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# Classic Fast Ferries

HYDROFOILS HOVERCRAFT SESS & CATAMARANS

A man with short grey hair, wearing a dark blue polo shirt and maroon shorts, stands with his arms crossed in front of a large blue and white hydrofoil boat. The boat is mounted on a wooden dry-dock stand. The background shows a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds, a body of water, and the masts of other boats in the distance.

**A MAN  
AND HIS  
HYDROFOIL**





# A M A N A N D H I S H Y D R O F O I L



**Who is the proud owner of a life-size hydrofoil?!**  
**Andrew Heighway with his teenhood love, RHS 140 *Curl Curl*, currently named *Spargi*, in Messina, Sicily**

/ ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo, both

**CLASSIC  
FAST  
FERRIES**

DECEMBER 2018 / ISSUE 57

THE ORIGINAL PERIODICAL ABOUT THE HISTORY OF HYDROFOILS, HOVERCRAFT, CATAMARANS AND SURFACE EFFECT SHIPS, THEIR BUILDERS AND OPERATORS WORLDWIDE.

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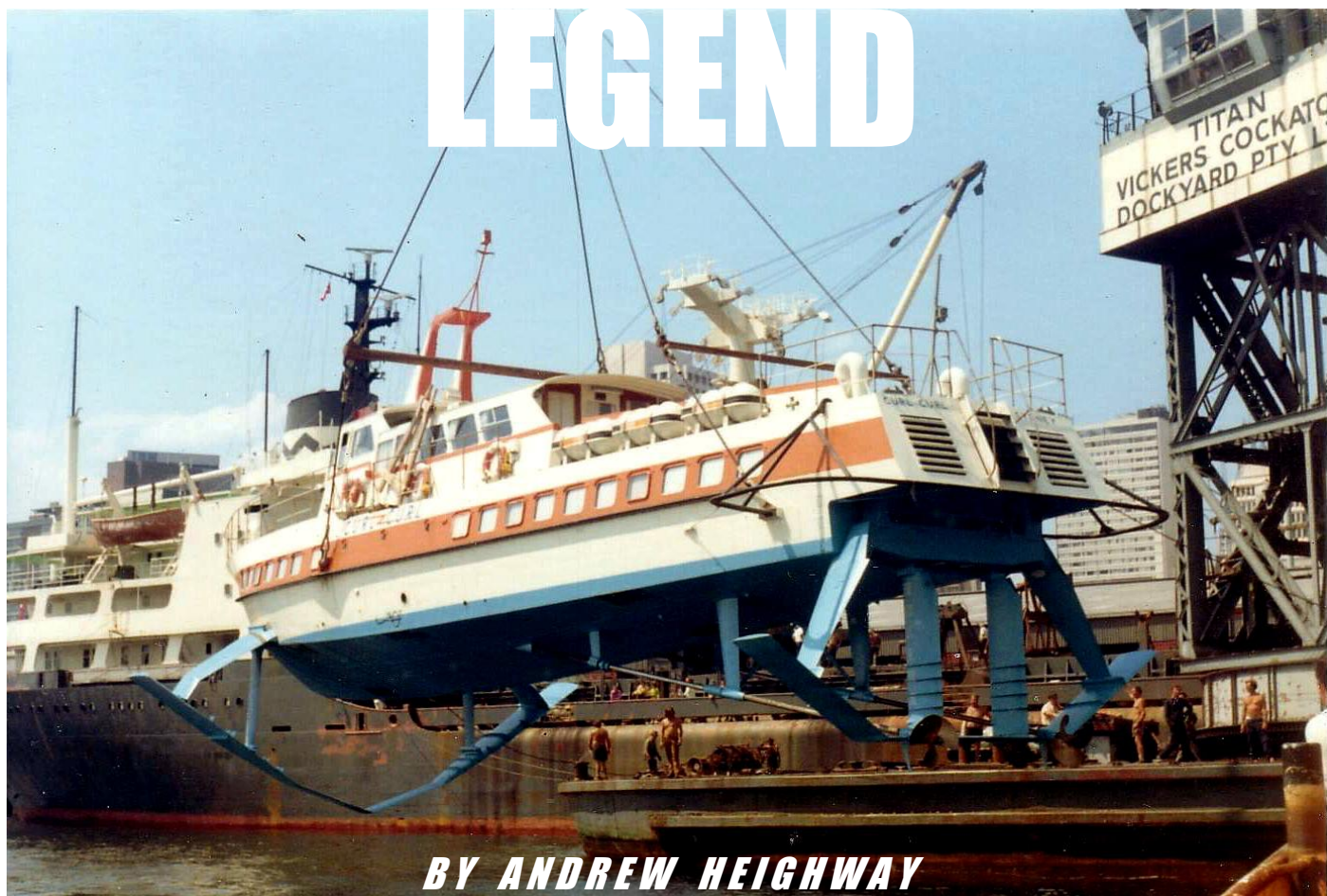
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**COVER :** Andrew Heighway has bought himself a life-size, former Australian RHS 140 hydrofoil  
 ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo



