

# "Jugolinija": The Myth and the Truth

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To generations of people inhabiting the eastern shores of the Adriatic Sea the name Jugolinija was and remains a symbol of a large and prestigious fleet ruling the ocean lanes. One could say: more than a symbol, almost a myth. In fact, Jugolinija was one of the largest liner shipping companies in the world, which ordered nearly one hundred brand new ships for its fleet between 1949 and 1989. Really impressive figures!

But it's also a fact that this giant disappeared from the high seas in a matter of only a couple of years. Since in the story of

Jugolinija reality lies somewhere in the middle, between the myth and the truth, this middle is certainly worth exploring. A detailed chronicle of Jugolinija would require an entire book and this paper only aims to provide a short history of the biggest shipping enterprise.

Officially, the story begins at Sušak (now a part of Rijeka), on January 20, 1947 when the Yugoslav Federal Government established an enterprise called Jugoslavenska Linijaska Plovidba, popularly known as Jugolinija. If we are to gain an understanding

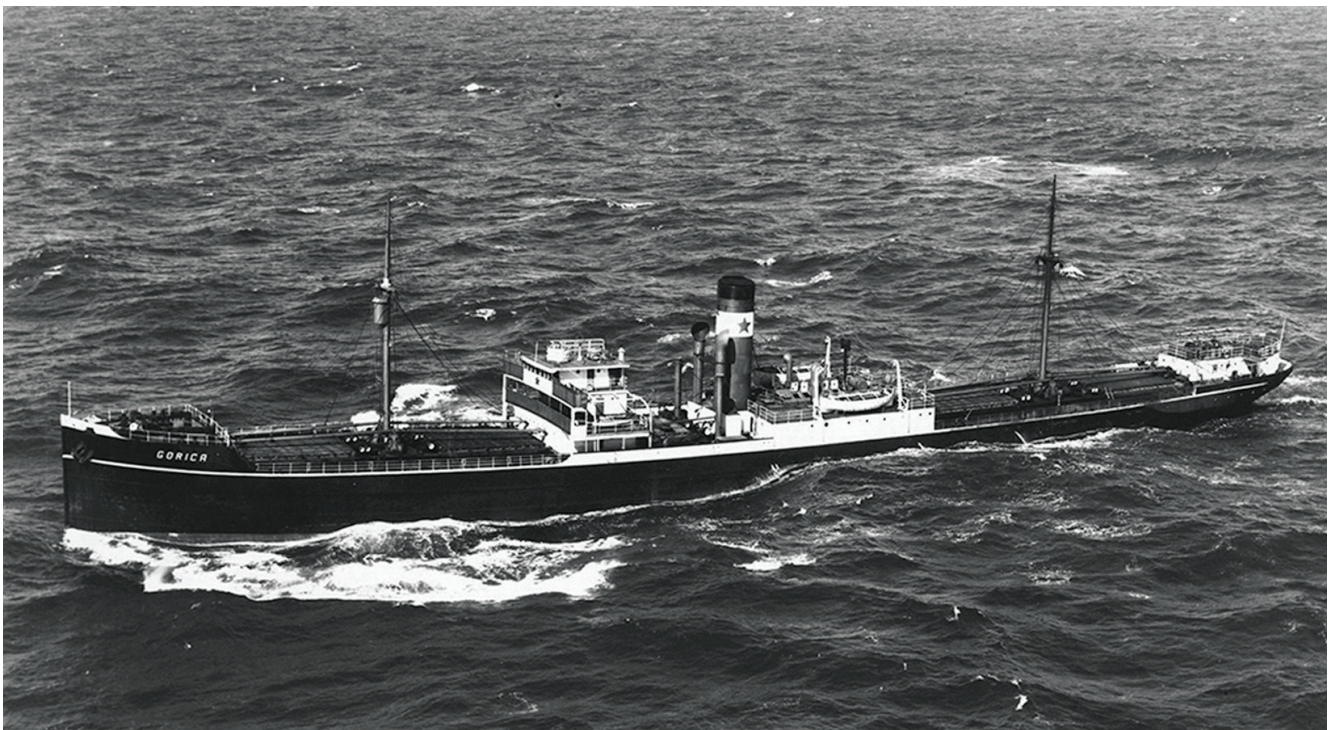


Figure 1.

'Gorica' – one of the WWII survivors.

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**Figure 2.**  
‘Bosna’ – the first real liner.

of the circumstances of its foundation we have to return to the summer of 1945, to the first months of peace. Relieved of duty after years of perilous sailing for the Allies, mainly chartered by the British Ministry of War Transport, Yugoslav ships started coming back to their homeland.

