

## **RMS MAJESTIC: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)**

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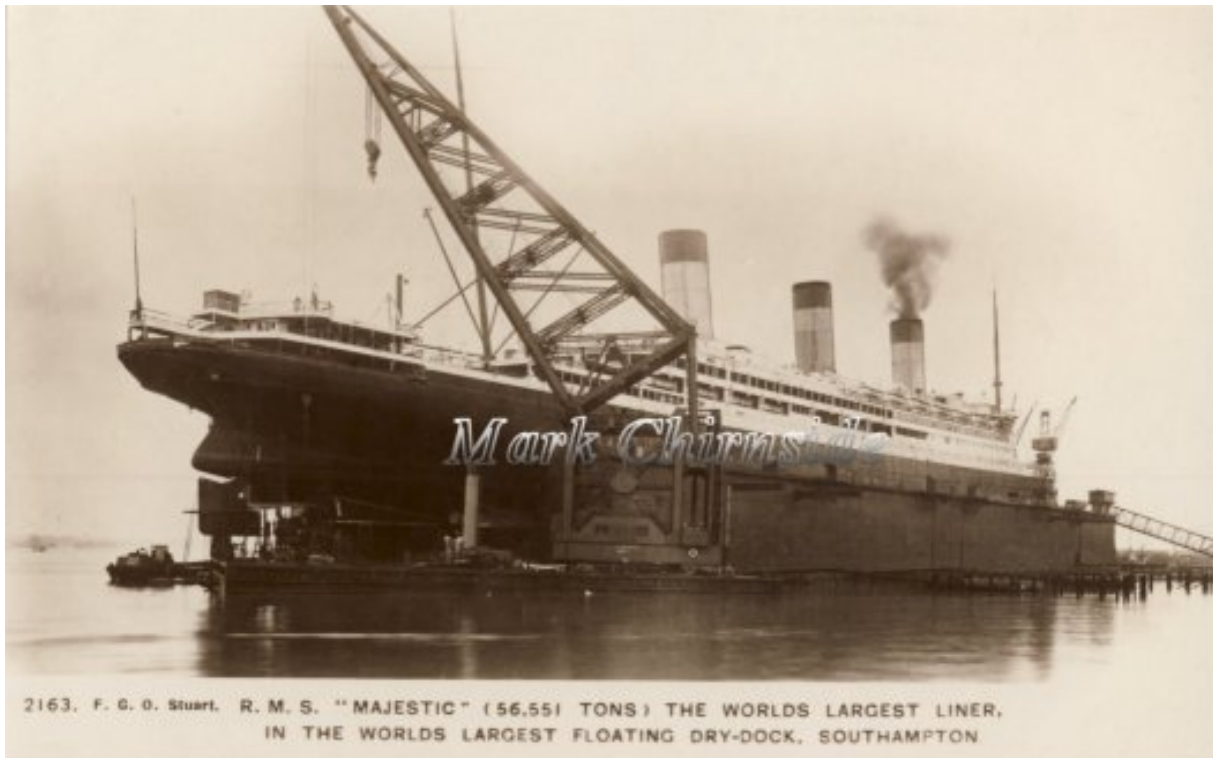
### **Did *Majestic* carry the White Star Line's highest ever number of passengers in September 1923?**

It has sometimes been reported that *Majestic* set a record in September 1923, carrying the White Star Line's highest passenger list of 2,625 passengers. There are several discrepancies. The statement, or a variation of it taken from several websites, appears to be traceable to *Duncan Haws' Merchant Fleets Volume 19: White Star Line* (Starling Press Ltd; 1990), page 90:

1923 Sept: Fastest then crossing 5 days 5 hours 21 minutes. Average 24.75 knots. Only *Mauretania* was faster. On one crossing carried 480 first, 736 second, 1,409 third = 2,625, the company's highest ever.

The first problem is that *Majestic* only made one westbound departure from Southampton that month, on September 12th 1923. She carried 1,774 passengers, including 815 in first

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*Above: Majestic presents a towering, impressive profile. (Author's Collection.)*

class (her highest that year, westbound). She did, however, make two eastbound departures from New York – on September 1st and September 22nd 1923 – with passenger lists in all three classes totalling 607 and 657, respectively. None of these three September departures had such a record list, although they did include the best first class passenger list that year for the westbound crossing, and (eastbound) *Majestic* carried 853 in first class on her June 23rd 1923 New York departure.

