

## **LUSITANIA AND MAURETANIA: PERCEPTIONS OF POPULARITY**

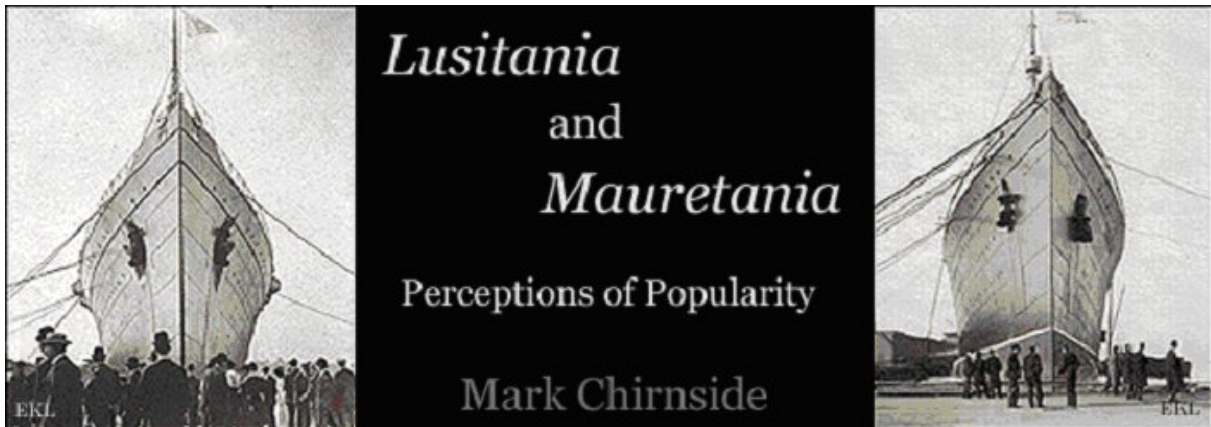
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*Mauretania's* dominance [of the Blue Riband] continued – though not in the passenger popularity department. Before the war, *Lusitania* was the more popular ship, a fact easily forgotten because of her sister's longer life. Presumably this has something to do with her more airy interior décor.<sup>1</sup>

It seems to be the subject of widespread belief: the 'fact' that *Lusitania* was more popular with passengers, even though *Mauretania* held the Blue Riband from 1909 and her older sister was never able to snatch it back. However, an examination of the pertinent facts tells a rather different story. Inevitably, we need to dwell on reams of dry statistics, but the interpretation of them can be very interesting.

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How can 'more popular' be defined? The question is not as simple as it might appear to be. Clearly, if one ship carries more passengers than another during any given year, then she has a claim to being the most popular. The problem arises in how popularity is measured. It might be that one ship carried a total of 35,000 passengers in one year compared to the 26,000 passengers of another vessel. On that measure – the total number of passengers carried – then the ship carrying a higher number would be more popular.

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**T**hose who marvelled over the titanic *Lusitania* when she made her first appearance in this port several weeks ago will soon have an opportunity of viewing her later and greater sister. "*Mauretania* the Magnificent," as the regal sister ship has been named by her admirers on the other side.' – *New York Times*, November 10th 1907.

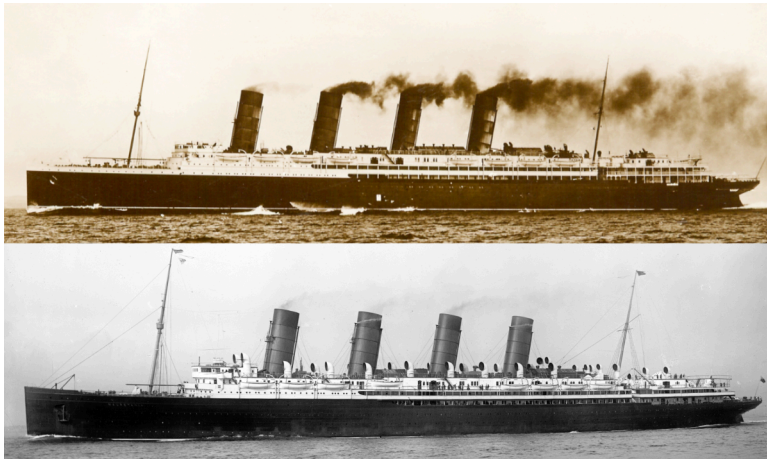
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However, that would not account for the number of crossings. The ship carrying 26,000 passengers might have crossed the ocean a smaller number of times, and therefore carried an average passenger list that was higher than her rival – carrying fewer passengers in total, due solely to the fact that she had made fewer crossings.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the ship making fewer crossings might have been in service only at the height of the season – around September westbound, and June and July eastbound – which would skew comparisons.