However, the homeland these rare survivors returned to was a quite different Yugoslavia, now under Communist rule. The first step of the new rulers was to change the ships' names, but the real challenge came in November 1946 when all shipping companies were nationalized. Four state enterprises were established in January 1947 to operate Yugoslav ships. All ocean-going vessels were divided between Jugoslavenska Linajska Plovidba or Yugoslav Liner Shipping and Jugoslavenska Slobodna Plovidba or Yugoslav Tramp Shipping, although the fleets of both enterprises consisted entirely of trampers. There was not a single liner or a single line to be maintained.

The Decree of January 20, 1947 allocated sixteen steamships to Jugolinija. In reality, that fleet existed only on paper! Cargo ship 'Šolta' and tanker 'Pulj' were in such a derelict condition and beyond repair that they never entered the fleet. Steamer 'Lošinj', former German 'Sardinien', allocated to Yugoslavia by the Inter-Allied Reparation Agency (IARA) was also on the list, but

undergoing extensive repairs at Hamburg not to be completed until late November.

Thus, Jugolinija's fleet consisted of only 13 ships of an average age of 35.5 years! The oldest in this 'League of veterans' was the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'Tara', built in 1896, and the youngest the 1928-built 'Livno'. Steamships 'Prozor', built in 1902, and 'Šibenik', built in 1900, were so worn out by sailing in Allied convoys that they were transferred to the coastal shipping enterprise Jadranska Slobodna Plovidba in a matter of months. By late 1947, six ships joined Jugolinija's fleet, now comprising 17 ships of all types, shapes and sizes! Italy returned tiny coastal steamer 'Hercegovina', seized in 1941. With the length of 58.8 meters and cargo capacity of 990 tons she became the smallest ship in Jugolinija's history. 'Šabac', the former 'Marie Leonhardt', arrived with 'Lošinj' as part of German war reparations and Jugolinija made its first purchase.

There hasn't been a single commercial tanker in the eastern Adriatic since the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the famous 'Etelka'! 'Jajce' of 9.599 tons and 124.3 meters, thus became the forerunner of Yugoslav tanker shipping. She was built under the name 'Kim' by Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. at Walker-on-Tyne in 1930 for a Norwegian ship-owner Sverre Sturlung. Five years



Figure 3.

'Partizanka' – festive arrival to Dubrovnik.

later, she became 'James Hawson'. Jugolinija purchased her from Eyvind Matheson of Oslo.

However, the most interesting newcomers were American-built steamers 'Radnik' and 'Partizanka'. 'Partizanka' was recognised as the symbol of Jugolinija for decades even though she sailed under its colours for only three years! Not surprising if we know she was purchased for a single purpose: to carry immigrants of Yugoslav origin from all around the world to the 'new Yugoslavia, a country of peoples' freedom and happiness'!

She was a star of Communist newsreels and newspapers. Being unaware of festive welcomes organized for 'Partizanka' in Adriatic ports was virtually impossible.

Thousands of immigrants arrived from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and other countries. And 'Partizanka' was the right ship for them. She was built at Newport News, Virginia in 1927 as liner 'Shawnee' for New York & Miami Steamship Corp. Being 120 meters in length, she was powered by four steam turbines capable of the speed of 20

knots. She was luxurious and had state-of-the-art navigation equipment. During the war, she served as an US Army troopship and was sold to Portugal in 1947. Having sailed as the 'City of Lisbon' for only a couple of months, she became 'Partizanka'. Her role of an immigrant ship came to an end in Rijeka in May 1949. She was sent to Split for repairs, but was destroyed by an unexplained fire in August 1949.

'Radnik' was nowhere near as famous and prestigious. She was also built at Newport News, but back in 1908. Originally, she was liner 'Lurline' of Matson Navigation Co., sold to Alaska Packers Association of San Francisco in 1928. She was rebuilt as 'Chirikof' for a unique purpose. In the spring, she sailed to the north with hundreds of workers hired for packing salmon in Alaskan factories to return in the autumn fully loaded with canned salmon. In 1947, immigrants replaced the salmon packers. 'Radnik' mostly sailed to Australian ports and was sent to the scrapyard in 1952.

