

Bay watch | EVERY THURSDAY THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER WE UNCOVER THE HIDDEN WONDERS OF HAMILTON HARBOUR

# Blue highway

BY DANA BORCEA

A hard-working town deserves a hard-working harbour. Each year, Hamilton's port welcomes more than 700 vessels handling more than 12 million tonnes of cargo, making it the busiest port on the Great Lakes. The opening of the Burlington Canal in 1830 linked the harbour to the Great Lakes shipping routes and transformed Hamilton into a port city. The opening of the Welland Ship Canal in 1932 and then the St. Lawrence Seaway almost 30 years later helped boost the city's shipping industry and made Hamilton one of the country's ports with the most traffic.

About 550 domestic carriers or "lakers" and 150 overseas ships called "salties" travel in and out of the harbour during its nine-month season which begins in late March.

Many bring iron ore and coal to feed the steel mills lining the southeastern shore. Others carry coil and pipes, salt and sand, grains and soybeans, liquid fertilizer and jet fuel.

With access to much of the port's 10,000 metres of dockwalls restricted, your best bet for ship-watching might be from the harbour's gateway, the Burlington Canal.

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For a snapshot of the ships coming in and out of port, visit [www.hamiltonport.ca/commercial/vesseltracking.aspx](http://www.hamiltonport.ca/commercial/vesseltracking.aspx)



FEDNAV

## Lake Ontario

Don't let the name fool you. The Lake Ontario is not, in fact, a laker but one of more than 100 overseas vessels that visit Hamilton Harbour every year.

Part of the FedNav fleet of more than 70 overseas ships trading around the world, the Lake Ontario's hull is painted a signature deep red.

At 220 metres, the Lake Ontario is among the largest ocean-going vessels to call at Hamilton.

According to John Weale of FedNav, the Lake Ontario is interesting "because it's equipped with a steering nozzle rather than a rudder. The pilots have always commented favourably on its manoeuvrability."

The Lake Ontario generally picks up a cargo of raw steel materials in either Germany or Belgium.

Once she's delivered in ports along the St. Lawrence, Lake Erie, Lake Michigan and Lake Ontario, she often loads grain to take overseas.

As a foreign flag ship with international partners, she cannot trade between Canadian ports. Federal Marine Terminal's piers 12 and 14 welcome the Lake Ontario at least twice a year.

## The Hamilton Harbour Queen

The harbour's newest cruise ship, the Hamilton Harbour Queen, had a long journey before arriving here. Built in Owen Sound in 1956, the 30-metre steel boat was cut in seven pieces and transported to the Mackenzie River by train and winter roads where it was welded together and put to work as a supply tug. She has since been cut up, reassembled and worked from west to east doing turns as a tug, a freighter and tour boat.

The cruise offers a view of the city from the water that's not available from the waterfront's trails and parks, a perspective once reserved for private boaters.

Passengers are clambering aboard to experience it.

Organizers booked more than 3,000 reservations before the Queen made her maiden voyage last May. Hamilton's Waterfront Trust says she's been doing brisk business ever since.

The half-million dollar investment represents the latest effort in a decade-long drive to revitalize the waterfront.

It can be found docked at Pier 8.



HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO



SHERYL NADLER, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

## The Hamilton Energy

As the only floating gas station on the Great Lakes, the Hamilton Energy works around the clock to keep Hamilton Harbour's vessels in fuel.

The 60-metre ship is popular in our harbour and beyond for the time it saves ship crews.

"If a ship comes in at 3 a.m. on a Sunday morning, we'll go to it," says Adrian Mitterhuber, president of Provmar Fuel, the Energy's owner. "That way it doesn't have to pull up to a traditional fuelling dock. It can keep unloading cargo. It can keep working. That's the beauty of the operation."

Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the Energy also supplies fuel to ships in Toronto, Mississauga, Oshawa and St. Catharines.

Its most famous client was probably Her Majesty's Yacht, the Britannia. The scrappy tanker pumped more than 250 tonnes of fuel into the royal vessel in Toronto Harbour when it was on its way to Hong Kong to be decommissioned nearly a decade ago.

While its regular customers may not be as glamorous, they are no less grateful.

An estimated 80 per cent of vessels entering the harbour require a fill-up.

Built in Grangemouth, Scotland, in 1968, the floating gas bar is celebrating its 20th year in the harbour.

She's docked at Pier 24 near Windermere Basin during some much deserved downtime.



THIES BOGNER

## The Progress

The Progress is among the busiest of McKeil Marine's fleet of 35 tugs. With its two-person crew, the 25-metre tug helps about four ocean vessels dock in the harbour each week.

Built in 1948, the Progress is an old timer in the harbour.

She was overhauled six years ago and received another extensive upgrade last year.

When she's not pushing around foreign vessels, you can find her docked at McKeil's pier 15.

## The Assiniboine

Thanks to a new name and a recent makeover, the Assiniboine sailed into Hamilton in July as the harbour's newest laker.

The Great Lakes self-unloading bulk carrier has spent more than a year at the Port Weller Dry Docks in St. Catharines undergoing a \$30 million fore-body replacement which extended its length to 225 metres.

The upgrade was part of the Canadian Steamship Lines' \$225 million fleet renewal program. Until recently, the company was owned by Prime Minister Paul Martin.

Assiniboine's predecessor, the Jean Parisien, sailed her maiden voyage in the winter of 1977 to Sandusky, Ohio, where she loaded coal bound for Hamilton.

While she spent most of her career hauling coal and ore, the ship will perhaps be better remembered for barley.

On Sept. 1, 1981, the Jean Parisien set a record for loading more than one million bushels of the grain in Thunder Bay.

The Assiniboine will continue to deliver iron ore, coal and limestone to Stelco, its main client. Inspired by Manitoba's Assiniboine River, the name, say its builders, is a tip of the hat to Canada's grain producing western provinces.

Expect to find her docked at Stelco's pier at least once a month.



JIM McRAE



THIES BOGNER

## Alouette Spirit

Described by its operators as the only one of its kind in North America, the Alouette is the harbour's newest integrated barge and tug-boat. Unique in design, the Alouette can handle rougher weather than a traditional tug and barge connected by a tow line.

The 125-metre barge, capable of hauling 11,000 metric tonnes, will be dedicated to the Quebec-based aluminum producer, Aluminerie Alouette, and operate between Sept-Îles and Trois-Rivières.

Half the company's annual aluminum production will now be shipped by river during the navigational season, something it calls its "blue highway" initiative.

Originally built as a liquid tank barge in Louisiana, the Alouette became the latest addition to McKeil Marine's fleet with its launch in July.



THIES BOGNER

## McCleary's Spirit

The McCleary's Spirit was put into service in 2002 as McCleary's first and only clean petroleum barge.

Like the Alouette, McCleary's is an integrated tug and barge with 11,000 tonne capacity. Although it delivers from Sault Ste. Marie to Cornerbrook, Newfoundland, the barge can often be seen discharging cargo at Vopak Terminals in Hamilton Harbour.

Built in Belgium in the late 1960s, she was towed across the Atlantic from England in 1999 and then spent a couple of years laid up in Hamilton Harbour.

In 2001, the ship was stripped and refurbished.

She re-entered service in early 2002 as McCleary's Spirit and began plying the waters of the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence and the East Coast.