# THE REBIRTH OF A LEGEND

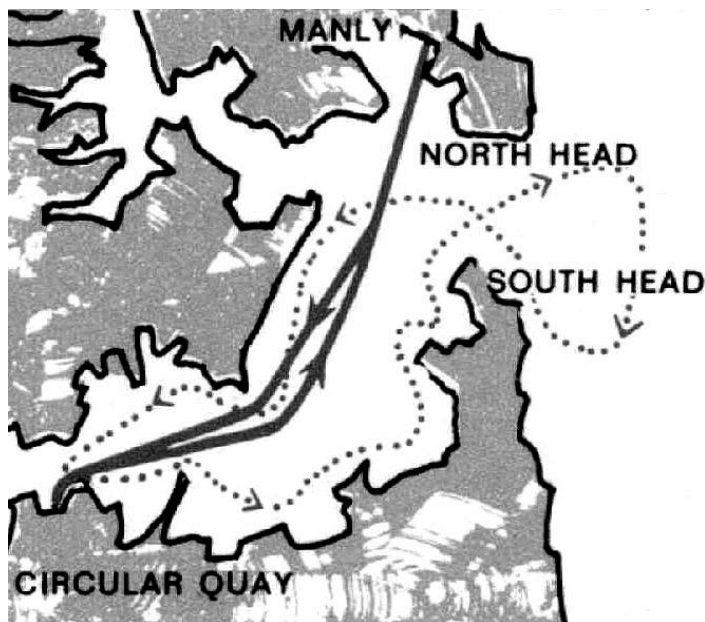


**BY ANDREW HEIGHWAY**

**S**o what defines a 'legendary' hydrofoil? Certainly, ground-breaking hydrofoils would join this elite club. The small, 30-seat Supramar PT 10 *Freccia d'Oro* which was introduced on the world's first scheduled passenger service on Lake Maggiore in north Italy in May 1953 certainly tops this list.

Then there are hydrofoils which have led colourful lives and operated in different locations. Some such hydrofoils even exist today. For instance, the Rodriguez yard number 119, PT 50 *Freccia Adriatica* delivered

**Above :** RHS 140 Curl Curl being lowered onto the water on arrival in Sydney from Messina, Italy in 1972 / JOHN DARROCH photo



So, if *Nilo* deserves legendary status for her history in European waters, what about a hydrofoil that has spent its life operating on both sides of the planet and by some amazing twist of fate, and against all the odds, still exists today?

#### How it all started

On 30th December 1964, the Port Jackson & Manly Steamship Company of Sydney, Australia, took delivery of a Hitachi-built PT 20 hydrofoil named *Manly*. She was the first of what would prove to count eight hydrofoils operating the six mile route between Circular Quay in Sydney and Manly for twenty-six years between 1965 and 1991. All but the PT 20 were built in Italy by the pioneering hydrofoil shipyard of Rodriquez.

This article focuses on the fourth hydrofoil to enter service on Sydney Harbour, the RHS 140 *Curl Curl*. Being yard number 155, *Curl Curl* was

**Above :** Route of the Sydney hydrofoils. The dotted line shows the sightseeing trip which was operated for some time

Like most operations with a longer history, the livery on the Sydney hydrofoils changed over time  
/ JOHN DARROCH photo



in 1969, was originally ordered for off-shore services in the Adriatic Sea with Agip. In addition to spending most of her working life with Aliscafi SNAV in the Mediterranean, she played a cameo as *Condor 2* on Condor's Channel Islands service for three seasons in 1969, 1970 and 1981.

With her operational life seemingly over by the early 2000s, she was unexpectedly purchased by Vetur Aliscafi in 2005, refurbished and brought back into service. Renamed *Nilo* the vessel operated until 2008, when it was laid up.

Remarkably, the now almost 50-year old hydrofoil is still alive and in remarkably good condition, basking in dry dock in the Neapolitan sun.

the sixth of a total of thirteen RHS 140-class hydrofoils to be built and operated on Sydney Harbour from 1972 until the end in 1991. It became the longest-serving member of the Sydney hydrofoil fleet and seemed to be an ever-present on Sydney Harbour.

In 1991, for political reasons and due to a mix of spiralling operational costs for the hydrofoils and a perceived poor reliability record, the four surviving members of the hydrofoil fleet – PT 50 *Long Reef*, RHS 140 *Curl Curl* and RHS 160Fs *Manly* and *Sydney* – were withdrawn from service, sold to Italian operator Aliscafi SNAV and shipped back to Italy in 1992.





**Left :** *Who would have thought...*

A 16-year old Andrew sits in the Belvedere saloon on Curl Curl in 1988, little knowing that he will one day be the owner of this RHS 140 hydrofoil

/ ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo

**Below :** *Curl Curl in full flight on Sydney Harbour*

/ STUART McPHERSON photo

Soon after their arrival in Naples the two youngest hydrofoils, *Manly* and *Sydney*, delivered in 1984 and 1985, were renamed *Sinai* and *Fast Blu* respectively and entered service in northwest Italy (*Fast Blue*) and in the Mediterranean. Not being particularly old, both RHS 160Fs had been retired and scrapped by 2010.

*Long Reef* and *Curl Curl* both appeared on SNAV's fleet roster for some time, but neither appears to have seen any active service with the operator. The PT.50 was cannibalised for parts

and subsequently scrapped and the RHS 140 put on the market.