In 1948, further three German war reparations vessels entered the fleet. They were the little 'Vis' (former 'Malaga'), 'Topusko' (former 'Mina Horn') and the giant 'Bosna'. She was formerly known as 'Schwabens' of Norddeutscher Lloyd, built by Bremer Vulkan shipyard in 1926. With the length of 156 meters and cargo capacity of 12.200 tons, 'Bosna' remained the largest vessel in Jugolinija's fleet for nearly a decade. These were the first genuine liners in the fleet.

They were soon followed by the first new liners. In 1948, Jugolinija ordered four ships for its pioneering Adriatic – Cyprus – Egypt line. The first, named 'Zagreb', was delivered in June 1949 and her sisters followed in an unusually quick succession. 'Skopje' was delivered in October, 'Sarajevo' in December and 'Titograd' in January 1950. There is an anecdote concerning the reaction of longshoremen in Alexandria to this quick succession of new liners. They were confident that Jugolinija operated only one new



Figure 4.  
Tiny veteran steamer 'Solis'.

ship and painted a different name on the bow for every voyage just to make an impression!

In the very eventful year of 1949, the fleet was enhanced by two much larger newcomers: 'Hrvatska' and 'Srbija'. The first arrived just by chance! She was former 'St. Lawrence Victory', built in March 1945 by Permanente Metals Corp. at Richmond, California. A standard 'Victory' type ship of 10.430 tons deadweight, she was powered by a pair of steam turbines, boasting with the speed of 16 knots.

Exactly two years after delivery, she was sailing in the Adriatic, carrying the valuable cargo of potatoes for the war-torn Yugoslavia. In the vicinity of Dubrovnik she ran into a minefield and was beached to prevent sinking. She was abandoned to the salvors and towed to Split for repairs. After the completion of repairs in late 1949, 'Hrvatska' was a real liner with accommodation for 60 passengers, ready to inaugurate the Adriatic – North America line.

'Srbija' was also a large ship, with the cargo capacity of nearly 12.000 tons and accommodation for 50 passengers. She was built under the name of 'Crostafels' in occupied Rotterdam in 1944, and towed to Germany for completion. However, 1947 found her still incomplete at Bremerhaven. Sold to Yugoslavia at auction, she was towed back to Holland and finished in August 1949. Following her delivery, Jugolinija ordered two similar ships from Amsterdam. The sister ships 'Crna Gora' and 'Slovenija' were completed in 1951.

In 1950, the Dutch shipyards in Rotterdam, Alblasserdam and Hardinxveld delivered three identical medium-sized liners for the Adriatic – UK & Continent service. 'Pula', 'Rijeka' and 'Zadar' were praised not only for their high quality but for their unparalleled elegance as well.

And then, in the middle of its strife to modernize its fleet and focus on liner shipping, Jugolinija was flooded with steam trampers: 14 newcomers with the combined age of 374 years! The



Figure 5.  
'Jajce' – the forerunner of tanker shipping.

