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CAPT'N ABBY “Most Maneuverable of Kind”

From Capt'n Abby's Library, an archived web article on the Abegweit's first skipper, Captain John Maguire, challenging the Montreal Harbor tugboats to stand clear as he deftly steered the Abby into her dock.



When she was launched in Sorel, Quebec in 1947, the rugged ice-breaking railcar ferry MV Abegweit was claimed to be the most maneuverable vessel of her size ever built.

The huge 7,000-ton ferry is equipped with four 13-foot nickel propellers - two aft, and two in her heavily plated bow - to enable her to fight the vicious ice of the Northumberland Strait.

The four screws, driven by variable current electric propulsion motors powered from eight huge diesel engines capable of 13,500 brake horsepower, make the big ferry as agile as many of the fish in the waters she sails.

With typical island devilry, Captain John Maguire, the Abegweit's first skipper, demonstrated this dramatically on her first refit trip to Montreal in 1948.

As the proud vessel's powerful green hull neared the berth in Montreal, several local tugboats swung out into the channel to help her dock.

Impishly, the veteran Maguire waved them off, indicating that he didn't need their help.

“Don't be a fool”, one of the tugboat skippers yelled through a loud hailer, “you can't make it on your own”.

“Can't I?” Maguire yelled back “Just watch.”

Chuckling to himself on the bridge, the master mariner eased back two levers controlling the big ferry's propellers, and gently moved two others forward.

On the port side, one screw turned ahead slowly, the other astern. To starboard, the same thing happened, but in reverse.

While the tug boat crews and nearby dock workers watched in open-mouthed astonishment, the super powerful icebreaker slid gently into dock - sideways -nosing up to the wharf with a gentle kiss as Maguire demonstrated her responsive handling.

In the 30 years since she slipped gracefully into the quiet Richelieu River dripping champagne from the newly christened bows, many crewman and passenger have said silent thanks for the big ferry's ease of maneuverability as she has twisted and side stepped her way through the crushing power of winter ice in the more forbidding waters of Northumberland Strait.

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