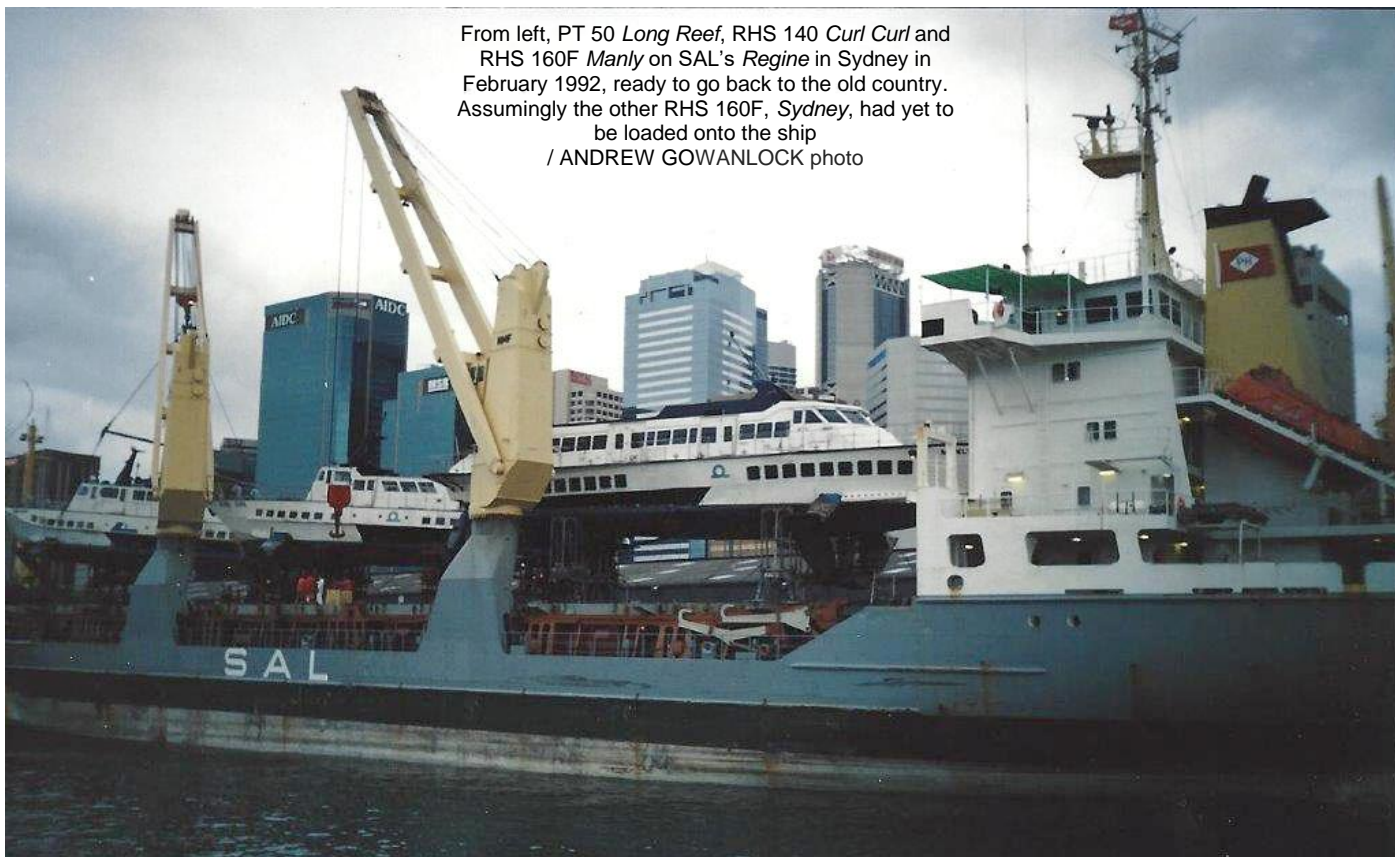
*Curl Curl* was eventually sold in 1995 to a fledgling Sicilian operator, Ustica Lines, currently known as Liberty Lines, based in Trapani. Having been extensively refurbished to 'as new' condition she began her new life in Sicilian waters as *Spargi*.

In 2004 another new operator, Alimare, entered the scene and purchased *Spargi* from Ustica Lines. The hydrofoil was introduced in May on a new





From left, PT 50 *Long Reef*, RHS 140 *Curl Curl* and RHS 160F *Manly* on SAL's *Regine* in Sydney in February 1992, ready to go back to the old country. Assumingly the other RHS 160F, *Sydney*, had yet to be loaded onto the ship  
/ ANDREW GOWANLOCK photo



airport shuttle linking the Aeroporto dello Stretto in Reggio on the mainland and Messina.

This new service did not prove successful and a little over a year later Alimare was declared bankrupt and *Spargi* was put into dry dock in Messina – where she has remained to this day.

Under normal circumstances, *Spargi* would have been scrapped long ago. However, fate would have its say and the bankruptcy courts of Reggio Calabria tried each year to sell the hydrofoil. The price was seen as way too high and there were no takers, even though the price was lowered every year.