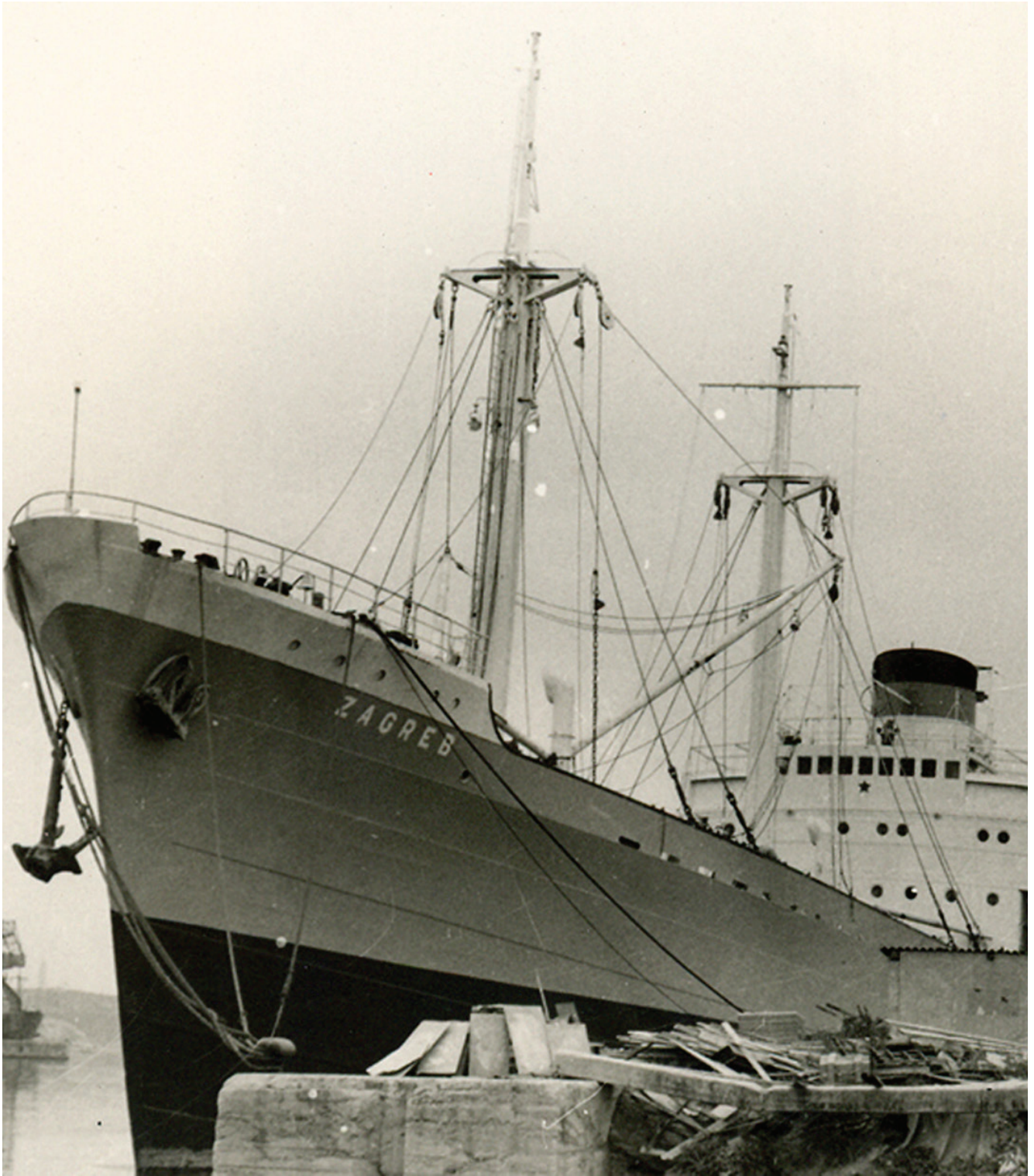


Figure 6.  
The first newbuild – 'Zagreb'.