The best way to examine the issue of popularity seems to be to take both measures into account, drawing upon the total number of passengers carried each year and the average passenger lists. In the case of *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*, the number of crossings they made each year was similar enough to produce a fair comparison of the trend. The result of such an analysis is rather surprising.

*Lusitania* made her maiden voyage in September 1907, which was a very good time of the year as far as westbound passenger lists were concerned. Many passengers were on the way to America. *Mauretania* did not arrive until two months later, by which time passenger traffic

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Left: Lusitania (top) and Mauretania (below) in nearly perfect, nearly matching port side profiles. The photo at the top was taken during Lusitania's trials in 1907; the lower photo was taken as Mauretania departed New York, ca. 1909. (Both images courtesy J. Kent Layton)

was lower. There was no doubt that *Lusitania* was doing well as 1907 came to an end: on three occasions out of eight, she carried over 2,000 passengers. She had carried 15,006 passengers in total. *Mauretania* lagged far behind, carrying 5,654 passengers on four crossings.

Table 1: Total Number of Passengers Carried by <i>Lusitania</i> and <i>Mauretania</i> 1907-14		
	<i>Lusitania</i>	<i>Mauretania</i>
1907	<b>15,006</b>	5,654
1908	<b>33,872</b>	26,579
1909	<b>33,478</b>	31,386
1910	35,558	<b>40,675</b>
1911	41,500	38,455
1912	32,301	<b>36,242</b>
1913	16,447 *	<b>44,245</b>
1914	<b>32,797</b>	24,735
<b>TOTAL</b>	240,959	<b>247,971</b>

**TABLE 1:** The total number of passengers carried by *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*, 1907 to 1914. These figures include wartime crossings made in 1914. **Bold** text emphasizes the highest number of passengers in a given year. The number of passengers seems particularly small for *Lusitania* because she was out of service for most of 1913 and made far fewer voyages than her sister did. Following turbine problems which began in the summer of 1912, *Lusitania* was at her builder's from the start of 1913 through to late August 1913. These difficulties were most unfortunate, since 1913 was a very good year for passenger travel and *Mauretania* did extremely well. (See Layton, J. Kent. *Lusitania: An Illustrated Biography*. Amberley Books, 2015.)



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*Left: Mauretania sails from New York early in her career. (Library of Congress, Author's Collection)*

The picture began to change in 1908, the first full year of service for both sisters. In terms of their average passenger lists, there was precious little difference, although *Lusitania* did very slightly better than her younger sister. The key distinction was that *Lusitania* was worked harder: she made thirty crossings, compared to twenty-four for *Mauretania*.

It was a pattern that continued in 1909. *Lusitania* made thirty-two crossings compared to her sister's thirty. This time, however, just as *Mauretania* gained the Blue Riband – taking it away from *Lusitania* for good – she also became more popular and closed the gap. Remarkably, *Mauretania* had been running on only three propellers from May 1908, since her port wing propeller was out of action. The situation was remedied at the start of 1909 when she returned to service with two propellers of an improved design. As *The Shipbuilder* reported in the summer of 1909: 'Both the *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* have accomplished remarkable steaming feats, but at present the latter vessel holds all eastward and westward records, viz., the quickest voyage, the greatest average speed across the Atlantic, the longest run for a single day, and the highest average speed for one day.'<sup>3</sup> The new propellers reduced vibration and increased efficiency, and *Mauretania's* speed continued to rise. By September 1909, she had raised her best average speed across the Atlantic to over 26 knots.