PT 50 *Long Reef* and RHS 140 *Curl Curl* shortly after arrival in Naples in 1992. *Curl Curl* would later enter service with Ustica Lines as *Spargi*, whereas the PT 50 never re-entered service in Italy  
/ TIM TIMOLEON photo





*Spargi* was hard to miss in the unconventional Ustica Lines colour scheme / ENZO ANNUARIO photo

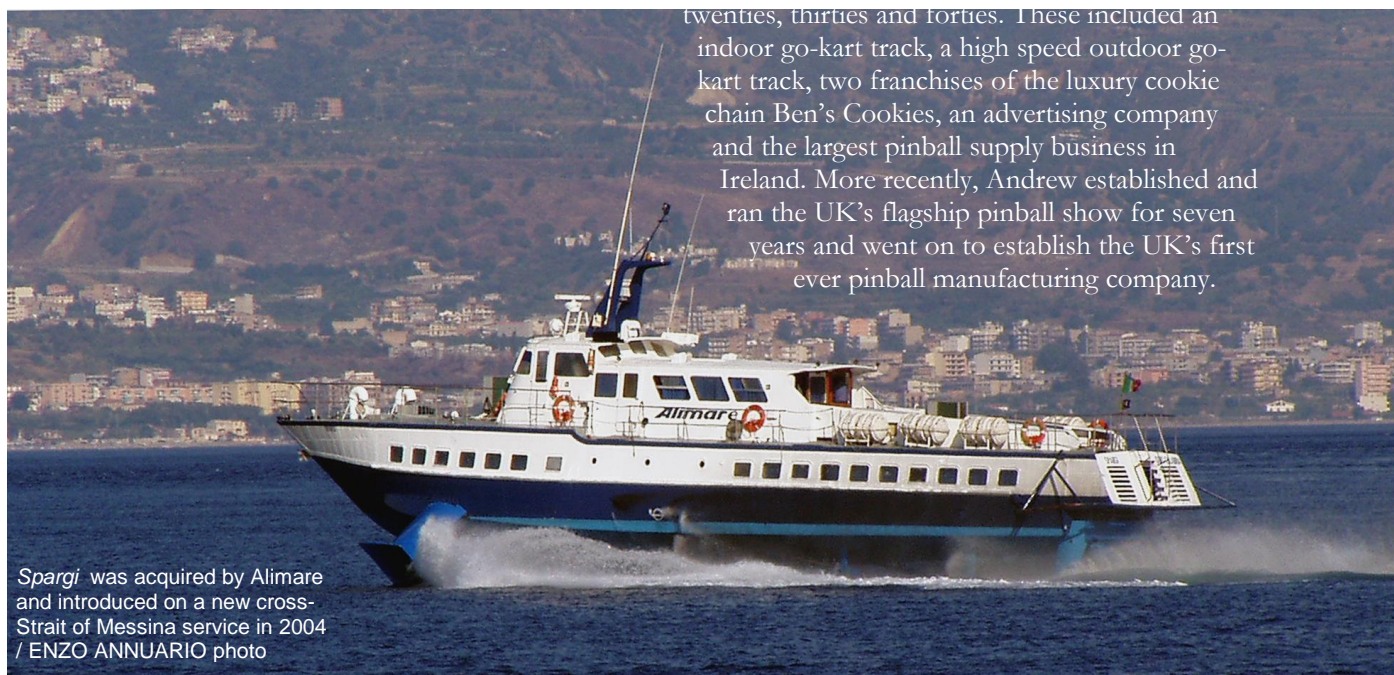


## A Man and His Hydrofoil

Andrew Heighway is a 47-year old businessman who lives near Cardiff, in Wales, UK. He is the son of an ex-British Airways Captain who was based out of Sydney for a number of postings during the 1980s. Andrew and his family spent plenty of time living in Manly, a suburb of Sydney. Whilst there, Andrew fell in love with the grace, power and

speed of the Sydney hydrofoils. Nothing else came close to the hydrofoils for speed and comfort. He took many photos of the hydrofoils and even filmed a journey on the bridge of *Curl Curl* one day with a shaky VHS camcorder.

Working for some companies for short times in his career, Andrew is an entrepreneur at heart and formed and ran a number of businesses in his twenties, thirties and forties. These included an indoor go-kart track, a high speed outdoor go-kart track, two franchises of the luxury cookie chain Ben's Cookies, an advertising company and the largest pinball supply business in Ireland. More recently, Andrew established and ran the UK's flagship pinball show for seven years and went on to establish the UK's first ever pinball manufacturing company.



*Spargi* was acquired by Alimare and introduced on a new cross-Strait of Messina service in 2004 / ENZO ANNUARIO photo





**Above :** Best seat in the house! Sandpaper, paint and varnish will bring it back to its glorious self / ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo

Andrew's interest in hydrofoils was on the backburner during these busy years, but he still kept in touch with his friend Alan Blunden, editor of the trade journal High-Speed Surface Craft later known as Fast Ferry International. Andrew and Alan would speak over the phone every couple of years, when Andrew would inevitably ask about the fate of his favourite hydrofoil *Curl Curl*. For five or six years, Andrew heard the same mystical story – that the vessel was sitting on a beach somewhere in Messina, Sicily, apparently in good condition and waiting for somebody to rescue her.

