

Will it be a quick sale for Quickcat?

The oldest and largest Fullers ferry, *Quickcat*, which began service in Auckland in 1987, is for sale.

"*Quickcat* is now over 30 years old and reaching the end of her viable life. She has not been decommissioned but is currently for sale," says Fullers chief executive officer Mike Horne.

Quickcat was the first vessel to make the nine-to-five trip to and from Auckland city a reality. Commuters may have noticed her absence recently - she's been away on her annual survey.

Mr Horne says that once sold, there are no immediate plans to replace *Quickcat*, which was the first ferry designed specifically for Waiheke Island residents.

Regular commuters say they'll miss the size and layout of *Quickcat*, which can seat 250 more people than the three newer vessels servicing Waiheke.



Above - The *Quickcat* on its regular run to Waiheke, and below, the *Quickcat* soon after she was first commissioned in 1987.

The Rolls-Royce of the gulf

Quickcat master Todd Bennett has been skippering ferries for almost 20 years, starting as a master at 360 Discovery Cruises, and moving over to the Fullers vessels about six years ago.

Over the years, Mr Bennett worked his way from the smaller vessels all the way up to *Quickcat* and *Superflyte* - and the *Quickcat* is his all-time favourite.

"The best way to describe *Quickcat* is that she's like a Rolls-Royce. She's absolutely beautiful," says Todd.

"She's very stable in the water. Many other boats have little idiosyncrasies, but she's such a gentle giant and a very predictable boat."

The three vessels currently making the daily trip were purpose-built for Waiheke services between 2014 and 2017 - *Te Kotuku* in 2014, and *Kororā* and *Tōrea* in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

"The build of *Kororā* and *Tōrea* together marked a \$17.6 million investment for the fleet, increasing frequency and capacity, and standardising the quality of the travel experience to include modern amenities," says Horne.

"There are no immediate plans for new vessels, as this investment directly addressed Fullers' ageing fleet. However, we operate a high-frequency timetable to accommodate the seasonal visitor increase, with a vessel movement sequence to allow for increased reliability and punctuality rates."



Quickcat can carry 650 passengers at maximum capacity, whereas each of the newer vessels seat just 400 people.

Quickcat's size and speed made the daily commute to Auckland City possible for hundreds of people, and the ferry was involved in many rescue missions. There was a baby born on her, and a dog even regularly travelled to and from Auckland on *Quickcat* alone.

The famous seafaring Jack Russell named Wally, split his time between his owners' homes on Waiheke Island and the mainland. With one owner busy as an

artist in Auckland, she would often drop Wally off at the terminal so he could go and visit her boyfriend on Waiheke. Wally became a celebrity of the Hauraki Gulf and was even inducted as a member of the Captain's Club.

For Mr Bennett *Quickcat* has provided many such memorable crossings.

"When it gets quite rough, *Quickcat* rides the waves so beautifully. When I'm coming back from Waiheke on a really rough day - you're cruising back into Auckland City with the bad weather behind you, and blue skies ahead of you," he says.

"If you spend as much time as I do on a vessel as a master, you have a love and passion for the machinery you're running. You give everything you can to what you're doing, and the boat becomes an extension of yourself."

Quickcat holds a very nostalgic place in the hearts of many Aucklanders, and once sold, the 31-year-old vessel is bound to be missed. • Sophie Boladeras

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