship Co. 236 ft.

The *Great Western* was the first purpose-built Atlantic steamship. Designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, she was the model for all successful Atlantic wood paddlers. The *Great West-ern* departed Avonmouth four days after *Sirius*, but due to her greater speed, she arrived in New York only one day after *Sirius*, thus capturing the Blue Riband. She was the largest steamship for one year until the British and American *Britain Queen* went into service.

RMS *Britannia*
1840. B&NA RMS Packet Company 207 ft.

The *RMS Britannia* was the first purpose-built ocean liner of the British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, which evolved into the Cunard Steam-ship Company. She is regarded as the beginning of the Cunard Line. She was so successful that she was followed by sister ships *Acadia*, *Caledonia*, and *Columbia*. Each of the four ships could carry 115 passengers and 225 tons of cargo.

SS *Canadian*
1854. Montreal Ocean Steamship Co. 278 ft.

Hugh Allan was a Scottish-born Canadian. In 1851, he persuaded the Canadian government to subsidize a regular mail ship between London and Montreal, and London and Portland, Maine. He established the Montreal Ocean Steamship Company. Its first ship, *SS Canadian*, made her maiden voyage in 1854 by sailing from Liverpool to Quebec. With the help of his political contacts, Allan ousted Samuel Cunard and took control of the Royal Mail contract beginning in 1856.

SS *Vanderbilt*
1857. North Atlantic Mail SS Line. 331 ft.

Cornelius Vanderbilt began his career running ferry services around New York City. He expanded into many different businesses, including railroads and steamships. Among these businesses was his North Atlantic Mail Steamship Line. It was a passenger line, largely subsidized by lucrative govern-ment mail contracts. The Vanderbilt was its first ship. When the Civil War broke out, Vanderbilt gave the ship to the U.S. Navy, and she became the USS *Vanderbilt* but was affectionately known as *Vanderbilt's Yacht*. With her high speed of 34 knots, she was outfitted with a large battery of heavy guns and sent out on the high seas in a futile search for commerce raiders of the Confederate States of America, while inflicting serious damage on Union commercial shipping.

SS *Great Eastern*
1858. Great Ship Company. 692 ft.

Widely regarded as one of the greatest ships ever built, the SS *Great Eastern* was an iron sailing steamship designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. She was by far the largest ship ever built at the time she was launched and this was a record she held for over 40 years. She could carry 4,000 passengers around the world without refueling, but on her first voyage to America she carried only 35 passengers. She carried such a huge cargo that the voyage was profitable. Upon her return to England, she was chartered by the British government to transport 2,144 officers and men, 473 women and children, and 200 horses to Quebec. There were also 40 paying passengers. She made several other voyages, but the Cunard and Inman shipping lines launched a price war, forcing the *Great Ship Company* into debt. The *Great Eastern* was sold at auction. Under her new owners, she laid the first transatlantic telegraph cable, which ran over 2,600 statute miles. She later saw other service but was scrapped in 1888-1889. She was so big it took 18 months to take her apart.

RMS *Scotia*
1861. Cunard Line. 400 ft.

Scotia won the Blue Riband in 1865 for the fastest westbound transatlantic voyage. She averaged 14.46 knots. She retained this award until 1872. She was Cunard's largest ship until *Bothnia* and *Scythia* were completed in 1874. In 1863, Cunard and Inman began to use propeller-driven ships on the Atlantic express run. The power to be a better investment, as she was only a knot slower but could carry more cargo and consumed half as much fuel. Cunard quickly ordered two more screw steamers. In 1876, *Scotia* was withdrawn from passenger service. She was the last of the Atlantic paddlers. In 1879, *Scotia* was converted to a twin-screw cable layer. She served in her new role for 25 years until she was wrecked off the coast of Guam in March 1904. She is widely considered the best paddle steamer ever built.

SS *Canada*
1866. Compagnie Générale Transatlantique. 355 ft.

The Compagnie Générale Transatlantique, commonly called "Transat," and known overseas as "the French Line," was established in 1861 as an attempt to revive the French merchant marine, which had fallen on hard times. *Canada* was the first French-built ocean liner. She carried passengers to Quebec and Montreal, Canada. She was originally a paddle wheeler, but she was converted to screw propulsion in 1872. She was scrapped in 1908.

RMS *Atlantic*
1871. White Star Line. 420 ft.