In one particular conversation at the start of 2016, Andrew learnt that the hydrofoil had been renamed *Spargi*. He went digging for information and to his great surprise saw her listed for sale on an Italian online auction site. However, the auction had ended three months earlier. Was he too late?

Andrew couldn't believe that he had missed out on the opportunity to potentially buy this amazing vessel. After a number of enquiries, he was told that he was "too late" and that she had been scrapped. Dogged and undeterred, Andrew went digging further and made contact with the shipyard in which *Spargi* was sitting and found she **was** actually still in existence – and available for purchase.

Within weeks, Andrew and his wife flew over to Sicily and negotiated a long term deal for him to purchase the hydrofoil. Andrew believes it is hard to justify moments in life as being fate but concedes this is a story that has gone full circle and is the closest episode in his life that could be considered as being his destiny.

Having negotiated a deal to purchase the hydrofoil, the next question was what to do with it? Andrew considered converting it into a private yacht, but this would require significant funds which he didn't currently have. Besides, he felt like there was a much bigger purpose for this vessel.

Following the withdrawal of the hydrofoils from Sydney Harbour in 1991, the success of their replacements – the JetCat catamarans, designed and built in Australia – was chequered at best. The new boats were much more thirsty on fuel than the hydrofoils, their reliability wasn't much better and the wake they generated was more destructive on the sea walls. When the JetCats were withdrawn from service in 2008, they were replaced by slower catamarans that only reached a maximum speed of 26 knots – a full 10+ knots less than what the hydrofoils were able to achieve.



**Below :** The upper saloon has had its seats and carpets removed to allow for the engines to be lifted out.  
Compare with top photo on page 5

**Bottom :** The lower front saloon on Spargi. Not much, if anything, has changed since the Alimare time. The seats will be retained, however, likely re-foamed and re-covered.  
Note the former phone bubble on the wall next to the toilet  
/ ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo, both

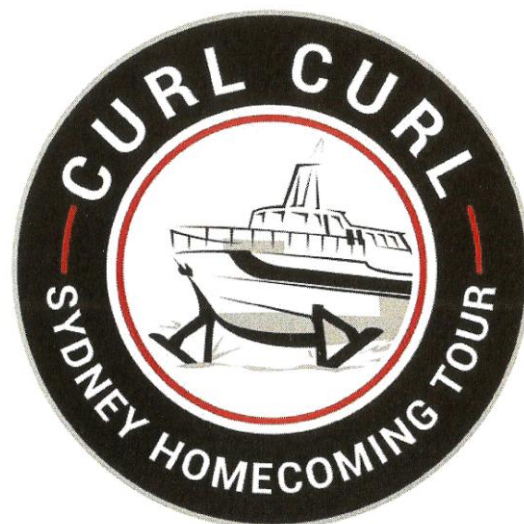




Riding on a hydrofoil is a bit like flying on an aircraft. They both have loud whistling engines, both take off and land, and with both you are flying above the surface level from where you started. They are events and experiences that many residents and visitors of Sydney still talk about fondly today, twenty-seven years after they were last seen on the Harbour.

### The homecoming

This got Andrew thinking, “Why not take *Curl Curl* back to Sydney for a ‘Homecoming Tour’ for people to see her fly once again over the Harbour water?”. The idea got more traction and Andrew started putting together a business plan to make this happen.



The wheelhouse on *Spargi / Curl Curl* needs refurbishment and upgrading to today's requirements and standards  
/ ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo

The next step was to visit Australia in March 2018 and to gauge opinions of his plan to bring *Curl Curl* home. Channel 7 News ran a piece on the venture and the story was covered in the Sydney Morning Herald, the Manly Daily and the Daily Telegraph. Additionally, Andrew featured on five radio shows, including Radio Sydney, Radio Northern beaches and 2Ser 1076.3.

During his visit, Andrew gave a presentation on the venture to a select crowd of enthusiasts, marine engineers and local dignitaries.

So what about *Spargi*'s actual condition now?

When she was withdrawn from service in 2005 it was due to an engine fault. It appears there was a turbo fault, and metal shavings were discovered in the oil filters. Although she is aesthetically tatty and rusty in places, overall she is in good condition. By being kept in dry dock for the last thirteen years, she is structurally sound. She needs a good clean, modernising, new engines, new gearboxes, new navigation equipment, new safety equipment, sandblasting and a coat of new paint.

Luckily, the asbestos was removed during a major refit in Sydney in 1987.





The hull is in remarkably good condition overall. The entire hull will be sandblasted and then checked for plate thickness with non destructive testing. Some panels may need to be replaced and the four special steel 'lifting point' plates located behind the bow foil and in front of the stern foil may be removed to save weight

When complete, primer, paint and anti-fowl will be applied. The new livery has yet to be decided but Andrew is looking for a colour scheme that pays tribute to *Curl Curl's* history but is also modern and respects her exciting future.

The interior carpets will all be removed and replaced. Inner panels will also be fixed up or replaced. The seats are of the comfortable variety rather than the sanitised and uncomfortable seats that are often seen on transportation. The seats will likely be re-foamed and re-covered.

