

Basic Detail Report



PS Ruby

Vessel number

HV000010

Date

1907

Primary Maker

Commander Hugh King

Description

PS RUBY was built by David Lowe Milne (1848-1919) for the Captain Hugh King. Both were well established in their trades and occupations at that time. It is particularly notable for a relatively shallow draft for its size, which allowed it to operate when river levels were low and other craft were unable to be used. It is one of the few paddle steamers from the Murray still in operational condition, and its construction, styling and arrangement closely represent how it was around 1915 and the associated period. PS RUBY provides a good example and experience of how a vessel of this type and era was designed, built, arranged and operated. The wide opening and generous size of the engine compartment is particularly impressive and educational in terms of the steam propulsion used on paddle steamers. The layout illustrates how passengers, crew and cargo were accommodated on the one vessel. The paddle steamers were vital to the development of settlement and commerce on the Murray and Darling systems for many decades. However from the early 1900s the establishment of a net work of train lines and later on roads eroded the river routes importance. Ruby was one of the last few steamers to be operating in this period and its working life ceased in the early 1930,s just over 20 years after it went into service. It later became a houseboat, and a number of paddle steamers had their lives extended through this adaptation, rather than being abandoned or broken up. The paddle steamer PS RUBY was built at Morgan in 1907 for Captain Hugh King and has been credited to David Low Milne (1850 - 1919), who was probably one of the builders involved. It was the fourth riverboat of that name to be used on the Murray. RUBY was 39.85m in length and had a beam of 5.71m. It was built with a whaleboat stern, a straight stem and a carvel planked hull. The internal depth of the hull was 6 feet (1.83 m) from deck to keel. RUBY's outstanding feature was that it had very light draught, drawing between 2'6" and 3' (0.75 m to 0.915 m) when fully laden at around 85 tons. This enabled RUBY to operate on much lower river levels when other steamers were tied up. RUBY carried 30 passengers in style and comfort and had three decks. The top deck featured the wheelhouse, chimney stack along with the captain and mate's quarters. Later in its career female crew quarters and a music room were added. The second deck housed the passengers, saloon, and bathrooms. The lower or cargo deck contained the engineer's cabin, galley and crew quarters. In the early days, RUBY was plagued by engine weaknesses. The original 20 n.h.p engine from Robey and Co. Lincoln UK did not prove satisfactory. In 1911 RUBY was fitted with a narrow gauge locomotive boiler from the SA Railways and the direct action engines from the PS INDUSTRY. In 1918 these were removed and the engine and boiler from the PS

LANCASHIRE LASS were installed. RUBY became one of the fleet of the newly formed Gem Navigation Company in 1909. This was a union of the Ben Chaffey Steamboat Company and Captain King's Gem Line of steamers, with head quarters in the Adelaide office of Messrs. A.H. Landseer Ltd. This company was later to become the Murray Steamship Company. At this stage RUBY was fitted with all modern conveniences for passenger traffic, including fly screens on windows and doors. Electric lights and fans were later fitted in the cabins. The 'Federal Standard', the Wentworth newspaper at the time, spoke of RUBY in that year as being as fast as any vessel on the river. GEM (now at Swan Hill), MARION (at Mannum) and RUBY were all passenger/cargo steamers of the same fleet. RUBY proved to be a valuable member of the fleet and was transferred from one route to another depending on the water in the rivers. It travelled the Morgan to Swan Hill route for most of its working life and was a 'bottom ender' in every respect. It never ventured further up the river because of its length. The vessel was taken off the run in the early thirties and tied up at its home port of Morgan until purchased in 1938 by Maurice Collins, who took it to Mildura to use as a houseboat. Two years later, stripped of most of the superstructure it was sold to Vic Robins who also used it as a houseboat. By 1968 it had deteriorated substantially but through the foresight of a Wentworth electrical engineer Frank Fotherby, the Wentworth Rotary Club was encouraged to purchase RUBY for \$1600. It was towed to Wentworth and placed in a park opposite the wharf it had tied up to so many years before. RUBY became a feature of the park for thirty years, until a rapid deterioration began. In 1996, Rotary placed RUBY in the trusteeship of the Wentworth Shire Council. A committee made up of local service groups and townspeople was formed to commence full restoration work. Under the guidance of Captain Leon Wagner the long restoration and rebuilding project began. On Sunday 11 July 2004 RUBY was recommissioned and handed over to the people of Wentworth. Work continued under a new board of management and in 2007 RUBY became operational. It now has a 20 nhp Robey engine installed, built in 1926 and this newer model than the original 1907 installation is much better suited to the vessel. It has been rebuilt and restored back to its construction, arrangement and configuration in a manner that interprets its heyday around 1915 to 1920, with work continuing to bring as many details as possible back to their correct arrangement as further more accurate information is brought forward. Further restoration work has been undertaken and the engine has been given a complete overhaul and re tuning of the set up to sort out some initial issues that were apparent. It now runs smoothly and the vessel is operated monthly. PS RUBY is now a major attraction at Wentworth and a rare example of a working paddle steamer on the Murray River. References: Paddle Steamer RUBY, One Hundred Years On, Jeannette Hope, 2007 and other material supplied by PS RUBY Restoration Committee. www.psruby.com

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 39.85 m x 5.71 m x 1.83 m (130.75 ft. x 18.73 ft. x 6 ft.) Engine dimensions: 279 x 406 mm, 52.22Kilowatts, 2No. (10.96 x 15.96 in., 70.03 Horsepower)