The predecessor of the White Star Line was the chartered *RMS Tayleur*. She was to carry troops and passengers to Australia. She ran aground and sank on her maiden voyage in 1854. Of more than 650 passengers and crew aboard, only 290 survived. The company later merged with two other small lines, but excessive debt forced it into bankruptcy. It was purchased by Thomas Ismay because he wanted to break Cunard's virtual monopoly on North Atlantic passenger service.

SS *La Champagne*
1885. Compagnie Générale Transatlantique. 508 ft.

The bulk of the ocean liner passengers were immigrants coming to America in hope of a better life. The upper decks contained cabins occupied by first- and second-class passengers. As the trade became increasingly competitive, the various lines continually increased the luxuries offered. The immigrants had little money so they were carried below the other decks in "steerage."

La Champagne was named after the famous French wine. She and her sister ship, the *Bretagne*, were France's first true luxury liners. They carried 590 first-class, 66 second class, and 670 third-class steerage passengers. While at anchor in May of 1915 *La Champagne* ran aground, broke in half, and was a total loss.

SS *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*
1897. Norddeutscher Lloyd. 655 ft.

In an attempt to break the British stranglehold on the transatlantic passenger business, Germany sent engineers to work in British yards to learn how to build steamships. One of the engineers was Robert Zimmermann, who returned home to design the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*. She was the first German liner built specifically to the win the Blue Riband. When launched, she was the largest passenger ship in the world. She quickly demonstrated her ability to run at high speeds, winning the eastbound record in 1897 and the westbound record in 1898, thus winning the Blue Riband.

The Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was the first liner to have a commercial wireless telegraph system when the Marconi Company installed one in February of 1900. She was later modified to take third- and fourth-class fares in order to make the most of the large demand for emigrant passages from Europe to North America. Later she was requisitioned by the German navy and was converted into an auxiliary cruiser. She was caught refueling off the shore of western Africa by the British cruiser HMS *Highflyer* and became the first passenger ship to be sunk during World War I.

SS *Minnehaha*
1900. Atlantic Transport Line. 601 ft.

The Atlantic Transport Line was founded and owned by Americans, but operated out of Britain with British-registered and British-manned vessels. Most of which were British-built. The line began in 1882 and initially transported general cargo, live cattle, and a small number of passengers. In 1900, it introduced its first-class-only, direct London-to-New York passenger/cargo service (operated by its four Minne-class ships: SS *Minnehaha*, SS *Minneapolis*, SS *Minnehaha*, SS *Minnetonka* and SS *Minnewaska*. On September 7, 1917, *Minnehaha* was torpedoed by the German U-boat U-53 and sank within four minutes, resulting in 43 fatalities. Her sister ships, *Minneapolis* and *Minnetonka* were scuttled while in use as troop transports during World War I.

SS *Deutschland*
1900. Hamburg America Line. 680 ft.

SS Deutschland was a passenger liner owned by the Hamburg America Line of Germany. She sailed for over 25 years under three different names. The second ship to have been built as a four-funnel liner, she was built by Hamburg America as a response to the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*. Although she was very successful at capturing the Blue Riband from the British, she suffered from terrible vibrations.

RMS *Baltic*
1903. White Star Line. 729 ft.

RMS Baltic was an ocean liner of the White Star Line. At 23,876 gross tons, she was the largest ship in the world for two years. She was the third of a quartet of ships, all measuring over 20,000 gross tons, dubbed the "Big Four." the other three being *RMS Celtic*, *Cedric*, and *Adriatic*. In 1917, she transported Major General John J. Pershing and his staff to England at the beginning of American involvement in World War I. On February 17, 1955, she sailed for Osaka, Japan, where she was scrapped. The metal was used to make warships.

RMS *Lusitania*
1906. Cunard Line. 787 ft.

RMS Lusitania was a British ocean liner, holder of the Blue Riband, and briefly the world's biggest ship (prior to the launch of her running mate *Mauretania*). She was launched by the Cunard Line in 1906 at a time of fierce competition for North Atlantic trade. In 1915, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat, with heavy loss of life. It was one of the factors that led the U.S. to declare war on Germany and its subsequent combat involvement in World War I.

SS *Statendam*
1900. Holland America Line / United States Lines. 950 ft.

