



SKOOKUM

meets a logger's demands



BY KEITH INGRAM

When Blakely Pacific Ltd launched their new 30m ro-ro vehicular barge, *Skookum* and commissioned her into the Tauranga-Matakana Island service, it was the start of a new era for timber activities on the island.

Skipper Geoff Bird in command

Designed and built in Whangarei by Shipco Ltd, *Skookum* can carry two fully-laden heavy transport logging rigs or general cargo of up to 130 tonnes, plus up to 30 passengers. Blakely Pacific, a family-owned, American-based logging company, is over 100 years old. The parent company, Port Blakely Tree Farms Ltd of Seattle, Washington, had its beginnings in 1864 when a colourful sea captain from Nova Scotia, Captain Renton, opened a sawmill on Bainbridge Island in Puget Sound, Washington. This area became the site of the Port Blakely Mill Company, once the world's largest sawmill under one roof.

During the early days the company was involved in ship-building, and marketing and shipping timber throughout the world, with many cargoes finding their way to New Zealand. Much of this early timber was used for mining in the Otago gold-rush, and for many of the government buildings built in New Zealand and Australia.

Port Blakely was sold to the present owners, the Eddy family, in 1903. When the sawmill burnt down in 1924 it was never rebuilt, but the company retained ownership of extensive timber holdings throughout Washington.

In New Zealand, Blakely Pacific owns or manages 27,472ha of exotic forest, of which 4005ha is located in the North Island. In addition to fast-growing, short-rotation radiata pine, the company grows eucalyptus and Douglas fir, plus macrocarpa, lustannica, Ponderosa pine, Corsican pine, cedar, larch and other minor species.

Skookum owes her name to the Chinook native American nation of the Pacific Northwest, the principal area of operations for Blakely Pacific's parent company, Port Blakely Tree Farms. Skookum is Chinook slang for "strong and enduring". The Chinook nation comprises eight tribes that inhabit the lower

Columbia River Valley of what is now Washington, Oregon and British Columbia.

This is the first time that Blakely Pacific has entered the barge or ferry business with the commissioning of its new vessel. *Skookum* is now operated by a subsidiary, the Tauranga Barge Company.

Matakana Island, which protects Tauranga Harbour from Mount Maunganui to Bowentown, is currently serviced by two barge operators. The northern one works out of Omokoroa and caters primarily for the farming, agriculture and horticulture businesses and the local community.

At the other end of the island, the Te Kotukutuku Corporation operates the older *Forest Lady*, previously owned and operated by the Rayonia Forest Corporation. Although *Skookum* will be available for other barge work to the island, the barge reinforces Blakely Pacific's commitment to its forest operation on Matakana Island and the western Bay of Plenty.

Skookum is designed primarily to operate in enclosed waters such as Tauranga Harbour. However, in suitable conditions she can work anywhere in the Bay of Plenty.

Captained by senior master/manager Geoff Bird, the opera- ▶





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Trucks can easily be driven up onto the vehicle deck

Skookum's service speed varies little, even when fully laden



130 tonnes rolls on board

tion is run using a rotation of three crew - master and deckhand, with a second master doubling as master or deckhand to enable rostered days off. Geoff Bird originally started his seagoing career in the fishing industry. After five years he left to join the Hokianga Vehicle Ferry Company, where he was a master for 12 years. Subsequently he spent five years as senior master with Fullers Bay of Islands, operating mostly the vehicle barge but also their many tourist vessels.

While designed primarily for inshore operations, *Skookum* carries the latest marine electronics from Furuno, including a 36-mile radar and a GP7000F GPS/plotter.

She is powered by twin 186kW 3126B air-started Caterpillar marine diesels, one for each engine room, for'ard and aft, driving two HRP 360-degree steerable azimuth thruster

propulsion units, which give excellent manoeuvrability and handling in all conditions.

She has a top speed of 11 knots, but she operates at a fuel-pinching eight knots on the harbour. At this speed her wash is virtually non-existent, considering that her total laden deadweight is 330 tonnes.

The barge operates up to 11 return trips per day from the Sulphur Point landing, or when carrying logs from the Port of Tauranga log farm ramp, to the Matakana Island forest landing. When operating directly into the port, bypassing public roads, she can carry overweight freight loads, reducing transport costs.

Our first impression as we walked aboard was that this was one solid, chunky vessel, as she remained stable while unloading 130 tonnes. With large off-road logging rigs driving over her deck there was no perceivable deck movement or annoying "dong" drumming of plates common among many vehicle ferries.

The vehicle deck is wide, long and clear, with a heavy-duty ramp at each end. The hull under the bow incorporates a bow-grounding plate so the barge can touch the ramp and lower the door. As the truck drives on or off, there is no racking of the ship or noticeable rocking movement. The master advises that *Skookum* can hold onto the ramp with minimal engine thrust.

Once the ramp is hoisted by its heavy duty hydraulic winches and the hydraulically activated locks are engaged, the ramp is quickly secured for sea. All this is done remotely from the wheelhouse.

The centre castle to starboard dominates the vessel. This structure includes the crew's galley and dining space, a separate head and shower and the access door to the main engine room.

Above these compartments is the main wheelhouse or conning position accessed by a fore-and-aft ladder. The conning position, as there is no wheel in sight, is slim, with all-round windows affording excellent visibility to the helmsman to all corners of the vessel, even when loaded with two heavy rigs, as he can see above these obstructions.

The controls are well laid out, with both azimuth controls at either side of the helmsman's position. The anchor is carried in



The main engine room also contains the genset

a workable position situated directly under the wheelhouse ladder. This hydraulically operated chain winch lowers the anchor, which is housed in a tunnel directly out the bottom of the barge in approximately a midship position on the centre castle or island side.

On going below, we see that the hull is divided into three main compartments. The first is the main engine room, which not only carries one of the main engines and azimuth drive units, but also a 180kVa Caterpillar genset and all the necessary pumps and machinery.

Access for'ard is through a large, heavy watertight bulkhead door, to the central part of the vessel known as the workshop and tank room. This space has a fully equipped workshop, with benches, drill presses and the like to carry out any urgent on-board repairs.

Tankage consists of two fuel tanks of 5500 litres a side, a sullage tank of 3000 litres, 2000 litres of potable water, 3000 litres of waste oil/oily water tank, and two 200 litre bulk oil tanks.

The suction and pumping design of these tanks was constructed so that the fuel tanker can drive on board and refuel, while the sullage and waste oil tanker can drive on board and suck out these respective tanks.

Clearly, *Skookum* has been built to remain environmentally friendly when operating in our near-shore pristine waters close to forests and built-up areas.

Another watertight bulkhead door provides access for'ard, where the second main engine and azimuthing propulsion unit is situated.

Returning to the main vehicle deck, even though we are travelling at service speed with a full load, the noise from the exhaust is quieter than the truck that had boarded.

Skookum is painted in the company's colours of white and light green, and is protected using Altex Coatings' paint systems throughout. 

SPECIFICATIONS

Length extreme		38.6m
Length overall		30m
Beam		10m
Draft	- empty	1.2m
	- laden	1.5m
Displacement	- light ship	150 tonnes
	- laden weight	330 tonnes
Service speed		8 knots
Engine		2 x Caterpillar 3126B
Power		186kW @2400rpm
Propulsion		2 x 360 degree steerable azimuth thrusters
Capacity		2 x truck/trailer units plus five cars or 21 cars



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