The report appears to refer to the October 26th 1923 westbound departure, when *Majestic* carried 475 first class, 731 second class, and 1,416 third class passengers for a total of 2,622 passengers, her highest that year in either direction.

When *Majestic* arrived in New York on November 1st 1923, figures given in an American listing from the North Atlantic (sometimes called 'Transatlantic') Passenger Conference were:

- 480 first class,
- 736 second class and
- 1,411 third class,
- for a total of 2,627 passengers.

The figures are extremely similar to the claimed total of 2,625, with only minor variations.

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If *Majestic* did carry that many passengers, albeit the following month, was it right to claim it was the highest passenger list of a White Star Line vessel? The smaller *Olympic* could not carry that many even if she was fully booked, as she was on one occasion in 1920.

Whatever the case, *Celtic* carried 2,957 passengers in total during a September 1904 crossing ('then the largest number carried by the company') and this figure is higher. Christian Cody, of the ProjectOlympic Yahoo Group, has done research that indicates *Celtic's* passenger list may have been even greater.

### **Was *Majestic* or *Leviathan* faster?**

The answer as to which liner was faster depends on the definition used. If we examine 'faster' from the point of view of the fastest crossing either liner made during their careers, then *Majestic* wins.

When *Majestic* departed New York on May 2nd 1925, she began what would turn out to be her fastest ever crossing. She covered 3,241 miles in five days nine hours and forty minutes, at an average speed of 25 knots. On two other occasions that year, she came very close and recorded average speeds of between 24.8 and 25 knots. By contrast, *Leviathan's* fastest ended when she arrived at Cherbourg on September 14th 1923, having averaged 24.81 knots over the five day, eight hour and thirty-eight minute crossing. Her average speed was lower than *Majestic's*, and the time was only shorter because the mileage was even shorter as well. It does not seem to have been a coincidence that *Majestic* made her fastest ever crossing after leaving New York on May 2nd 1925, for *Leviathan* left at 6 p.m. - six hours after *Majestic*. The late Frank Braynard did not have the information about *Majestic's* speed available in the 1970s, yet he explains (*Leviathan: 'The World's Greatest Ship'* Volume 3: Page 203):

In order to make sure the ships would not race, the departures were set one tide apart, with the *Majestic* going out at noon and the *Leviathan* at 6 p.m. ...

The *Majestic*, leaving on her first eastbound crossing of the year, took out 384 in first, 336 in second, and 388 in third. The *Leviathan* beat her this time, with a total of 1,125, largely because her tourist third [class] concept was going over well. She carried 531 in that category. The *Majestic's* division, however, was better from the revenue standpoint.

This may have been the crossing that *Leviathan* stalwarts look back on with pride as the time they nearly caught up to their British rival and may actually have beaten her in elapsed sea passage time. Unfortunately, data for *Majestic's* crossing was not available. The *Leviathan* made her best passage of the year, taking five days ten hours and forty-eight minutes and doing it with an average speed of 24.63 knots...'

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*Majestic's* time and speed were well ahead of her sister. She beat her by almost four-tenths of a knot in speed and one hour and eight minutes in time:

Passage	Time	Average Speed
<i>Leviathan</i>	5 days 10 hours 48 minutes	24.63 knots
<i>Majestic</i>	5 days 9 hours 40 minutes	25.00 knots

Scheduling the departures one tide apart did nothing to stem the rivalry between the two liners!

On the other hand, a more practical definition of which liner was faster might be the average speeds they maintained in regular service, rather than using a one-off record of the fastest ever crossing. In that regard, *Leviathan* seems to have had the edge over her younger sister, sometimes by a tiny margin. In 1926, *Majestic* averaged 23.16 knots compared to her sister's 23.24 knots; in 1929, *Majestic* averaged 22.95 knots and her sister *Leviathan* no less than 23.60 knots. In 1925, 1927 and 1928, *Leviathan's* average speeds were closer to 24 knots than 23 knots, although the average speeds during a number of years are - as yet - unavailable.