The wheelhouse will need refurbishment. New engines will require new helm controls and instrumentation. Navigation and safety equipment will all need to be upgraded.

Being a purist, Andrew's preference would be to keep the original MTU 12V 493 TY71 supercharged



**Above :** The stylish design of the RHS 140. Don't be fooled by the somewhat tatty and rusty appearance in places. Overall the hydrofoil is in good condition / ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo

**Left :** How the 9,500 nautical mile journey from Messina to Sydney might look. In reality it will probably navigate much closer to the coastlines for refuelling reasons



**Right :** Curl Curl's original MTU 493 TY71 super-charged marine diesels (top). Replacement options being considered are MTU 12V 2000 M72 (centre) and CAT C32 Acert (bottom) / ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo, all



marine diesels. The problem comes with keeping such old engines reliable in today's age. Acceptable emission levels would likely be exceeded and the big problem is that there was no manifold cooling on these engines, meaning the manifolds ran white hot at times – and present a safety risk today.

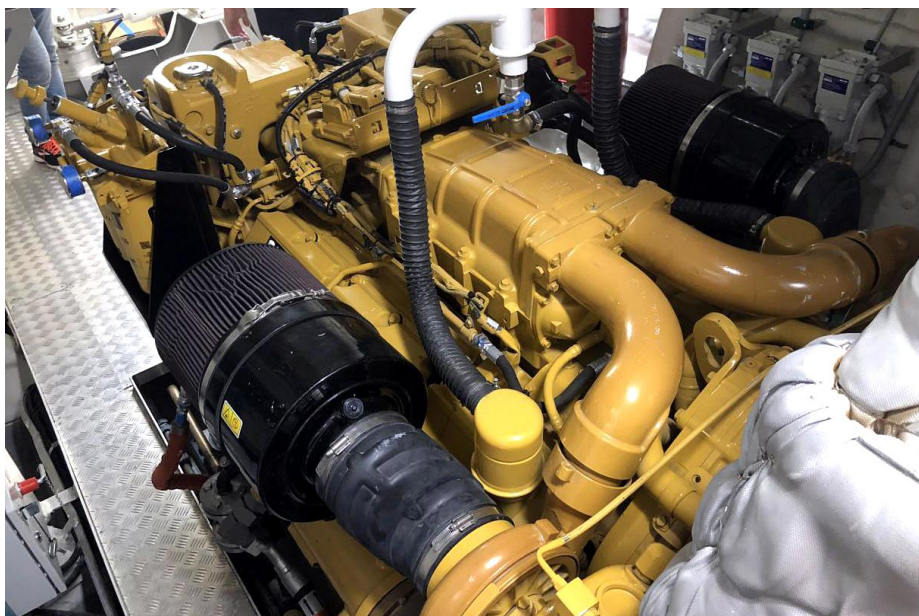
### **Taking it for a spin**

Factoring in the 9,500 nautical mile journeys each way between Sicily and Australia, it is clear that modern and reliable engines and gearboxes will be needed, especially if she is to enjoy a new commercial life following the Homecoming Tour.

The two realistic options being considered are MTU's 12V 2000 M72 and Caterpillar's C32 ACERT, both using the ZF 3050 gearbox. Both should prove reliable via global technical backup by the manufacturers for any potential problems.

The installation of the new engines will not be an easy and straightforward job. A marine engine will need to look at an installation project, along with the manufacturer and the ship yard. Final decisions will be made in early 2019.

Once the refurbishment work has been completed and the new engines





*Spargi* sitting high and dry in Messina awaiting her restoration to commence and having her original name back  
/ ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo

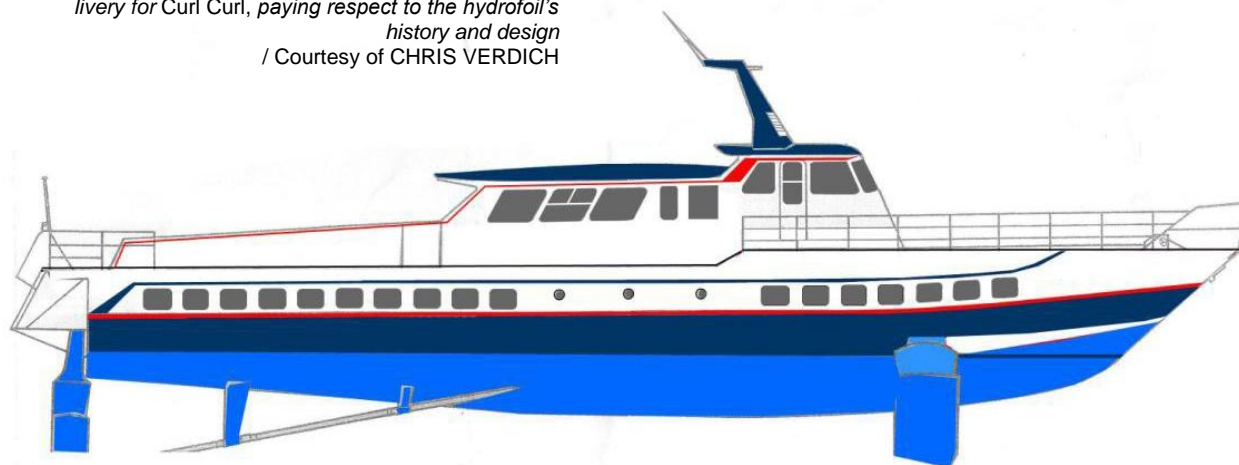


and gearboxes installed, then extensive sea trials will bring to ensure the work has been carried out properly and that everything works as it should.

