

CLASSIC *FAST* FERRIES



/ PENNIE & DAVID GRIFFITHS photo

But first we take the hovercraft

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It is amazing what may crop up when you are researching something completely different.

In the spring 1970 a young Australian couple who at the time resided in Great Britain set out to tour continental Europe by taxi. Luckily there was no fare meter in it as the 1958-built cab had been acquired by the couple following its retirement from service on the streets of London. After having completed the European tour in the taxi, and another without it, the couple moved back to Australia taking their beloved taxi with them. They have since imported and owned three more London taxis.

So where does a classic fast ferry come into all this? The answer is in these photos which were taken prior to departing for France on the cross-Channel hovercraft from Dover to Boulogne.

Built by the British Hovercraft Corporation, *The Princess Anne* entered service with British Rail Seaspeed across the English Channel in 1968 along with *The Princess Margaret*. Four more of the design were delivered by BHC to competing cross-Channel operator Hoverlloyd. Designated SR.N4, these craft originally had a length overall of just under 40 metres and beam overall of 24 metres and as such would carry 254 passengers and 30 cars. Hoverlloyd subsequently had these figures increased to 282 and 37, respectively, in a modest rebuild, by which the craft were designated SR.N4 Mk II.



*The imposing Seaspeed hovercraft at the Dover hoverport in 1970.
The famous London taxi is seen on the extreme right in the top photo.
/ PENNIE & DAVID GRIFFITHS photo*

As popularity of the swift cross-Channel service grew, it was decided to opt for a rebuild on a much grander scale, stretching the SR.N4s to a length overall of 56.4 m. This was achieved by inserting a nearly 17 m long prefabricated section amidships and widening the existing superstructure. Payload on the new giant SR.N4 Mk III, also known as the Super 4, was 418 passengers and up to 60 cars. *The Princess Anne* was the first to be converted and re-entered service in July 1978 with *The Princess Margaret* joining it in May the following year.

Seaspeed and Hoverlloyd joined forces in 1981 and became Hoverspeed.

Being the surviving pair of the once six SR.N4s in service across the Channel, the *Princesses* were retired in 2000, making their final crossings from Calais to Dover in the evening of October 1. Only the year before both hovercraft had been extensively refurbished to see them operating well into the new century. They were subsequently moved to the premises of the Hovercraft Museum at Lee on the Solent and put on the market. So far no deal has been closed and the craft remain at the Museum grounds. **CFF** (*Published October 2012*)

The Princess Anne at the Hovercraft Museum grounds in southern England a few years back.
The Princess Margaret is visible at right
/ MARTIN GRIMM photo



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