

SS Teutonic (1889)

The **SS Teutonic** was a steamship built for the White Star Line in Belfast and was the first armed merchant cruiser.

History

In the late 1880s, competition for the Blue Riband, the award for the fastest Atlantic crossing, was fierce amongst the top steamship lines, and White Star decided to order two ships from Harlan and Wolff that would be capable of an average Atlantic crossing speed of 20knots (37km/h). Construction of the Teutonic and the Majestic began in 1887. When Teutonic was launched on January 19, 1889, she was the first White Star ship not to have square rigged sails. The ship was completed on the July 25, 1889 and participated in the Spithead Naval Review on August 1, commemorating Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

Teutonic was built under the British Auxiliary Armed Cruiser Agreement, and was Britain's first armed merchant cruiser, sporting eight 4.7" guns. These were removed after the military reviews, and on August 7, she left on her maiden voyage to New York City, replacing the SS Baltic in White Star's lineup. In 1891, Majestic brought the Blue Riband to White Star, and in 1891, Teutonic took it from her sister with an average crossing speed of 20.25knots (37.50km/h). She later bested her own record with a speed of 20.5knots (38.0km/h). The following year the City of Paris took the honor away, and no White Star ship would ever regain it. Despite this, both Teutonic and her sister were extremely profitable liners, and the two ships made crossings completely filled to passenger capacity several times.

The Teutonic and Majestic were both known as the first modern liners because of their modifications to passenger accommodations. All of White Star's former liners only carried two classes of passengers, Cabin and Steerage. Teutonic and Majestic were large changes to that pattern. Both ships were built with the three-class accommodation system, consisting of First, Second, and Third Classes. First Class, originally known as Cabin Class was renamed as Saloon Class on specific terms, being meant for rich and wealthy travelers and their families. The Teutonic had rooms for 300 First Class passengers in spacious cabins situated on her uppermost three decks, and had many interesting features. Many of the cabins were inter-connecting for family travel. A New Class began appearing in ships after this time in shipbuilding, and Teutonic was amongst the first to see it. Second Class, also known as Cabin Class, was designed as being in between First Class and Third Class, meant for travelers of the middle class. Teutonic was built to carry 190 Second Class passengers in comfortable rooms on the second-highest deck, further aft towards the stern. Third Class, commonly known as steerage, was built for immigrants and lower class travelers. Teutonic was built to carry 1,000 Third Class passengers in two areas of accommodation aboard the ship. In the bow, there were large multi-berth rooms for single men. Meanwhile, there was accommodations for the remainder of the passengers in the Stern. There were small two- and four-berth rooms for married couples or passengers traveling with children, while single women were berthed, like men were in the bow, in large multi-berth dormitory like rooms.

During the first 18 years of service, both Teutonic and Majestic, along with their older cousins Britannic and Germanic sailed on the route from their home port of Liverpool, England to New York City. Each ship made on average one sailing per month, and averaged 11-14 sailings each season. The White Star Line had it planned so as they could operate a weekly service across the North Atlantic. Each week a ship sailed from Liverpool on a specific day, commonly Wednesday or Thursday. From there, they would stop at the small port of Queenstown (now known as Cobh), Ireland, to pick up more passengers. Records have shown that the Teutonic and her partner ships were known to pick up as many as 800 Irish immigrants in a single stop, as the White Star Line was very popular in Ireland because most of their ships, including Teutonic were Irish built.

After Queenstown, the ships would then continue on the long voyage to New York, almost 2,500 miles of open sea. Once passengers were disbursed at either the White Star Line pier in New York or the Immigration center at Castle Garden, and later on Ellis Island, the ship would be prepared for her return voyage.

In 1897, Teutonic reassumed her military role for a review commemorating Victoria's 60th anniversary. In 1898, she had a minor collision in New York Harbor with the United States Lines' Berlin, but neither ship suffered major damage.

During the Boer War in 1900, she served as a troop transport. In 1901, Teutonic encountered a tsunami, which washed two lookouts out of the crow's nest, but survived. Fortunately the tsunami hit at night, there were no passengers up on deck.

In 1911, she was transferred to sister company Dominion Line for Canadian service. By 1913, Teutonic's age meant that she no longer attracted the top-class passengers, and so was refitted to carry only second and third class travelers. In 1914, with the start of World War I, Teutonic became a merchant cruiser once again, being commissioned into the 10th Cruiser Squadron. In 1916, she was refitted with 6" guns, and served as a convoy escort ship as well as being used for troop transport.

In October, 1918, the ship narrowly avoided the same fate as the Titanic, when it ran so close to an iceberg 172 miles east of Belle Isle, off the Newfoundland coast that it was only prevented from crashing into it by reversing its engines and putting the helm hard aport. According to the October 29, 1918 issue of the Chicago Tribune, "the liner passed within twenty feet of the iceberg. The fog was so thick that even at that small distance the berg could scarcely be distinguished. It was so close that there was danger that the propeller of the ship would strike it as the vessel went around. The passengers were not aware of their peril until it had been averted. They signed a testimonial to the captain and his officers expressing their gratitude and admiration for the care and skill displayed by them."

In 1921, she was scrapped at Emden.



Teutonic Leaving Liverpool
Painting by William Lionel Wyllie

Career

Name:	SS Teutonic
Namesake:	Teutonic (German people)
Owner:	 White Star Line
Operator:	White Star Line
Port of registry:	Liverpool, United Kingdom
Builder:	Harlan and Wolff yards in Belfast
Launched:	January 19, 1889
Completed:	July 25, 1889
Maiden voyage:	August 7, 1890
Fate:	Scrapped in Emden in 1921
Status:	Broken Up

General characteristics

Class and type:	Teutonic class ocean liner
Tonnage:	9,984 gross tons
Length:	582 feet (177.7 m)
Beam:	57.7 feet (17.6 m)
Propulsion:	Two triple expansion engines powering two propellers.
Speed:	20.5 knots (38.0 km/h)
Capacity:	1,490 passengers