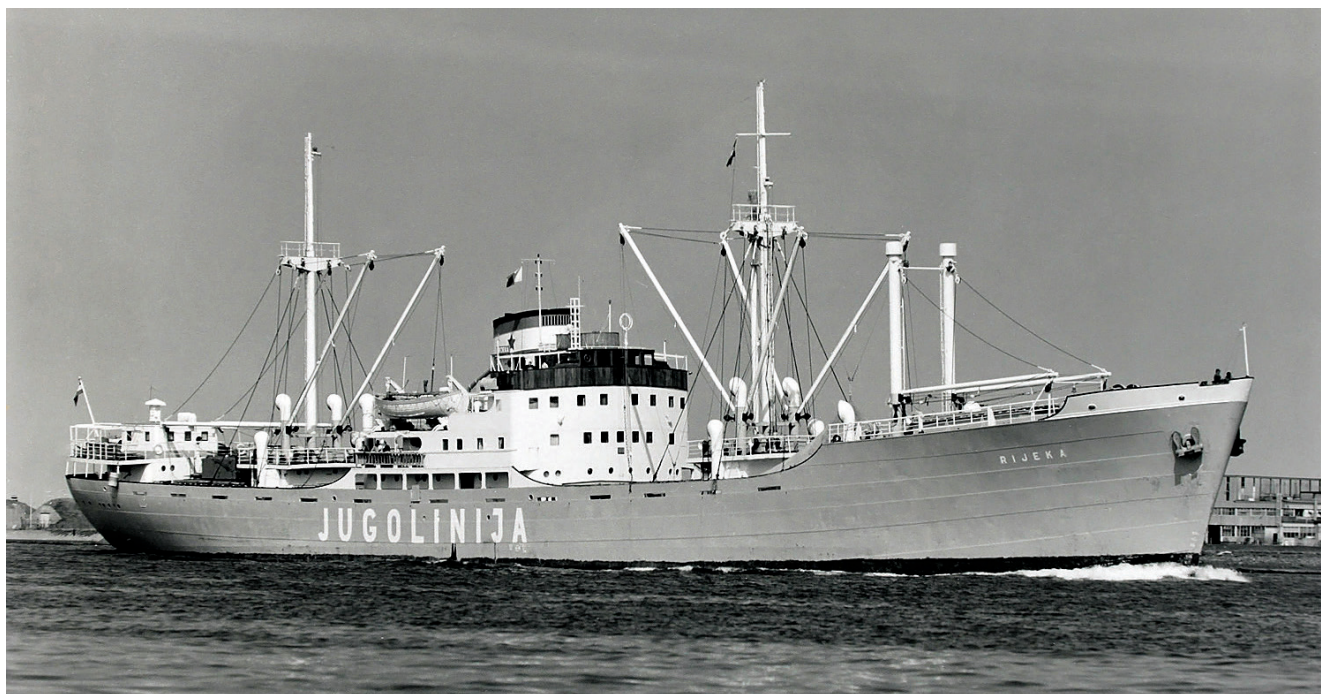


Figure 7.  
Handsome 'Rijeka'.

entire fleet of Jugoslavenska Slobodna Plovidba was transferred to Jugolinija in 1949 and a year later, the two enterprises formally merged. The new old company was titled Jugoslavenska Linijska Plovidba and its abbreviation, Jugolinija, became its official name.

In late 1950, Jugolinija's fleet consisted of 43 vessels. Only four years later, there were 54 names on the fleet's list. This tremendous increase gave birth to the myth of the mighty Jugolinija. And it will persist for years to come. Much later, in the mere six years between 1972 and 1977, 23 newbuilds entered the fleet, with only two sold.

After the episode with ships built in Holland, Jugolinija completely turned to Adriatic shipyards. 'Učka', delivered by the Rijeka shipyard '3. maj' in 1951, was the first to come, although she wasn't really a newbuild. She was originally built in 1944 by the same shipyard, at the time called Cantieri Navale del Quarnaro, as 'Vittorio Locchi'. She was the seventh of the 'Poet' class ships built after 1942 for Italian company 'Tirrenia'. Sunk in the shipyard by Allied air attacks at the end of WWII, she was later raised and repaired. Her blueprints were reused and her three sister ships – 'Avala', 'Romanija' and 'Dinara' – built in 1952/1953. In 1954 three additional, only slightly modified, ships entered the fleet – 'Lovćen', 'Triglav' and 'Veletić'.

Then came the turbulent year of 1955. The fact that all overseas shipping activities in Yugoslavia were concentrated in only one enterprise caused widespread displeasure along

the Adriatic, giving rise to demands for the dispossession of Jugolinija and the establishment of new shipping companies. As expected, Jugolinija strongly opposed such ideas. To calm down inflamed passions and mitigate any political damage, the Federal Government forced Jugolinija to consent to the decentralization of its fleet. In late 1955, nineteen trampers were allocated to the newly established enterprises in Dubrovnik, Kotor and Piran, while tankers 'Jajce' and 'Lendava' became cornerstones of the new tanker company in Zadar.

Although no newcomers made it into the fleet in 1955, the years that followed were marked by a tidal wave of ships from domestic yards. Unfortunately, the very first step forward proved to be a disappointment! Jugolinija ordered four turbine powered liners of 10.500 tons, three from Rijeka and one from the Split shipyard. 'Drvar' and 'Radnik' were delivered in 1956 and 'Marjan' and 'Šibenik' in 1957. Ships were powered by a pair of steam turbines with a total output of 4600 HP, which proved too weak for such ships. To make things worse, since the turbines were built by the inexperienced Karlovac plant 'Jugoturbina', engine breakdowns and costly repairs were frequent.

But, the consolation was soon to come. In 1957, shipyards in Rijeka, Pula and Split delivered four identical liners ('Lika', 'Nikola Tesla', 'Treći Maj' and 'Uljanik'). Sturdy vessels of 12.980 tons were a good choice for maintaining the Adriatic-Middle & Far East line. The fifth sister ship, 'Trepča', entered into service in 1958.



Figure 8.  
'Marjan' – troubled turbine liner.



1957 became important to Jugolinija for one more reason: the establishment of Kvarnerska Plovidba. Although formally independent, the new shipping company served as Jugolinija's reserve fleet. Nine vintage steamers averaging 39 years of age and, unsurprisingly, two brand new turbine liners of dubious quality - 'Marjan' and 'Šibenik' were transferred to Kvarnerska Plovidba.

After this 'cleaning' operation, Jugolinija's fleet consisted mainly of newbuilds. And a whole new flotilla was ordered. In 1958, the '3. maj' shipyard delivered three sister ships for the Adriatic - UK & Continent line. Named 'Bratstvo', 'Sloboda' and 'Pobjeda', these liners proved to be yet another complete failure! Being 95 meters in length, they had more than a modest cargo capacity of 2350 tons. Even so, the trio kept sailing for Jugolinija until 1971!