Hydrofoils can go wrong and replacement parts can be expensive. For this reason, Andrew has also agreed to purchase another RHS 140, *Duccio*, built in 1977 as *Fabricia*, which is sitting next to *Spargi* in Messina. With a full set of foils, propeller shafts, propellers and many other things this acquisition will keep such costs very low.

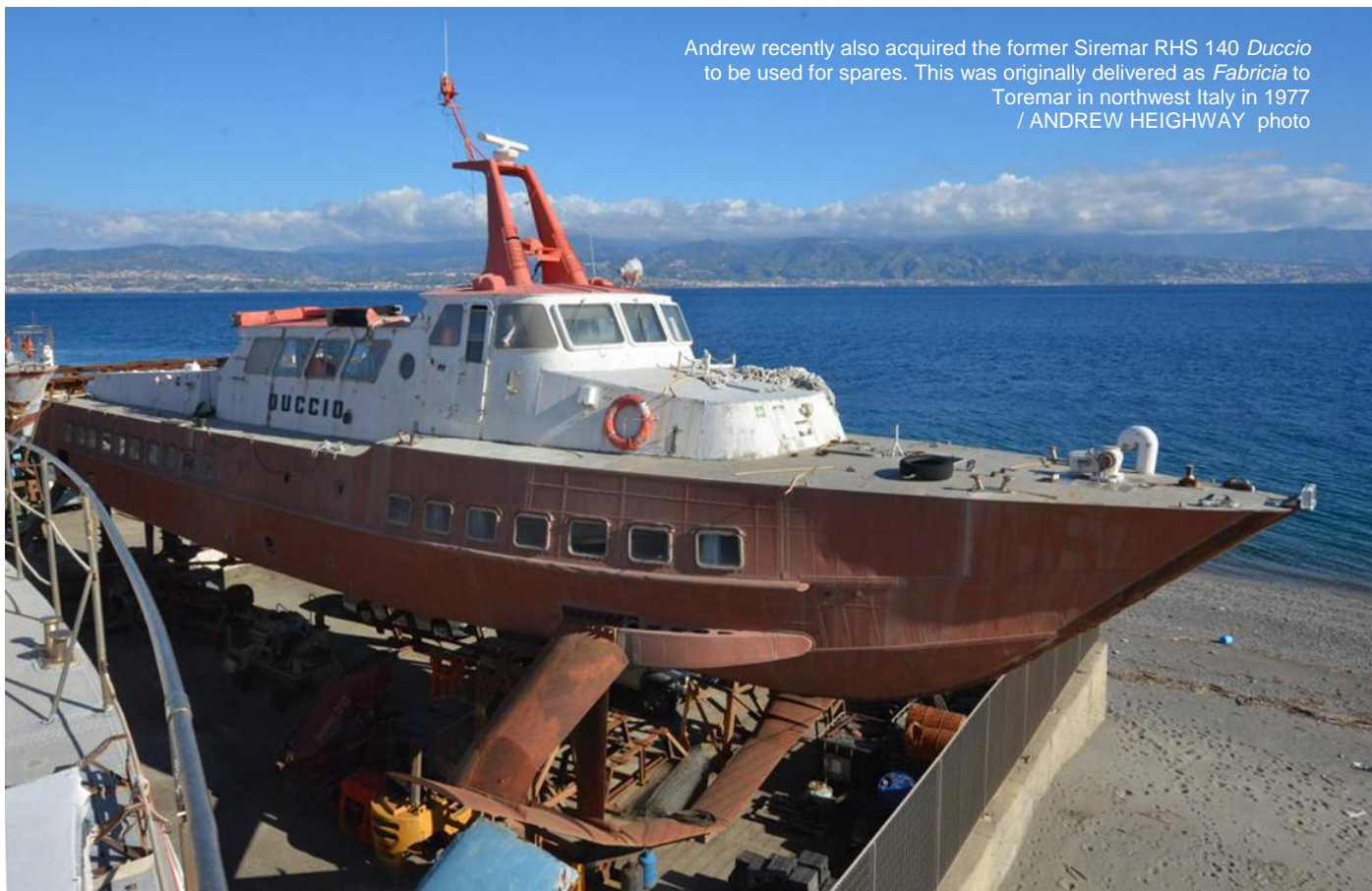
Originally the plan was to take *Curl Curl* back to Australia on the back of a container ship. After all, it is the established way of shipping hydrofoils around the world. As Andrew got shipping quotes together, not only did it seem like a costly exercise but he felt there was a bigger opportunity here. This whole journey is an adventure, so why not fly her from Messina in Sicily to Sydney in Australia under her own power? Although this trip has never been attempted on a hydrofoil before, two RHS 70 hydrofoils travelled from Southampton in the UK to Thailand under their own power in 2002. So with the right planning and the right crew, such a trip is definitely possible.

