

Fairstar

Sitmar Line 1955-1997

Originally built as the troopship *Oxfordshire* in 1955, this vessel became one of the most beloved cruise ships in Australian maritime history. After conversion to the *Fairstar* in 1963-64, she operated successfully for over three decades, carrying more than a million passengers and helping establish Australia’s modern cruise industry.

Early Years as Oxfordshire (1955-1963)

Built by Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co Ltd. in Scotland, *Oxfordshire* was launched on December 15, 1955 and completed in February 1957. Along with her identical sister ship *Nevasa*, she was one of the last British-built troop carriers. The vessel featured 50 large dormitories for enlisted personnel and participated in transferring troops during the Suez Crisis. However, changing military transport needs led to her being laid up at Falmouth.

Conversion and Sitmar Service (1963-1988)

In 1963, Sitmar Line chartered the vessel and began converting her for civilian passenger service. The initial refit took place at Wilton Fijenoord F.V. in Schiedam, Netherlands, but due to a dockyard dispute, she was towed to Harland and Wolff Ltd. in Belfast for completion in May 1964.

The conversion transformed the vessel into a contemporary Italian-styled passenger ship. Features included:

- Extended bridge over the superstructure length
- New squat funnel with Sitmar’s distinctive “V” (representing the Vlasof family ownership)
- Two swimming pools
- 364-seat cinema
- Stabilizers
- 50,500 square feet of open deck space

Ship Information

Former name	Oxfordshire
Company	Sitmar Line
Built by	Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co Ltd., Scotland
Year launched	1955
Fate	Scrapped in India as Ripa
Gross Tonnage	23,764
Length	610 ft (186m)
Beam	78 ft (23.8m)
Draught	27 ft (8.2m)
Propulsion	Parsons D.R.G. steam turbines (18,400 SHP)
Speed	20 knots
Initial Capacity	1,922
Later Capacity	1,300 (one class)
Crew	475
SWI Ref	556

Australian Cruise Pioneer (1972-1997)

After initially serving the Europe-Australia route via Suez (1964-1970) and conducting round-world voyages (1970-1972), *Fairstar* found her true calling as a cruise ship based in Sydney. She became known as the “Funship,” operating popular Pacific cruises to destinations including:

- Auckland
- Bay of Islands
- Picton
- Tauranga
- Suva
- Noumea
- Apia
- Tonga
- Pago Pago

In 1988, P&O Princess Cruises acquired Sitmar, replacing the beloved yellow funnel and “V” logo with their dolphin emblem. *Fairstar* continued serving until January 21, 1997, when she made her final cruise. She departed Sydney shortly after, renamed *Ripa* for her final journey to Indian breakers.

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