

# Orion

The *Orion* was a significant passenger liner launched in 1934 for the Orient Line's Australia service. Notable for her Art Deco styling and innovative corn-colored hull (later adopted company-wide), she demonstrated the inter-war period's movement toward modern ocean liner design. Her launch was historically significant as the first ship launched remotely, with the Duke of Gloucester performing the ceremony from Brisbane Town Hall via radio-telephone.

## Ship Information

<b>Built by</b>	Vickers-Armstrongs Ltd., Barrow-in-Furness
<b>Launched</b>	December 7, 1934
<b>Dimensions</b>	665 ft x 84 ft x 30 ft (202.7m x 25.6m x 9.1m)
<b>Tonnage</b>	23,371 GRT (initially), 23,696 GRT (after 1946)
<b>Propulsion</b>	Six Parsons SRG steam turbines (24,100 SHP)
<b>Speed</b>	21 knots
<b>Capacity</b>	Initially 708 cabin + 700 tourist; later 1,697 tourist
<b>Crew</b>	Initially 466, later 567
<b>Company</b>	Orient Steam Navigation Company
<b>Fate</b>	Scrapped at Tamise, Belgium
<b>SWI Ref</b>	566

## Construction and Design

Built by Vickers-Armstrongs Ltd. at their Barrow-in-Furness yard, *Orion* shared her hull design and engineering with P&O's *Strathmore* as a cost-saving measure - a practice later repeated with *Stratheden/Orcades* and post-war with *Himalaya/Orcades* (3). New Zealand designer Brian O'Rourke created her Art Deco interiors, featuring distinctive Australian native timber veneers - a style later replicated in *Orcades* (3), *Oronsay* (2) and *Orsova* (2).

## Pre-war Service (1935-1939)

Following her completion in August 1935, *Orion* conducted a Mediterranean shakedown cruise before commencing her inaugural voyage to Australia on September 28, 1935. She operated on the UK-Australia route via Gibraltar, Toulon, Palma, Naples, Port Said, Suez, Aden and Colombo. Within two years, she was joined by her sister ship *Orcades* (2) on this service.

## Wartime Service (1939-1946)

In September 1939, *Orion* was converted to a troopship in Sydney. Her wartime service included a 1940 collision with HMS *Revenge* in the Indian Ocean, requiring urgent repairs in Singapore. In January 1942, she narrowly escaped Singapore's fall, evacuating civilians and military personnel just before the Japanese invasion. The vessel made two notable North Atlantic crossings in 1943, carrying record loads exceeding 7,000 U.S. troops each time. Despite facing German dive bomber attacks in the Mediterranean, she emerged from five years of war service relatively unscathed.

## Post-war Service (1946-1963)

Following a 1946 refit at Barrow that increased her gross tonnage to 23,696, *Orion* resumed commercial service with new passenger configurations. She played a crucial role in post-war migration to Australia and in 1954 pioneered a new Pacific service to Vancouver. By the early 1960s, she had become the Orient Line's oldest vessel, making her final commercial voyage to London in May 1963.

## Final Days

After her long service with Orient Line, *Orion* briefly served as a floating hotel under West German ownership. Her final voyage took place in November 1963, sailing from Hamburg to Tamise, Belgium, where she was broken up.

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