*Mauretania* carried an average passenger list exactly the same as *Lusitania's* over 1909: 1,046 – although if we were to use enough decimal points then *Mauretania* would have been ahead. The difference is statistically insignificant. In 1910 she did even better and moved more decisively ahead of her sister. On her westbound crossings, *Mauretania* carried an average of 1,671 passengers – some two hundred ahead of *Lusitania*; on the eastbound crossings, she averaged 1,041 passengers – 139 ahead of *Lusitania*. From that time onwards, *Mauretania's* passenger lists were higher: 1909, 1910, 1911,<sup>4</sup> 1912, 1913 and 1914 all saw her beat *Lusitania*.

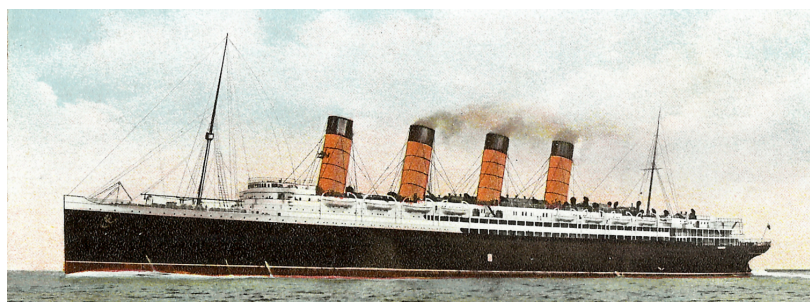
## *Lusitania and Mauretania: Perceptions of Popularity*

Table 2: Average Passengers Lists of <i>Lusitania</i> and <i>Mauretania</i> 1907-14		
	<i>Lusitania</i>	<i>Mauretania</i>
1907	<b>1,876</b>	1,414
1908	<b>1,129</b>	1,107
1909	<b>1,046</b>	<b>1,046</b>
1910	1,185	<b>1,356</b>
1911	1,297	<b>1,373</b>
1912	1,346	<b>1,394</b>
1913	1,371	<b>1,475</b>
1914	1,171	<b>1,302</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,242	<b>1,298</b>

**TABLE 2:** The average number of passengers carried by *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*, 1907 to 1914. These figures include wartime crossings made in 1914. **Bold** emphasizes the highest average number of passengers in a given year.

It is interesting to make some further observations. Although *Lusitania* carried over 2,000 passengers on her maiden voyage, it was not until 1910 that *Mauretania* carried over 2,000 passengers on a single crossing. Similarly, *Lusitania* appears to have carried more than 2,000 passengers on six occasions during her career (including three crossings in 1907 alone): *Mauretania* only did so on four occasions. There seems to have been a burst of enthusiasm for *Lusitania* when she entered service – an entirely natural occurrence, as she was the first to enter service and all the attention was focused on her – yet it was also reflected in her early passenger figures. She was also lucky that she made her maiden voyage at a time of the year that was very good for westbound passenger figures, whereas *Mauretania* did not. Perhaps these early comparisons might explain, in part, how the myth took hold that *Lusitania* was more popular than her sister.

*Right: Lusitania, as seen during her trials before the maiden voyage. (J. Kent Layton Collection)*



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Table 3: Class-by-Class Average Passenger Numbers for <i>Lusitania</i> and <i>Mauretania</i> 1911 and 14						
1908	<i>Lusitania</i>			<i>Mauretania</i>		
	<i>1<sup>st</sup> Class</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Class</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> Class</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Class</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Class</i>
Westbound	269	281	592	241	287	580
Eastbound	254	227	635	249	201	633
1911	<i>Lusitania</i>			<i>Mauretania</i>		
Westbound	354	298	688	370	346	756
Eastbound	343	232	670	351	236	681
1914 (Pre-war)	<i>Lusitania</i>			<i>Mauretania</i>		
Westbound	285	258	699	301	268	785
Eastbound	299	235	971	360	293	1,007