The *SS Noordam* was the second of a trio of liners built by Germany's Hamburg America Line for transatlantic passenger service. She began sailing the North Atlantic in 1914, but her early career was halted by the start of World War I. In 1917, she was seized by the U.S. government and renamed *SS Leviathan*. She would be known by this name for the majority of her career. She served as a troopship during World War I and later as the flagship of the United States Lines. She made her last voyage in 1938. During her 301 voyages, she carried over a quarter-million people, but never made a cent for her owners.

SS *Bismarck* / RMS *Majestic*
1914. Hamburg American Line. / White Star Line. 956 ft.

The *SS Bismarck* was launched in 1914. At 56,551 gross register tons, she was the largest ship in the world until the completion of the *SS Normandie* in 1935. Completion of the *Bismarck* was delayed by World War I. She never sailed under the German flag except on her sea trials in 1922. Following the war, she was awarded to her German builders who was handed over to the Allies as war reparations. She became the White Star Line flagship, the *RMS Majestic*.

SS *Conte Biancamano*
1925. Lloyd Sabaudo. 658 ft.

Conte Biancamano was an Italian liner built by William Beardmore & Company, near Glasgow, Scotland. She made her maiden voyage on November 20, 1925, from Genoa to New York, sailing, as expected, on a direct route to North America. The ship was intended primarily as a luxury liner. She made her last New York trip in 1932. Over the next few years, she was used for routes to South America and the Middle East. At the start of World War II she was seized by the United States and used as a troopship.

SS *Rex*
1931. Flotta Riunite. 880 ft.

The *SS Rex* was an Italian ocean liner launched in 1931. She held the westbound Blue Riband between 1933 and 1935. Originally built for the Navigazione Generale Italiana (NGI) as the *SS Guglielmo Marconi*, its state-ordered merger with the Lloyd Sabaudo Line meant that the ship sailed for the newly created Italia Flotta Riunite Italian Line. The *Rex* operated transatlantic crossings from Italy-was its running route. The Conte di Savoia. On September 8, 1944, off the coast of Solenzia, the *Rex* was hit by 14 rockets launched by RAF aircraft and caught fire. She burned for four days, then rolled onto the port side, and sank in shallow water. The ship was broken up at the site beginning in 1947.

SS *Normandie* / USS *Lafayette*
1932. Compagnie Générale Transatlantique / U.S. Navy. 1,029 ft.

SS Normandie entered service in 1932 as the largest and fastest passenger ship afloat; she is still the most steam-powerful turbo-electric-propelled passenger ship ever built. Despite this, she was not a commercial success and relied partly on government subsidies to operate. During service at the flagship of the CGT, she made 139 westbound transatlantic crossings from her home port of Le Havre, France, to New York. *Normandie* held the Blue Riband for the fastest transatlantic crossing several times during her service career. The RMS *Queen Mary* was her main rival. During World War II, the *Normandie* was seized by U.S. authorities at New York and turned over to the U.S. Navy. She was renamed the USS *Lafayette*. In 1942, the liner caught fire while being converted to a troopship; capsized onto her port side, and came to rest on the shoreward bottom of the Hudson River at Pier 88, the site of the current New York Passenger Ship Terminal. Although salvaged at great expense, restoration was deemed too costly, and she was scrapped in October 1946.

RMS *Empress of Britain*
1930. Canadian Pacific Steamship Company. 760 ft.

The RMS *Empress of Britain* was an ocean liner built between 1928 and 1931 by the John Brown Shipyard in Scotland and owned by the Canadian Pacific Steamship Company. This ship was the second of three CP vessels named "Empress of Britain." She provided scheduled transatlantic passenger service from Sailing to autumn between Canada and Europe from 1931 until 1939. In her day, she was the largest, fastest, and most luxurious ship traveling between England and Canada. She was torpedoed on October 28, 1940, by an German submarine U-32 research. At 42,348 gross tons, she was the largest liner lost during World War II and the largest ship ever sunk by a U-boat.

SS *Normandie*
1935. Compagnie Générale Transatlantique. 1,029 ft.

The *SS Normandie* was launched in 1932 and was the largest passenger ship ever built. She was the most luxurious ocean liner ever constructed. She was the first ship to exceed 1,000 feet in length. She was also the largest ship in the world until the completion of the *Queen Mary* in 1936. She was the most technologically advanced ship of her time. She was the first ship to have a theater-style movie projector installed. She was also the first ship to have a full air-conditioning system. She was the first ship to have a cabin class. She was the first ship to have a cabin class. She was the first ship to have a cabin class