In 1959, the first, and for a very long time, the only, Japanese-built ship entered the fleet. She was 'Kosovo', a fine ship

of 16.000 tons, built by Hakodate Dock Co. Her sister ship 'Piran' was built for Splošna Plovba of Piran. This was a unique deal, since the ships were partly paid with Yugoslav steamers sold for scrap in Japan.

The next year saw the arrival of liners 'Jesenice' and 'Trebinje', the first two of the quartet generally considered as the best ever built for Jugolinija. 'Primorje' arrived in 1961 and 'Kostrena' was delivered in 1963. All were built by '3. maj'. They were 155 meters in length, with the cargo capacity of 13.650 tons. Powered by CRDA-Sulzer engines of 10.400 HP they sailed at the impressive speed of 18.5 knots. These prestigious ships navigated on the Adriatic - US North of Hatteras regular service, and later ran the Far East line.

The early sixties were marked by a stream of new ships. Three sister ships of 3.150 tons ('Frano Supilo', 'Matko Laginja' and 'Ivan Mažuranić') were built at Kraljevica for the Adriatic-UK & Continent line. Another trio of 6.950 tons ('Baška', 'Drežnica' and

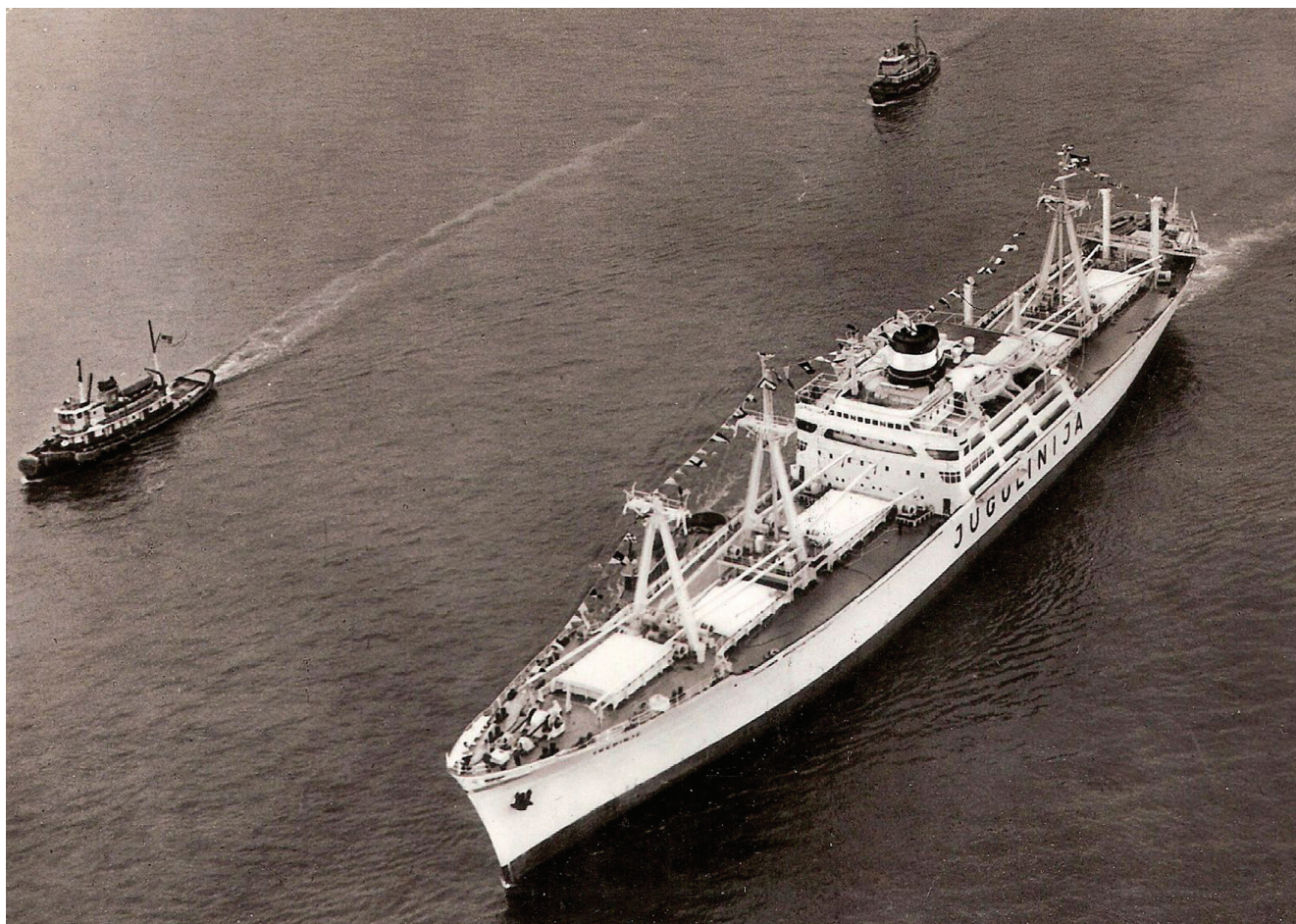


Figure 9.  
New York welcomes the prestigious 'Trebinje'.



**Figure 10.**

A rare containership – ‘Koper Express’.

‘Grobnik’) delivered by the Split shipyard was intended for the Adriatic-South America service.

And then came an unpleasant surprise! Kvarnerska Plovidba ceased to exist and in January 1963 its fleet of 12 antiquated ships became part of Jugolinija. It was several years before these unwanted and useless veterans were deleted from the fleet list crowded with newbuilds.

The sheer number of new ships is astonishing! In only six years between 1965 and 1969, the ‘3. maj’ shipyard alone delivered 15 liners: four sister ships of ‘Viševica’ class, a trio of ‘August Cesarec’ class, sister ships ‘Trsat’ and ‘Nehaj’, another pair of sister ships ‘Bosna’ and ‘Hrvatska’ and four ships of ‘Arcturus’ class. Furthermore, four ships of ‘Kraljevica’ class were built by Italcantieri at Monfalcone and vessel ‘Pag’ came from the Spanish yard at El Ferrol during that same period.

And the fleet continued its relentless growth without pause! 19 additional newbuilds were delivered between 1972 and 1977, adding to the myth of Jugolinija. The 74 ships it boasted in late 1977 were the strongest proof of its mightiness. However,

maritime experts were fully aware of the company’s weakness. The giant fleet was hopelessly outdated!