An exhaustive analysis is not available at this time, but it does seem to be part of a general trend that *Leviathan* was recording a higher average speed all year round (especially by the late 1920s), compared to her younger sister. It seems probable that she was being driven harder, although there were exceptions - such as 1923 - when *Majestic* was faster. Frank Braynard (*Leviathan: 'The World's Greatest Ship'* Volume 3: Page 194) notes that *Leviathan* lagged behind *Majestic* - in 1924 - by a mere hundredth of a knot: 23.77 to 23.78 knots.

Their speed performances were similar, therefore. *Majestic* completed the fastest crossing, averaging 25 knots, while her sister *Leviathan* generally had the edge in terms of the average speed all year round. On that measure, *Majestic* would have been the third fastest liner (measured by her yearly average speed), behind *Leviathan* and *Mauretania*, prior to *Bremen's* debut in the summer of 1929.

### **Was *Majestic* ever the fastest liner in the world?**

*Leviathan* and *Majestic* were slower than the *Mauretania's* record-setting pace and neither ever wrested the Blue Riband from the Cunarder. However, if we examine the average speeds for each liner in 1923 then it becomes clear that they could run her fairly close.

In the early 1920s, *Mauretania's* speed was not up to her pre-war standards, yet after extensive turbine work and the conversion to oil her speed crept up and she put up some excellent times up until her fastest ever crossings in 1929. It was in this context, in 1923, that *Mauretania* was almost relegated to second place. In 1923, the North Atlantic Passenger Conference gave figures for *Leviathan*, *Majestic* and *Mauretania* which were the average



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speeds calculated for each liner that year. *Leviathan* had averaged exactly 23 knots; *Majestic*, 23.29 knots; and *Mauretania* 23.29 knots.

Slight variations can always be found in various sources, depending on the measurements or methods used. However, if these figures were correct, then *Majestic's* average speed in 1923 would have enabled her to claim that she was the equal - in terms of her average speed - of the Blue Riband holder. She was, therefore, the joint fastest liner in the world in 1923 - as well as being the largest and the most popular by far as her passenger figures began to soar.

### Is it true that *Leviathan* was bigger than *Majestic*?

Given that a lot of prestige accompanied any liner that could claim to be the world's largest, it is not surprising that a dispute arose in the 1920s when both *Leviathan* and *Majestic* laid claim to the title. When she entered service in 1922, *Majestic* was calculated to be 56,551 gross tons and yet the following year the newly-refitted *Leviathan* claimed to be 59,957 gross tons. There was no question that *Majestic* was longer, but given that gross tonnage is a better measure of size (or enclosed space), the gross tonnage figures were more significant and *Leviathan* certainly seemed to be larger. It is interesting to note that *Leviathan's* gross tonnage was shown as 59,956 tons, putting her above *Majestic*, and *Mauretania's* was calculated at 30,703 gross tons, according to each liner's entry in the North Atlantic Passenger Conference records for 1923.

How could this be the case? Each of Ballin's trio was larger than its predecessor, and *Majestic* was no exception. The fact of the matter is that had *Leviathan* been measured using a comparable method to *Majestic*, she would have measured up at 54,282 gross tons and therefore been smaller. Instead, her American owners had her measured under their own country's regulations, and by using a variety of 'tricks' claimed she was larger. Had *Majestic* been measured in the same manner, she would have come out at 61,206 gross tons compared to *Leviathan's* 59,957 gross tons, and been able to claim the title. The possibilities for manipulating the ship's tonnage figures were considerable, for in 1931 *Leviathan's* then-owners had her re-measured and her gross tonnage dropped sharply, to less than 50,000 gross tons. Frank Braynard goes into considerable detail about tonnage in *Leviathan: 'The World's Greatest Ship'*, Volume 2: Pages 357-58.



