

## ***TITANIC*: ‘SHE SAILED ONLY HALF FULL?’**

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It is not uncommon for people to express surprise when they learn that *Titanic* sailed on her maiden voyage with many empty staterooms: ‘Why was she not fully booked? Why did she sail only half full?’ There was accommodation available in all three classes for additional passengers. Using the best documentation we have available today, thanks to a number of international researchers’ hard work over many years, it appears *Titanic* had 324 first, 284 second and 709 third class passengers on board for a total of 1,317 passengers.<sup>1</sup>

By comparison, she had capacity for 787 first, 676 second and 1,008 third class passengers for a total of 2,471 passengers.<sup>2</sup> This means that she sailed with about 53 per cent of her passenger accommodation occupied, so it is certainly true that she sailed a little over half full. Nonetheless, in asking why she was not fully booked, there’s an assumption within the question – that she should have been full. This is not the case.

There were certainly particular circumstances surrounding *Titanic*’s maiden voyage, such as the disruption from the coal strike, which resulted in *Oceanic* being laid up and some passengers transferred to *Titanic* from other vessels. The key purpose of this short article is to examine the issue of passenger traffic more generally.

In fact, there was a considerable variation in passenger traffic over the course of the year. The westbound season picked up in August, September and October and the express liners of the period sailed regularly with very good passenger lists in September. On the eastbound crossing, passenger traffic tended to be at its peak in the summer months and there were very good passenger lists in June and July. A westbound crossing in April, such as *Titanic*’s maiden voyage, would not see the same sort of demand as a crossing at the height of the season:

Cunard and White Star: Selected Westbound Maiden Voyage Passenger Lists 1899-14		
Maiden Voyage	Total Passenger List	Ship
September 1899	1,456	<i>Oceanic</i>
July 1901	607	<i>Celtic</i>
February 1903	742	<i>Cedric</i>
June 1904	906	<i>Baltic</i>
May 1907	2,502	<i>Adriatic</i>
September 1907	2,090	<i>Lusitania</i>
November 1907	1,326	<i>Mauretania</i>
June 1911	1,316	<i>Olympic*</i>
April 1912	1,317	<i>Titanic*</i>
May 1914	1,019	<i>Aquitania</i>
* <i>Olympic</i> and <i>Titanic</i> sailed from Southampton to New York. All other westbound maiden voyages were Liverpool to New York.		

Fig 1.

Cunard's *Mauretania* was undoubtedly a popular ship. However, before the war her highest average passenger list for a calendar year was in 1913: 1,475 passengers.<sup>3</sup> (Contrary to popular belief, *Mauretania* was more popular than her sister *Lusitania*, based on both the total number of passengers carried and her average passenger lists from 1907-14.) Her lowest average passenger list was in 1909: 1,046 passengers, exactly the same as *Lusitania*.

For the 1907-14 period, *Lusitania* had an average passenger list of 1,261 and *Mauretania* 1,310. These numbers were far below their maximum passenger capacities. *Mauretania* was in service for almost three years before she ever carried a passenger list of more than 2,000. (The years 1908 and 1909 were relatively poor, before numbers picked up from 1910 to 1913.) This data provides some perspective on the sort of passenger lists that were typical for the Cunarders, which represented the largest and fastest liners in the world for much of the pre-war period.

Liners sailing nearly fully booked at the height of the season were relatively empty during the quieter months. *Olympic* reflected these trends. She only brought 707 passengers into New York on 27 December 1911 and 864 passengers were booked for her 30 December 1911 departure. By comparison, on 5 September 1911, she brought 1,931 passengers into New York as the westbound season got going; more than 2,100 passengers were booked for her fifth westbound crossing, which was cancelled due to the *Hawke* collision. On 28 June 1911, she left New York

with 2,279 passengers on her eastbound maiden voyage, reflecting the high demand at that time of year.

White Star's Southampton to New York express service was not yet established in April 1907, but it is interesting to look at the sort of passenger lists seen in that month from 1908-11:

Date of westbound arrival in New York:	Total Passenger List	Ship
9 April 1908	344	<i>Teutonic</i>
16 April 1908	740	<i>Adriatic</i>
23 April 1908	399	<i>Majestic</i>
29 April 1908	597	<i>Oceanic</i>
15 April 1909	825	<i>Teutonic</i>
22 April 1909	1,084	<i>Adriatic</i>
29 April 1909	835	<i>Majestic</i>
13 April 1910	1,381	<i>Oceanic</i>
21 April 1910	839	<i>Majestic</i>
28 April 1910	1,651	<i>Adriatic</i>
13 April 1911	1,386	<i>Adriatic</i>
19 April 1911	695	<i>Oceanic</i>
27 April 1911	597	<i>Teutonic</i>

Fig 2.

April certainly was not the busiest time of year.

*Olympic* did particularly well when she left Southampton on 3 April 1912 with 2,043 passengers. Her performance was the exception rather than the rule, but *Titanic* did reasonably well in sailing with 1,317 passengers a week later. Given the disaster that lay ahead of her, it is fortunate she was not fully booked.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Halpern, Sam, et al. *Report into the Loss of the SS Titanic: A Centennial Reappraisal* (History Press; 2011), appendices A, B and C by Lester Mitcham.

<sup>2</sup> These figures are from a berth-by-berth count by Daniel Klistorner. They exclude 56 sofa berths in first class; assume that the alternate first/second class accommodation was used for second class (enabling more passengers to be carried than if they had

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been used for first class); and assume that the alternate second/third class accommodation was used for second class. If the alternate first/second class accommodation was used for first class and the alternate second/third class accommodation was used for third class, then the figures would be 916 first class, 398 second class and 1,120 third class. (These compare to 905 first class, 564 second class and 1,134 third class passengers on *Titanic*'s passenger certificate dated 4 April 1912. There are always discrepancies in such figures depending on the source material and on what basis the figures have been calculated. The passenger certificate indicates she could carry a total of 3,547 passengers and crew but the figure was apparently obtained by maximizing the number of passengers in all three classes, which it was not possible to do simultaneously, then adding them up together.)

<sup>3</sup> Chirnside, Mark. '*Lusitania and Mauretania: Perceptions of Popularity*'. *Titanic Historical Society's Titanic Commutator* 2008: Volume 32 Number 184: Pages 196-200.