

Cutty Sark: The Promptest Sailing Ship of All Time

“The nineteenth century was a duration of significant technical growth in Britain, and for shipping, the main differences were from breeze to mist control, and from timber to iron and steel.

The most immediate commercial sailing ships of all period were clippers, three-masted vessels made to ferry goods worldwide, although some also carried passengers.

From the 1840s until 1869, when the Suez Canal extended and smoke propulsion replaced sail, clippers overpowered the global trade business. Many were constructed, but only one has triumphed more or less untouched: Cutty Sark, now on exhibit in Greenwich, southeast London.

Cutty Sark’s remarkable title comes from the ballad Tam O’Shanter by the Scottish poet Robert Burns. Tam, a farmer, is tracked by a wizard named Nannie, who is fraying a ‘cutty sark’ – an old Scottish term for a brief nightgown.

The wizard is shown in Cutty Sark’s figurehead – the carving of a female generally at the facade of ancient sailing yachts. In mythology, and Burns’s poetry, magicians cannot strike water, so this was a somewhat unconventional selection of expression for a vessel.

Cutty Sark was constructed in Dumbarton, Scotland, in 1869, for a shipping firm possessed by John Willis. To bring out edifice, Willis picked a unique shipbuilding company, Scott & Linton, and provided that the difference with them placed him in a very powerful place.

In the end, the company was pushed out of trade, and the vessel was completed by a contender. Willis’s company was involved in the tea business between China and Britain, where pace could fetch shipowners both yields and reputation, so Cutty Sark was developed to create the travel brief of any different ship. In 1870, on her virginal journey, she sailed from London, holding large quantities of interest in China.

She yielded loaded with tea, completing the travel around to London in four months. Nonetheless, Cutty Sark never lived up to the lofty anticipations of her landlord, as a consequence of destructive winds and different mishaps. On one occasion, in 1872, the ship and a rival clipper, Thermopylae, vacated dock in China on the same daytime.

Travelling the Indian Ocean, Cutty Sark earned a charge of over 400 miles, but then her rudder was hardly hurt in stormy seas, causing her unimaginable to steer. The ship’s crew had the daunting task of repairing the rudder at sea and only succeeded at the second attempt. Cutty Sark reached London a week after Thermopylae.

Steamships posed a growing threat to clippers, as their speed and cargo capacity increased. In addition, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the same year that Cutty Sark was launched, had a serious impact.

While steam ships could make use of the quick, direct route between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, the canal was of no use to sailing ships, which needed the much stronger winds of the oceans, and so had to sail a far greater distance. Steamships reduced the journey time between Britain and China by approximately two months.

By 1878, tea traders weren't interested in Cutty Sark, and instead, she took on the much less prestigious work of carrying any cargo between any two ports in the world. In 1880, violence aboard the ship led ultimately to the replacement of the captain with an incompetent drunkard who stole the crew's wages.

He was suspended from service, and a new captain was appointed. This marked a turnaround and the beginning of the most successful period in Cutty Sark's working life, transporting wool from Australia to Britain. One such journey took just under 12 weeks, beating every other ship sailing that year by around a month.

The ship's next captain, Richard Woodget, was an excellent navigator, who got the best out of both his ship and his crew. As a sailing ship, Cutty Sark depended on the strong trade winds of the southern hemisphere, and Woodget took her further south than any previous captain, bringing her dangerously close to icebergs off the southern tip of South America. His gamble paid off, though, and the ship was the fastest vessel in the wool trade for ten years.

As competition from steamships increased in the 1890s, and Cutty Sark approached the end of her life expectancy, she became less profitable. She was sold to a Portuguese firm, which renamed her Ferreira. For the next 25 years, she again carried miscellaneous cargoes around the world.

Badly damaged in a gale in 1922, she was put into Falmouth harbour in southwest England, for repairs. Wilfred Dowman, a retired sea captain who owned a training vessel, recognized her and tried to buy her, but without success.

She returned to Portugal and was sold to another Portuguese company. Dowman was determined, however, and offered a high price: this was accepted, and the ship returned to Falmouth the following year and had her original name restored.

Dowman used Cutty Sark as a training ship, and she continued in this role after his death. When she was no longer required, in 1954, she was transferred to a dry dock at Greenwich to go on public display. The ship suffered from fire in 2007, and again, less seriously, in 2014, but now Cutty Sark attracts a quarter of a million visitors a year."

(Cullen, Pauline. The official Cambridge guide to IELTS: for academic & general training: student's book with answers: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Text.)