It may sound incredible, but the entire fleet of 74 ships had at its disposal only three container ships, three tiny ro-ro vessels and seven liners with container carrying capacity ranging from 116 to 303 TEUs! Six liners built in 1949, four from 1950, three from 1954 and four built in 1957 were still in service. The inevitable question was: what would it cost to maintain lines around the globe with such an antiquated fleet?

A detailed explanation would take pages and pages, but to cut the story short, economic principles might be said not to have been the only decisive factor in Jugolinija’s operation. The network of lines was an important political issue. From the mid 1950s Yugoslavia, together with Egypt and India, was the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement and regular lines running from the Adriatic to numerous African and Asian ports served as a visible connecting factor. Likewise, profitability was not a priority in Yugoslav socialist economy. The fact that hard currency income was additionally subsidized was hugely important for Jugolinija.



**Figure 11.**  
 'Omišalj' – custom-made for the Great Lakes.

The best example of the direct influence of politics on Jugolinija is the establishment of Rashid Shipping Co. in 1981. This Egyptian-Yugoslav joint venture managed to stay afloat for less than three years before winding up in bankruptcy. The politicians intended Jugolinija to provide the ships, and the Egyptians cargoes, believing everything would be fine. But experts could clearly see this venture was doomed to failure.

Four of Jugolinija's ships – 'Viševica', 'Klek', 'Tuhobić' and 'Zvir' – were ordered to sail under Egyptian flag. The quartet was built by the '3.maj' shipyard for Adriatic-North America line as classic liners of a humble cargo capacity, capable of accommodating 50 passengers. Being nearly 20 years old, the ships could hardly be expected to make a profit. As early as in the summer of 1982, the ships were laid up in Alexandria and were soon to be arrested for numerous debts. In 1983, Jugolinija withdrew from the joint venture as losses came to be counted in tens of millions of dollars and ships were sold at auctions.

Clearly, profitability and staying abreast of trends in shipping technology were not issues of primary importance.

Unsurprisingly, the first response to the new winds on the market came too late. In early 1973, Jugolinija chartered a German ship 'Ede Sottorf' to navigate the Adriatic-US North of Hatteras line. This semi-container vessel capable of carrying 258 TEUs, was built by the Unterweser shipyard in Bremerhaven for a Hamburg owner, Erich Drescher, in 1969. Sailing mainly to New York, she remained under charter until April 1975.

