

The Hales Trophy (For Fastest Crossing of the Atlantic Ocean)

Once upon a time..... - The history of the Blue Riband and The Hales Trophy almost calls for such a beginning, but let us start with the present:

The current holder of the record and thus, the trophy, is Danish ferry owner Scandlines, who won it in 1998 when its newbuilding M/V Cat-Link V made an eastbound crossing in 2 days 20 hours at an average speed of 41.3 knots (equal to 76.5 km/hour). Scandlines has made an agreement with Danish Shipowners' Association to exhibit the trophy on the Association's premises.

The trophy was instituted in 1935 when Harold K. Hales (1868-1942), a member of the British Parliament and owner of a shipping company, commissioned a Sheffield goldsmith to produce a large trophy to be presented to the fastest ship crossing the Atlantic. For a man so devoted to the sea, it is ironic that it should claim his life. Mr. Hales died in a boating accident on the River Thames in 1942. The trophy is a gilt statue, four feet tall, weighing nearly 100 lbs., fashioned with a globe resting on two winged figures of victory (inspired by the big statue of the greek goddess Nike that was erected on the Greek Island of Samothrace following a victorious sea battle in 305 B.C.). It stands on a base of carved green onyx, with enamelled blue ribbon encircling the middle, and decorated with models of galleons, modern ocean liners and statues of Neptune and Amphitrite, god and goddess of the sea. It is surmounted by a figure depicting speed pushing a three-stacked(-funnelled) ocean liner against a figure symbolizing the forces of the Atlantic.



Although a few holders of The Hales Trophy have also, by virtue of the same achievement, won the so-called Blue Riband, the two notions should not be confused. As early as the beginning of the 19th century a mythical blue ribbon was awarded the fastest steamer to cross the Atlantic. This became known as the Blue Riband (of the Atlantic). The Blue Riband was (and is) only awarded for westbound crossings, i.e. against the Gulf Stream. Voyages start in either Liverpool or Queenstown but the end has always been Sandy Hook, or later Ambrose Lightship, at the entrance to New York harbour, a distance of 2800 nautical miles (5186 km). On an eastbound voyage a ship could be a record breaker, but would not win the Blue Riband. Competition was fierce and rewards were considerable. Imaginary in itself, the Blue Riband offered immense tangible rewards. Many travellers wished to go on the fastest ship, and it obviously played a role in securing contracts for mail carriage and other freights where speed was of the essence.

For the purpose of putting the whole story of record-setting on Atlantic crossings into perspective, let us first look into the highlights and the winners of the Blue Riband during the first 100 years or

so. There is no ship capable of winning the Riband today, because the contestant must be a mono-hull passenger liner, and the large cruise ships of our time and age neither have the hull shapes nor the propulsion necessary to achieve the speeds of which the last great liners were capable. The new Queen Mary II comes close, but cannot quite reach the maximum speed of the last winner. The first ship to officially win the Riband, however, was certainly no sprinter by today's standard. In 1838 the little British M/V Sirius made the crossing (from Cork, Ireland) in 18 days at a speed of just 8 knots. Her possession of the Riband lasted only days when she was beaten by the "Great Western", doing closer to 9 knots. Then followed a succession of steamers from the renown, and still existing, Cunard Lines culminating with the "Asia" in 1850, which made the crossing in 8 days 14 hours and 50 minutes at 12.25 knots. Then there was a brief interlude of American possession when the "Pacific" and then the "Baltic" broke the speed record between 1851 and 1854. The British, however, quickly won it back in 1856 with the "Persia" and held the Riband for the next 42 years until 1898. Then the "Lucania's" 1894 record of a round 22.0 knots was beaten by Germany, Norddeutscher Lloyd's "Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse", which did 22.29 knots. The Germans managed to hold on to the Blue Riband until 1907, also assisted by Hapag-Lloyd's Deutschland in 1903. Then Cunard's "Lusitania" brought it back to the British, as she made an average of 23.99 knots on an autumn passage from Queenstown to Sandy Hook.