*Artist's impression of a possible new and modern livery for Curl Curl, paying respect to the hydrofoil's history and design*  
/ Courtesy of CHRIS VERDICH





Andrew recently also acquired the former Siremar RHS 140 *Duccio* to be used for spares. This was originally delivered as *Fabricia* to Toremar in northwest Italy in 1977  
/ ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo



The graphic on page 11 shows how the 9,500 nautical mile journey might look, but in reality it will likely navigate much closer to coastlines for refuelling reasons. The 3,000 litre fuel tank capacity of *Curl Curl* will need to be increased to lengthen the current 300-mile range of the vessel.

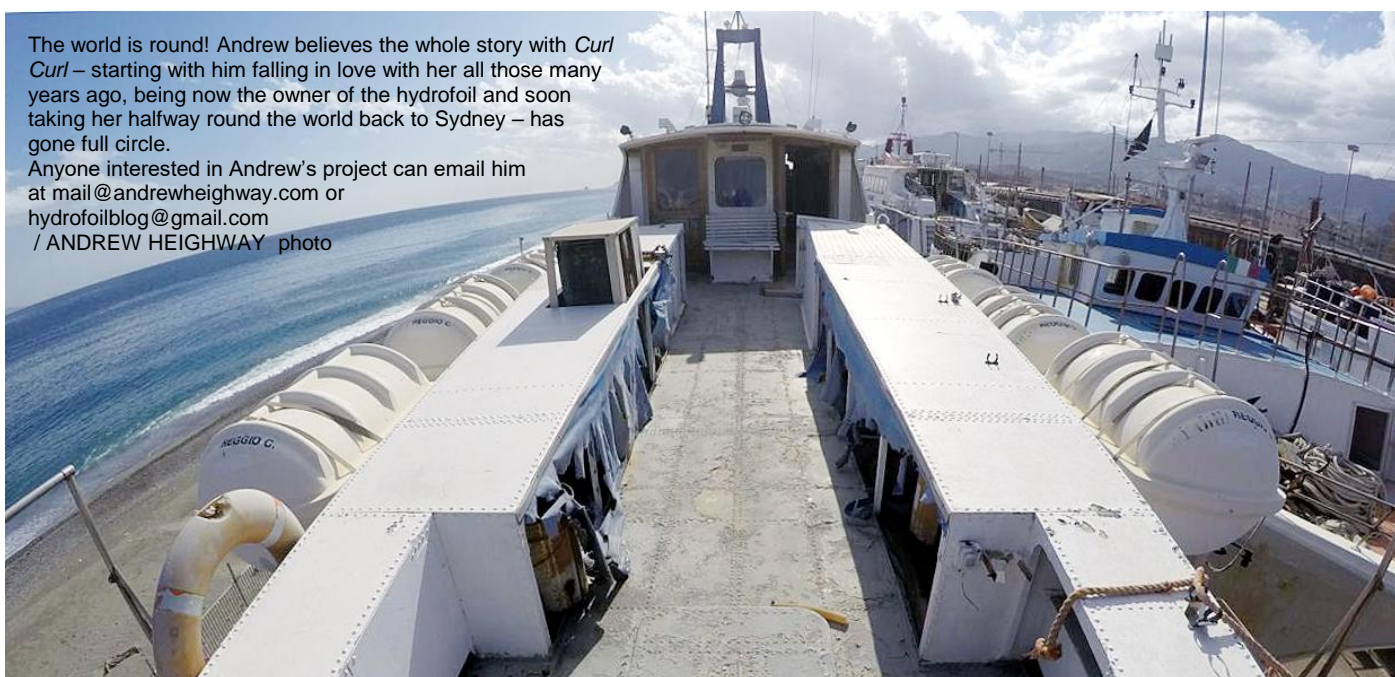
Additionally, all three stages of the process – the restoration, the journey from Messina to Sydney and the Homecoming Tour – will be filmed as a

TV documentary and sold to stations around the world. The movie will document the hydrofoil's glittering career and feature interviews with captains, crew and passengers from her past and everyone associated with her present and future.

*Curl Curl* has had a remarkable life in the 46 years since she was built, but arguably the most significant episodes in her history are still to come. **CFF**

The world is round! Andrew believes the whole story with *Curl Curl* – starting with him falling in love with her all those many years ago, being now the owner of the hydrofoil and soon taking her halfway round the world back to Sydney – has gone full circle.

Anyone interested in Andrew's project can email him at [mail@andrewheighway.com](mailto:mail@andrewheighway.com) or [hydrofoilblog@gmail.com](mailto:hydrofoilblog@gmail.com)  
/ ANDREW HEIGHWAY photo





# FROM DOWN UNDER

A hydrofoil out of the water always makes an impressive sight, especially when viewed from Down Under.

This is *Curl Curl* drydocked at the Urban Transit Authority, UTA, Balmain yard in Sydney in December 1988  
/ MARTIN GRIMM photo





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It doesn't have to be Christmas for you to give your heart to Lake Como and *Freccia dei Gerani*, but the white does add a romantic touch.

The charming RHS 70 is seen here on December 14, 2012 and is still going strong, pushing 42

/ JACOPO MEMEO photo