In July 1974, Jugolinija's first very own container ship entered the fleet. Aptly named 'Pionir', she was built a year earlier by the German Schürenstedt yard in Bardenfleth as 'Maritime Champ' and purchased from the London investors. 118.7 meters in length, she had the capacity of 297 TEUs. She was immediately engaged on the North American route. In 1977, she was joined by two much larger vessels, 'Sušak' and 'Hreljin'. The pair, built by the renowned Sietas shipyard in Neuenfelde, had the capacity of 574 TEUs and sailed at the speed of 18.5 knots.

If anyone expected continued rapid containerisation of Jugolinija he was certainly disappointed. It was five years before the next vessel entered the fleet. It was 'Jadran Express' of 926



**Figure 12.**  
The biggest ever – 'Kostrena'.

TEUs, built by the Japanese shipyard Ishikawajima Harima in Aioi in 1978. A similar vessel, Polish-built 'Rijeka Express' of 934 TEUs, followed in January 1986.

Finally, the first container newbuild was delivered to Jugolinija by a domestic shipyard in May 1987. It was called 'Sarajevo Express', a fine ship with the capacity of 1762 TEUs, capable of the speed of 18 knots. Intended for the North American service, she was built by 'Uljanik' shipyard in Pula. Her sister ship, 'Koper Express', was delivered as early as in September. The third vessel, 'Zagreb Express', with a slightly greater capacity of 1916 TEUs, followed in December 1987.

It was over five years before the fourth and the final sister ship, 'Croatia Express', was delivered. What this implies is that in the entire history of the liner company, among the amazing number of 164 vessels, there were only nine container ships!?

Between 1974 and 1981, the East German shipyard Warnowwerft from Warnemünde built nine liners of the 'Ozean' and 'Meridian' type for Jugolinija, with the modest container capacity ranging from 116 to 356 TEUs. In the early 1980s, 'Uljanik'

shipyard built two pairs of semi-containers: 'Rijeka' and 'Tuhobić' of 566 TEUs and 'Triglav' and 'Veletić' of 454 TEUs. In 1985, three sister ships with the capacity of 752 TEUs, built in 1978/1979, were purchased from the Danish Det Østasiatiske Kompagni.

In 1987, the fleet was enriched with sister ships 'Omišalj' and 'Malinska'. These bulk carriers of 34.976 tons were custom-made by the '3.maj' shipyard for the Adriatic - Great Lakes service and the requirements of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Generally considered some of the best ships ever to navigate this route, they are sailing even today under the Canadian ensign.

In the summer of 1987, Jugolinija purchased its biggest ship so far, the bulk carrier 'Kvarner' of 64.063 tons, intended to carry coal for a coking plant in Bakar. She was built in 1973 by the Belgian Cockerill yard in Hoboken. Two years later, a brand new bulker 'Kostrena' of 69.345 tons was delivered by the Japanese builders from Todotsu. She was simultaneously the largest and the very last vessel to enter Jugolinija's fleet.

In the late 1980s, it became apparent that the era of socialist economy and reliance on state subsidies had passed.

Before anything major could be done, the name Jugolinija was relegated to the dustbin of history together with the war-torn state of Yugoslavia. Now operating in the independent Republic of Croatia, she became Croatia Line. A new name and old problems. The first was the enormous number of obsolete liner ships. 'Cleaning' started in 1991 and in three years time ten ships were sent to scrapyards.

From the very beginning, Croatia Line encountered another serious problem. The war disrupted the economy, there were no cargos and no need for liner shipping. Furthermore, the inherited debts of Jugolinija and annual loan repayments were daunting. To keep operating, the company was forced to sell ships. Croatia Line reached the point of no return in 1997.

Unpaid debts for all kinds of supplies and services led to seizures of ships all around the world. In 1997 alone, various ships spent a total of 511 days under arrest. In that year, the proud 'Malinska' and 'Omišalj' were sold to obtain the desperately needed cash, only to be followed by the company's flagship 'Kostrena' in 1998. But in vain! In 1999, creditors lost their patience and the ships were arrested from Durban, Panama, Valletta and Singapore to Hong Kong and Valparaiso. By late 1999, 13 ships were sold at auctions.

Croatia Line officially declared bankruptcy in May 2000. The very last ship on the fleet's list, 'Buzet', was sold in December 2002. But the myth of Jugolinija lives on...



Figure 13.  
The end of the line – 'Slovenija' in the scrapyard.