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Queens in trouble—Southern Gulf Islands' ferries have a tough season

The substitute *Bowen Queen* is still suffering from overload problems on Route N^o5. Ferry crews have been almost heroic in getting people home. Meanwhile, all has not been plain sailing for the *Queen of Burnaby*, borrowed from Comox–Powell River to replace the *Queen of Nanaimo* (in refit) on the Southern Islands-Tsawwassen route.

On Monday, November 22, while docking at Sturdies Bay on Galiano, the *Queen of Burnaby* was pinned against the port-side wingwall by the wind (reported as up to 40 knots), and every attempt to back out saw the stern of the ship come ever closer to the rather solid rock of Burrill Point and Bellhouse Park.

It took an hour's clever work by the skipper to get the stern pointed out into Active Pass to permit a brave dash *in reverse* well out into the strait, where the ship could be safely turned around to head toward Tsawwassen.

Though the 50-year-old sister ships *Nanaimo* and *Burnaby* were originally built to the same plans, their respective routes have determined different modifications. As reported by ferry crews, the two vessels have quite different handling characteristics.

With a multi-Island loading and unloading pattern, using only one end, the *Queen of Nanaimo* makes a series of demanding dockings and undockings.

Travelling through Active Pass, Route N^o9 also presents the skipper with a formidable variety of wind and current conditions. In fact, one of the most difficult routes on the ferry system; in contrast to the port-to-port Comox–Powell River route.

Route N^o9's fourth port of call, Sturdies Bay, is particularly exposed to southeast winds from the Strait of Georgia, which accompany most of Southern Islands' bad winter weather.

Winds continued for the rest of the day on November 22; the afternoon sailing did not leave from Long Harbour. The plastic surface of the starboard side wingwall at Sturdies Bay had been peeled off by the bow of the ship and it was towed away for repair.

The following Monday, high winds once again cancelled the afternoon trip.

Then on the morning sailing on Thursday, December 2 as the ship approached Berth 2 at Tsawwassen, the skipper warned passengers: 'Everybody hold on, we're going to bump the dock.' The ship wouldn't go into reverse.

As it turned out, the bump was gentle and there was no obvious damage. But the return trip to Long Harbour was delayed for three hours while the ship was repaired. Otter Bay passengers had a very long ride as the *Queen of Burnaby* did not call there until the commencement of the evening round-trip. However this got her back on schedule. Good work for a quick fix.

Many are waiting for Santa; Southern Islanders are waiting for the return of their ships, slated for December 16. ☺

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