*Left: An impressive view of Majestic from overhead. Although her length and sleek profile appear impressive, if she had four funnels then she may have appeared even longer still. Major Hamilton Maxwell's caption notes that she is the 'world's largest liner' - a title she held throughout her service from 1922 to 1935. (Author's Collection.)*

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Some insight into the comparative size of the two liners came in an interview that Dr. Foerster, one of the Hamburg-Amerika Line's consulting engineers, gave to an American newspaper in 1925:

"It was the intention to make the *Majestic* the same size as the *Leviathan*, which at that time was the *Vaterland*," Dr. Foerster said. "The English then were building the *Aquitania*, and the report was that this new ship would be five feet longer than the *Vaterland*. My instructions were then changed to make the *Majestic*, then the *Bismarck*, six feet longer than the *Vaterland*." Dr. Foerster said the Germans were chagrined when they learned that the *Aquitania* was fifty feet shorter than their last word in large ships.

'..."The *Majestic* would have even more tonnage if the same measurements were used that were applied to the *Leviathan*."

"Then you mean that the *Majestic* is the larger of the two ships?"

"By six feet, yes. But it was a costly six feet. How well I know, and how much work it involved. It virtually called for a complete change in plans to add those six feet."

Although the informed observer always knew that *Majestic* was larger, after 1931 there could be no dispute. *Leviathan* slipped behind the new German liners *Bremen* (1929) and *Europa* (1930), as well as her two sister ships. *Majestic*'s gross tonnage was eclipsed in the summer of 1935 when *Normandie* entered service, thus ending her thirteen-year reign (counting her time in service) as the largest liner in the world. *Majestic* had to settle for second place, although she was withdrawn from active service before *Queen Mary* made her maiden voyage in 1936.

### **Was *Leviathan* more popular than *Majestic*?**

How can popularity be defined? By the total number of passengers carried, or the average number of passengers carried on each crossing? The difficulty arises when trying to establish if one liner was more popular than another.

Taking the average passenger list for *Berengaria* over the 1923 to 1932 period (covering 300 crossings), she averaged 980 passengers; *Leviathan* averaged 1,035 passengers in the same period (over only 264 crossings), and *Majestic* led the way with 1,067 passengers (292 crossings). In this respect, then, when information for a comparable period is available then *Majestic* had the edge over her older sister.

*Leviathan*'s total of 40,539 passengers carried in 1927 eclipsed *Majestic*'s best showing of 37,949 passengers in 1928, and *Berengaria*'s best year of 1928 was slightly further behind. On the basis of the most passengers carried in any one year, *Leviathan* had the record, but overall *Majestic* had the edge in carrying higher numbers of passengers on average.

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*Leviathan* was not consistent in the 1920s, carrying the lowest average number of passengers of any of the three sisters in 1924 (983 passengers), and then the highest average of 1,448 passengers on each crossing in 1927, while *Majestic's* best average passenger lists came in the same year at 1,304 passengers. (Although she did slightly better - at 1,319 passengers - in 1922, she was not in service for the full year and *Leviathan* had not yet re-entered service.) *Majestic* was ahead in every single year of the 1920s - barring 1926 and 1927 - measured by her average passenger lists, although *Berengaria* did slightly better in 1928.

(Further information can be found by referring to *RMS Majestic: The 'Magic Stick'*).

### **Was *Majestic* the first name that the White Star Line selected for *Bismarck*?**

It seems to be the case that another name was considered, if newspaper reports are to be believed. In February 1921, it was reported that White Star Line officials had told a newspaper that *Bismarck* (as she then was) would be named *Oceanic* - the same name as White Star's pioneering steamer. The following month, correspondence sent to Edward Wilding by a Board of Trade official referred to 'SS *Majestic* ex-*Bismarck*,' and subsequent references continued to use the name. In June 1921, there was even speculation that *Homerick* would be called *Oceanic*; in the event, the name was not used until White Star laid down a new express liner in the summer of 1928.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Peter Kohler deserves considerable thanks for providing me with copies of American documentation for the North Atlantic Passenger Conference, back in 2003, which have helped answer many questions as to passenger figures. I have drawn upon some of them here, as well as additional material from my own research. Even in primary source material, there are direct contradictions and inconsistencies, but the figures do help to try and sort out fact from fiction. Brent Holt's input was invaluable, including his discussions regarding *Leviathan*. Any errors are my responsibility alone.