**TABLE 3:** It helps to get a broader assessment of each ship's strengths when we break down the passenger figures class-by-class, taking three random years as an example. In 1908, *Lusitania* retained a slim advantage over her sister. She was more **popular** in every category (apart from second class, westbound, where *Mauretania* did better). Even so, the figures were extremely close. However, in 1911 and the pre-war months in 1914 *Mauretania* had established an advantage in every single category, both westbound and eastbound. *Mauretania* did not carry a higher average passenger list due to greater popularity in one class alone, but rather she had a broad-based advantage. (NB. Figures do not necessarily match the average passenger list totals due to rounding.)



The figures speak for themselves. Although *Lusitania* sometimes carried more passengers in total than *Mauretania* did – in the years 1909, 1911 and 1914 – the only reason she could make the claim was because she had made more crossings. It is very hard to claim that *Lusitania* was the more popular ship before the war. While she did have the edge over *Mauretania* in 1907 and 1908, both in her total passenger numbers and average passenger lists, that advantage vanished over the course of 1909 and 1910.

*Left: Lusitania at her New York pier very early in her career. (National Archives & Records Administration, Author's Collection.)*

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<b>Table 4: Total Number of Passengers Carried by <i>Lusitania</i> and <i>Mauretania</i> 1907-14</b>		
	<b><i>Lusitania</i></b>	<b><i>Mauretania</i></b>
Total Passengers Carried ( <b>excluding</b> wartime crossings)	231,996	<b>241,102</b>
Number of crossings	<b>184</b>	<b>184</b>
Average Passenger List	1,261	<b>1,310</b>
Total Passengers Carried ( <b>including</b> wartime crossings)	240,959	<b>247,971</b>
Number of crossings	<b>194</b>	191
Average Passenger List	1,242	<b>1,298</b>

**TABLE 4:** A comparison of the years 1907 to 1914 – firstly, excluding the wartime crossings late in 1914, and then including them. *Mauretania* carries **more** passengers in total, and has a **higher average passenger list** on each crossing.

None of this information should detract from *Lusitania*'s success. She was, for all practical purposes, nearly as fast as her sister; and she remained very popular throughout her remaining years of service. Together, the two sisters carried almost half a million passengers between 1907 and the end of 1914. They maintained a great partnership. Hopefully any future discussion of their relative merits will be centred on historical fact as well as subjective opinion.

Is it possible that *Lusitania* was more popular with repeat passengers? Although the great bulk of passengers (for example, third class) only crossed once or twice, a number of first class passengers crossed regularly and may have had their own favourite ships or commanders; many certainly had allegiance to a particular line, such as Cunard or White Star. However, it seems highly unlikely that this small segment of potential repeat passengers would have any appreciable affect on these passenger totals. *Mauretania*'s popularity was sustained over a number of years, and in order for *Lusitania* to have been more popular with repeat passengers then *Mauretania* would need to have been doing far better with first time travellers. Anecdotal evidence might be brought into play, but it is essentially impossible to verify if one ship carried more repeat passengers than the other, given that even the same



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Above: The image above comes from a postcard postmarked June 22nd 1909. The senders wrote: 'Arrived in Liverpool all O.K. & leave for London in 10 min. The Mauretania broke all her previous records this trip - time being 4 days - 17 hrs. & 21 min. Average speed being 25.88 knots per hour. Everything O.K. Carl & Lilly.' (Restored Digital File © Eric Keith Longo/ Collection of Eric Keith Longo 2009.)

names appearing on passenger lists might not be the same people. No doubt both were popular with regular travellers. Short of researching the identities of the many thousands of passengers who crossed on each ship, the answer will never be known, but the available information does not seem to support the suggestion.

