

Great Ships of the Seas: *The Italia*

She began her life as the Swedish-American Line's *Kungsholm*, built in 1928. Even then,, she was a noted transatlantic liner. Later, beginning in the early thirties, she also developed a good reputation on luxury long-distance cruises. Built by Blohm & Voss, Hamburg, Germany, she boasted 21,532 tons and was 609 feet long and 78 feet wide. With B & W diesel engines and twin screws, her service speed was 17 knots. She could carry 1,319 passengers (213 first class and 1,106 tourist class).



She served with the Americans during World War II, when she was bought outright and used as the transport *U.S.S. John Ericsson*, and subsequently worked for the Home Lines under the name of *Italia*. She had emerged from the war a battered ship, seriously damaged not long before by a fire at her New York pier, and had been eventually sold to Home Lines, which was in desperate need of second-hand passenger ships for its service to Latin America. Following full repairs and alterations, she was rechristened *Italia*. She entered service between Genoa and S. American ports in July, 1948, but was moved to the N. Atlantic within a year because of a sudden decline in immigration to South America. She consistently earned high profits for the next several years.

As jets began to cut into the transatlantic trade, the *Italia* was one of the first liners withdrawn from that service. She finished her last crossing in 1960. Fully refitted at Genoa, she began a new Home Line service in the Caribbean, which was also very successful. She was decommissioned in April 1964 and had a very brief stint as a hotel ship in the Bahamas. Towed into Bilboa by a Spanish scrap firm on September 8, 1965, the *Italia* was scrapped within months.

One Home Lines official later remarked, "She was the best ship we ever had. She could do no wrong. She was always profitable and popular."

