

## Mark Chirside's Reception Room

# RMS OLYMPIC: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

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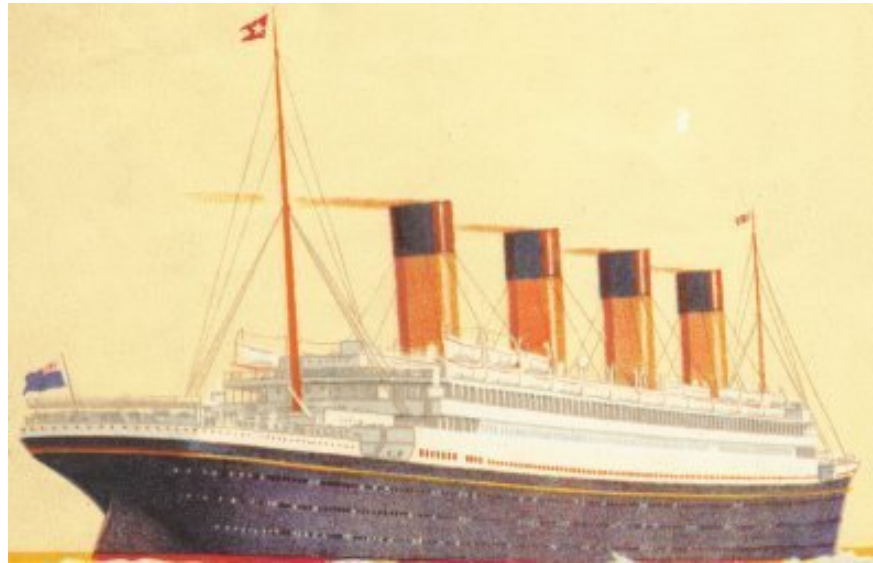
**I thought that *Olympic* completed her maiden voyage in five days sixteen hours and forty-two minutes, averaging 21.17 knots. Why do you give different figures (after 2006)?**

When *Olympic* completed her maiden voyage, the time was given as five days sixteen hours and forty-two minutes. This appeared in press reports and the log card issued to passengers. Given the distance of 2,894 nautical miles, the average speed came to 21.17 knots. However, unknown to anyone at the time, there was an error in the time calculation that went unnoticed. The departure time from Daunt's Rock, and the arrival time at the Ambrose Lightship, could be confirmed, and they showed that the voyage had taken five days fifteen hours and two minutes. This meant that the average speed was actually 21.43 knots - more impressive than the incorrect speed.

The incorrect figures were included in the earlier print runs of *The Olympic-Class Ships: Olympic, Titanic & Britannic* and *RMS Olympic: Titanic's Sister*, as the mistake was not known at that time. In fact, the error went unnoticed for over ninety years. However, after Mark

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*Right: Olympic, depicted by the White Star Line in an advertisement dating from the late 1920s or early 1930s. Although characterful, the illustration has several mistakes, including the liner's lifeboat configuration. She cuts an impressive profile. (Author's Collection.)*



Chirnside and Sam Halpern discovered the mistake in 2006, it was outlined in an article published in early 2007. This article appeared in the *Titanic* International Society's *Voyage* journal, and subsequently online at Encyclopedia-Titanica: [‘Olympic and Titanic: Maiden Voyage Mysteries’](#). Since then, the books have been revised and the mistake corrected.

### **Didn't *Olympic* lose the title of the largest British liner to *Aquitania*, in 1914?**

The generally accepted standard for measuring if one liner is larger than another is to use gross registered tonnage, which is essentially a measure of enclosed space (and not weight, as the term implies). On this measurement, *Olympic* was the largest liner in the world in 1911, at 45,324 gross tons; after the 1913 refit, her size increased to 46,358 gross tons. By this time, with the German HAPAG liner *Imperator* (later to become *Berengaria*) exceeding 52,000 tons, *Olympic* lost her right to the title of the largest liner in the world (which she had lost for a brief period when *Titanic* was in service) but remained the largest British liner.

Although *Aquitania*'s size was projected at 47,000 gross tons by Cunard publicity material in 1913, when she entered service in 1914 she measured 45,647 gross tons. This was higher than *Olympic*'s gross tonnage in 1911, but – given that *Olympic*'s size had increased to 46,358 gross tons in 1913 – *Aquitania* was smaller. While both liners' gross tonnage figures varied throughout their careers, *Aquitania*'s never surpassed *Olympic*'s. (When *Britannic* was in service in 1915-16, she was the largest British liner at 48,158 gross tons. The honour subsequently reverted to *Olympic*.)

In terms of length, *Aquitania* was marginally longer than *Olympic*; and her width was several feet greater. By that standard, *Aquitania* would have appeared slightly larger to the keen observer if the two liners were ever side by side, and Cunard did claim on occasion that *Aquitania* was the largest British liner. However, on the more comprehensive measurement

## RMS *Olympic* FAQ

of gross tonnage then *Olympic* was always larger, and after the war White Star also pointed out that she was the largest triple-screw steamer in the world.

**You state that *Olympic*'s fastest eastbound crossing was completed in 1924, and her fastest westbound crossing in 1928. Wasn't *Olympic*'s fastest crossing completed in November 1921?**

Yes and no. On October 31st 1921 *Olympic* arrived in New York, having completed 2,931 miles in 5 days 12 hours and 39 minutes, averaging 22.10 knots. However, the eastbound return crossing was even faster: she covered 2,999 miles in 5 days 12 hours and 38 minutes, averaging 22.61 knots. These appear to be her fastest westbound and eastbound crossings in terms of the time elapsed but, if her average speed is a better way to measure a 'fastest' crossing, then she subsequently did even better. She exceeded both average speeds on subsequent crossings.

It is important to note that *Olympic*'s fastest crossings were not a great deal faster than her usual schedule. Given that *Olympic* was not fast enough to gain the 'Blue Riband,' it does not seem that she was ever driven at full speed for an entire crossing. Rather, the fastest eastbound crossing she ever made, in 1924, seems to have been aided by favourable weather conditions. She often made a single day's run at a much higher speed, exceeding regularly 23 knots. In 1915, Harold Sanderson confirmed that she had previously maintained 24.2 knots for a 24 hour period - a speed more than a knot greater than that of her highest average speed on an entire crossing. (Further information can be found in [RMS \*Olympic\*: Titanic's Sister.](#))

**When were the new first class suites added to *Olympic*, forward on B-deck?**

Although it is popularly believed that they were added in 1928, at the same time as changes were made to second and tourist class areas, in fact there was no one major refit in 1928. Instead, some changes were made over the winter of 1927-28, and some over 1928-29. The new suites were added over the winter of 1928-29. (See: '[RMS \*Olympic\*: The Mis-dated Refit](#)'.)

*Right: This photograph was taken in Southampton between December 1928 and February 1929, and shows the windows along B deck being reconfigured to make way for the new suites of rooms installed along either side of that deck forward, replacing a portion of what previously had been the enclosed first class promenade. (GKCL Collection.)*