Below: An impressed passenger writes a postcard to her father towards the end of September 1909. *Mauretania* had just raised her average speed for the westbound crossing above 26 knots. Earlier that month, an exchange had been reported between Chief Engineer Currie and Captain Pritchard. In response to a report that the coal was of poor quality and had stones in it, Pritchard responded: 'Never mind, Chief; we will beat the *Lusitania* even if we have only stones to get steam with.' (Restored Digital File © Eric Keith Longo/ Collection of Eric Keith Longo 2009.)



## *Lusitania and Mauretania: Perceptions of Popularity*

[Postmark: 1 PM September 26, 1909 Queenstown]

Receipient:

Rev. W.R. Hickman,  
"Crofts" Haslemere,  
Surrey,  
England

"This ship is like a palace Dad, it is really wonderful Everything is so comfortable & no motion to speak of - I miss you all so much & wish I was home.

Love and kisses, Mina"

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

It has been rather unusual for me to venture away from White Star liners – the ‘Olympic’ class, *Majestic* and *Homeric* being my favourites – and *Aquitania*, but it is hoped that this article about *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* will have been informative. I could not have done it without considerable help.

I wish to thank Eric Longo for his insights and correspondence, encouraging me and suggesting the article’s title. Eric also designed the lovely title illustration, using two unique and previously unpublished images. (The photographs show *Lusitania* [left] on the afternoon of September 13th 1907; while *Mauretania* [right] is pictured on the afternoon of December 22nd 1907.) Additionally, Eric deserves considerable credit for helping me to contact John Maxtone-Graham, who was always willing to take time out of a busy schedule to assist me, and – in turn – John’s assistance was invaluable for putting me in touch with Norman Morse. Norman’s generosity was amazing, and it is entirely thanks to him that I have been able to present the passenger figures for *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*. He copied for me the relevant annual tables for the Cunarders, which were published by the contemporary North Atlantic Passenger Conference (sometimes called the ‘Atlantic Conference’ or ‘Transatlantic Passenger Conference’). I was then able to add up the figures voyage-by-voyage. I am very grateful to him for taking the time to assist me in my research and offer advice. He has set a fine example for other researchers to follow. As always, the interpretations and opinions expressed in this article are my own unless stated otherwise. Any errors are entirely my own responsibility.

### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Ballard, Robert, and Archbold, Rick. *Lost Liners*. Madison Press; 1997. Page 52. The citation of this publication should not be taken as a criticism, but it is a convenient example that has

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been used for the purpose of illustrating a popular myth.

<sup>2</sup>This hypothetical example might be illustrated as follows: the first ship makes 32 crossings, carrying 35,000 passengers with an average passenger list of 1,094; the second ship makes 20 crossings, carrying 26,000 passengers with an average passenger list of 1,300. Although the first ship was more popular in the sense that she carried more passengers, the claim would appear extremely dubious given that her competitor was carrying an average of 206 more passengers every time she made a crossing.

<sup>3</sup>Warren, Mark D. (Ed.) *Distinguished Liners from The Shipbuilder 1906-1914 Volume 1*. Blue Riband Publications; 1997. Page 100.

<sup>4</sup>There always seems to be some discrepancy when dealing with passenger statistics. For example, the figures given here for 1911 (total passenger carryings for *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* of 41,500 and 38,455 respectively) differ slightly from other documentation giving 41,377 and 38,367 – even though the differences are tiny and do not influence the sisters' comparative standing (see Chirnside, Mark. *RMS Aquitania: The 'Ship Beautiful'*. History Press; 2008). The former were calculated by adding up every single crossing individually, whereas the latter came from a summary giving the total number. Another problem can occur due to rounding: if a ship completed thirty-two crossings in a given year, the final crossing might be completed on January 3rd of the following year, and so the figure could be justifiably rounded to either thirty-one or thirty-two. (Although, on these figures, *Lusitania* made thirty-two crossings in both 1909 and 1911, it was the work she did in 1911 that was claimed as a record number for a single year.) Every effort has been made to be consistent.