

# BALLIN'S Blue Riband HEROES

As the first super-liners, *Imperator*, *Vaterland*, and *Bismarck* were built to assure Germany's dominance of the North Atlantic passenger runs, but fate intervened and Germany's trident found glory flying the flags of her former enemies

BY DAVID REED

With her massive size and three giant funnels, *Imperator* certainly lived up to its name. Photographed in 1913, note the controversial figurehead.

There exists no technological development in recent maritime history that has had so profound an effect on ships and their design than the steam turbine.

Since the day when Charles Parsons so rudely disrupted the fleet review of 1897 with his sleek *Turbinia*, ships have never been the same. Because of the tremendous power generated by this new innovation, larger ships could be built and powered by the engine. And they were.

In 1900, the HAPAG liner *Deutschland* of 16,500-tons was the world's largest ship. She was also the world's fastest — winning the Blue Riband in 1900 with a speed of 20-knots. Expansion engines powered her.

By 1907, however, Britain had constructed the splendid *Lusitania* and *Mauritania*.

These sleek greyhounds raced across the Atlantic powered by Parsons' ingenious machinery. The *Mauritania* won the Blue Riband in 1907 with a speed of 27.4-knots.

The French joined the turbine-driven liner race in 1912 with the very palatial *France* of 24,000-tons. So did White Star Line with their triple-screw giants *Olympic* (1911), *Titanic* (1912), and *Britannic* (1914).

The battle of the liners for the transatlantic trade was steaming "Full Speed Ahead!"

In Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm II was finally persuaded that not only were battleships important to supremacy of the seas, a nation with a strong merchant fleet was strong in

international trade and, in the age of Imperialism, this was a most important consideration.

Finally, it was decided that Germany would enter the transatlantic liner trade. Naval architects were called in and plans were drawn up for a quadruple-screw, turbine-driven fleet of liners that would challenge the British and French liners for speed, comfort, and size. The giant trio — *Imperator*, *Vaterland*, and *Bismarck* — was the result of this planning.

The shipping line that initiated this move was HAPAG of Hamburg (*Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt-Actien-Gesellschaft* or Hamburg-Amerika Line). In 1897, this company was rated among the top-20 of the world's shipping lines. By 1900, it was among the top-five. The phenomenal success of the line was due to the devotion of one man: Albert Ballin.

Ballin was a remarkable success story. Born of Jewish parentage in 1857 in Hamburg, he began work as a clerk in the ticket offices of HAPAG. Within 20-years, he was in charge of the North American passenger division and, ten-years later, he was head of the line.

Ballin was a devoted, punctual man whose imaginative and precise manner was responsible for the success of the line. He sailed frequently



*Imperator* under construction.

on the ships of HAPAG and recorded all details that came to mind: The pillows needed to be fluffier, the butter dishes bigger, the company crest engraved on the backs of cards, etc. Nothing escaped the detailed concern of Albert Ballin.

This same concern was expressed over the construction of HAPAG's three new liners. They would be the epitome of ocean travel. The largest liners in the world, they were designed to carry upwards of 5000 people in sumptuous elegance.



Beautiful oil painting of *Imperator* in her original configuration done by Albert F. Bishop.

