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Ferry Review By Priscilla Ewbank

## The Rebranding of a Venerable Queen

When our dogwood emblem was stripped off BC Ferries' funnels we never knew how awry our world would go. Oh, the *Mayne Queen*! She brought me to Saturna Island in May 1970 and I did love her. Now, she is back from refit with \$800,000-worth of tarting-up and several million dollars in upgrading for which we have all paid.

No-one questions the mechanical and structural upgrades that have occurred. The social area, the part that serves the travelling public, is a different case though. She looks like a blend of a 1960s school bus and a cheap truck-stop, minus the smell of fries.

The cozy benches that you could always squeeze one more person onto are gone. Those days, a couple of families could function in fine style over the course of what is often a three-hour trip. However, there will be no more luxuriously spreading the newspaper out over a big table, next to the crayon books and dinky toys.

No more sleeping on the benches when you are dead dog-tired from a day in Vancouver and it's summer and you have waited at Galiano or Mayne for the connection and maybe you will get back at 11pm. Too bad for the tradesmen who catch the 5am to Saturna and usually spend the trip sleeping.

No, sir! In one end of the boat, we will be sitting straight upright on metal chairs welded to a tiny table that seats four. There will be 7 groupings of us, half of us not able to see the view. None of the 'units' will hug the baseboard heaters so that you can warm your wet coat or doze in winter. The rest of the passengers in the top deck and the two lower decks will sit in metal chairs resembling cheese-graters welded into rows. The seating is uncomfortable for even a short time and freezing cold for commuters in winter.

The new interior creates a feeling of transience by not fitting our bodies or our social needs. (In the crew mess, they fare no better, having had their table and benches replaced with a tiny metal table bolted to the four-chair component.) The ship's lounge feels cold, with most of the carpeting gone. The ability to stretch out and enjoy the journey with other community members is over.

When I queried upper echelon ferry administrators, the answer I got was that this is all due to 'branding'. People expect upgrades, and the ferry fleet must look 'modern, recognizable, and similar'.

'Teflon-coated' is how I would describe the administration staff I spoke to. They offer that a special 'brand' of talk that you get when no one is accountable to the people that they are hired to serve. They were not interested in anything but their answers and escaping from my questions and suggestions. Their 'we will do whatever we want and you can do nothing about it' attitude was infuriating.

That the *Mayne Queen* is not on a main-route run and serves mostly Islanders was of no interest. If people want to sleep, they can sleep in their cars. Families can have four chairs and a table. Branding was the critical concept. No mention of the incredible cost of upgrading to a boat they are planning to retire in 8 years or so.

Our identities as Islanders are made up of many pieces, our connections give us passion and inspiration and a sense of belonging that lead to responsive behavior. I hate surrendering any part of mine to such mindless twaddle as Ferries offers as 'rationale'. Why should usefulness and function in my world be sacrificed for 'branding'? ☞

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