"Sirius"



"Mauretania" (Cunard)



"United States" (U.S. Lines)

In summary, with the turn of the century the point had also been reached where speeds were only slowly climbing towards and above 25 knots – a figure which is also considered quite high for normal, single-hull ships today. It was only towards the end of the active era of the Blue Riband that some extraordinary speed figures were reached, and the below list of record-breakers during the 20th century should speak for itself (note: the "Lusitania" broke her own record several times from 1907 to 1909:

Ship	Year	Owner / Nationality	Voyage time	Speed
Mauretania	1909	Cunard / British	4 days 10 hours 51 m..	26.06 knots
Bremen	1929	N.D.L. / German	4 days 17 hours 42 m.	27.83 knots
Europa	1930	N.D.L. / German	4 days 16 hours 06 m.	27.91 knots
Rex	1933	Italian Line / Italian	4 days 13 hours 58 m.	28.92 knots *
Normandie	1935	French Line / Italian	4 days 03 hours 02 m.	29.98 knots *
Queen Mary	1936	Cunard-White Star/ Br	4 days 00 hours 27 m.	30.14 knots (*)
Normandie	1937	French Line / French	3 days 23 hours 02 m.	30.58 knots *
Queen Mary	1938	Cunard-White Star/ Br	3 days 21 hours 48 m.	30.99 knots (*)
United States	1952	U.S. Lines / American	3 days 12 hours 12 m.	34.51 knots !! *

*) Ships marked with an asterisk were also awarded The Hales Trophy. The "Rex" possessed it only for three months – the time between the actual completion of the trophy and the new record set by the "Normandie". And although the trophy had been instituted in 1936, Cunard – White Star did not actually possess it after the 1936-record set by "Queen Mary". The Queen's captain stated: "We

don't believe in racing on the Atlantic, or in blue ribands and the like. That caused Harold K. Hales to change the rules so that the trophy could only be won by a “non-British ship”.

The rules for the trophy were also different from the traditional rules for the Blue Riband in that the trophy could be awarded to any surface passenger ship, i.e. also fast-ferries with a catamaran hull, and it could be won on the basis of a speed record in either direction, also eastbound, and between other ports than those dictated by the Blue Riband rules. That made way for the victory of three such new generation vessels, ending with the Cat-Link V. – But only in 1990 did a fast-ferry beat the 1952-record of the stately liner “United States”. The latest winners of the trophy are:

Ship	Year	Owner / Nationality	Voyage time	Speed
Hoverspeed Great Britain	1990	Aegean Speedlines / (Bahamian) British	3 days 07 hours 54 m.	36.6 knots
Catalonia	1998	Buquebus / Spanish	3 days 09 hours 40 m.	38.9 knots
Cat-Link V	1998	Scandlines / Danish	2 days 20 hours 09 m.	41.3 knots

The Cat-Link V is no longer owned by Scandlines, but it still flies the Danish flag as the “Fjord Cat”. It was bought by Fjord Line, who operates it on the company’s Hirtshals-Kristiansand route. So there is still ample possibility to make a passage on this, the fastest ferry in the world, albeit not with the possibility of “dining at the captain’s table” and other traditions that existed on the big Atlantic liners – before aviation made even their impressive speeds inadequate for modern use.



“Cat-Link V”



- and her wake (from the author’s archive)

As a curiosity it can be mentioned that when the “United States” won the trophy in 1952 its location was unknown, but it was found at the Sheffield goldsmith’s where it had originally been crafted. It was presented to U.S. Lines at a ceremony attended by 400 guests and was displayed at their headquarters in New York until the “United States” was taken out of service in 1969. In 1979 it was transferred to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy as a relic. When the “Hoverspeed Great Britain” formally won it in 1990 – its owners having previously verified with the trophy’s trustees in U.K. that the ship was eligible although it would be on a positioning voyage without carrying passengers – the Academy considered challenging the decision on the grounds that Harold K. Hales donated the award to “ships providing Transatlantic passenger service”, but decided to rest their case because of potential legal costs. If the Academy had won a case the Cat-Link V would not have been eligible, being also on a positioning voyage from the Tasman shipyard where it was built to Denmark. –

But here it stands, looking a bit like something out of a fairy tale, and Danish Shipowners’ Association, on behalf of Scandlines, will care well for it until, possibly, some new and even faster ship “do us part”.

If you have a special interest, it is possible to arrange individual inspection of the trophy:

(Contact: Michael B. Clausen, Analyst, mbc@shipowners.dk)