

by Archie Bayvel



The queen of cruise tells it like it is: There's a lot we can learn from the airlines!

So we find ourselves in the reign of Queen Ann at a time when many other shipping queens are visiting ... Mary, Victoria, and E II. Even the Queen of the Netherlands is here, albeit in Melbourne and as the world's biggest dredge not likely to receive a reciprocal visit by the first lady of Carnival Australia..

Not that she wouldn't be game because Ann Sherry's a merry-enough monarch with a nice air of pony club and more than a whiff of jolly hockey sticks.

She says detractors have referred to her as a perfumed steamroller but that's

fiddlesticks because rollers are flatteners and Sherry is all about lifting the game. Her own and those around her.

She did it as CEO of Westpac New Zealand and as CEO at Bank of Melbourne as well as when head of the Prime Minister's Office of the Status of Women.

But all that's in the past and the danger is to write so much about her past achievements that inadequate space is left for what she's up to now. Suffice to say that Ann Sherry, AO, has led a big life and that with a bit of luck we ain't seen nothing yet. The game is on again at Carnival and she

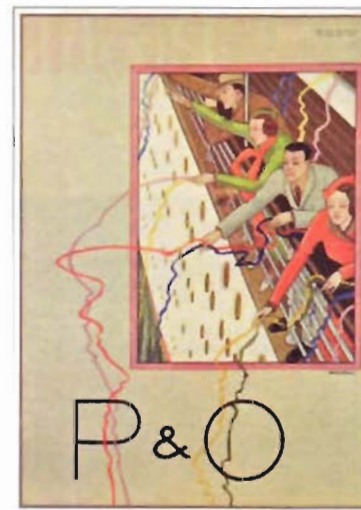
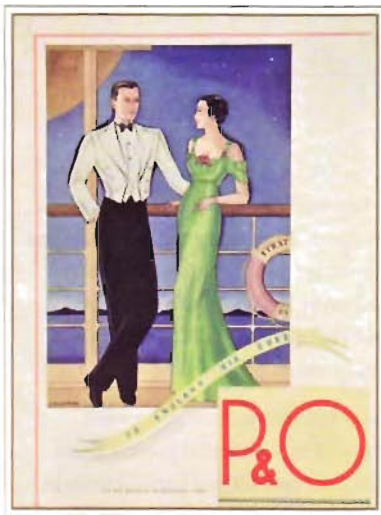
seems to have a clear field to play it.

"I'm 53 and I don't expect to be out of puff even when I'm 63," she says.

"I'm ambitious for the shipping and the tourist industry. I want to see it go ahead successfully. We have wonderful ports and wonderful destinations and the ships want to call there but we need to look to management and infrastructure so that reality lives up to the expectation."

There is of course another and terrible reality now for outstandingly successful women. Previously it was the exclusive preserve of men simply because there were





no women high enough in prominent companies to enter its danger zone.

It's what they call equal opportunity and its danger is the chance to become diverted at or near peak career by things blokes would think a good idea at the time. Eg: Margaret Jackson and the Qantas takeover controversy, Meredith Hellicar's nightmare at James Hardie.

Right now, though, Ann Sherry has only positives on her schedule:

- Carnival Australia is the dominant cruise provider here and growing fast
- She believes the shipping industry has heaps to learn from the airlines
- She has things to say about shipping salaries that will open a few eyes,
- She's eyeing off Sydney's Garden Island currently under RAN ownership.

"There's a lot the cruise industry can learn from airlines," she says. "Such as lifting our internal capacity to meet market challenges. These challenges include the changing nature of our market, increased competition, the need for more on-line presence.

"Airlines have done well with the on-line stuff. Today a lot of passengers wouldn't think of making bookings any other way. That hasn't been so good for travel agents but that's how things are.

"Air has also done well with customer segmentation. As a cruise line, for example, we have a lot of long-established brands but I'm not sure we've been smart enough yet in working out their segmentation.

"Qantas is a mile ahead which is probably why it's about the only airline in the world that turns a profit. Parts of that progress are not always popular with customers but when one is operating on such a big scale you can expect a complaint now and then.

"Our industry as a whole – not just the cruising sector – should look for learning, look around other industries and see what's what.

"But today there is a worldwide shortage of technical crews on ships and right across all aspects of the industry and we need to address that. We need to be fleet of foot to acquire attractive, contemporary and capable people.

"Changes are under way at Carnival. Our huge recent increase in capacity requires growth in selling and management needs a quite different intensity,

"I have an executive team of eight: Me, a CFO, a senior VP commercial, a PR manager, the head of HR, head of the hotel operation, and our general counsel.

"If you need to do a bit more to get the best person across the line, you should do it rather than accept a mediocrity."

On that note it is timely to speculate on Ann's personal salary at Carnival. Her \$3.1 million-a-year package at Westpac was a source of constant comment during her years in New Zealand.

In what must be the definitive profile on her, by the writer Carroll du Chateau, she told the NZ Herald: "I was brought up not to talk about our money. What I cost – rent, travel and superannuation – comes out of that – and a third of my remuneration is in shares which means I only get value if the shares perform well."

"You mean you don't get a dividend but you do get the shares?" du Chateau asked and was told: "No, I don't get anything."

So we're talking here about a lady who understands that outcome, performance is all and she appears to be part of a team with similar thinking.

"Look around Carnival globally and there are several very senior women," she says. "At a recent meeting there were three of us sitting around the table – one from Cunard, one from Seaboard, and me. And let's not forget Serena Bratten's history here in Australia.

A selection of Carnival's historic poster collection





The Queen Victoria at Sydney's Overseas Passenger Terminal

"The cruise business needs reconstructing in some respects and I'm good at that.

Sometimes the best way to achieve change is to change the style and having a woman at the helm is exactly that.

"My duet with Katie Lahey, CEO of the Business Council of Australia and chairman of Carnival's advisory council, is unusual in that neither of us came up through the ranks of shipping. We come from business.

"Now I've got my eyes on Garden Island. I'd like a passenger terminal there and a technical maintenance shipyard too.

"Just look at the cruise industry's growth! But our big ships can't get under Sydney Harbor Bridge and there's room for only one at Circular Quay. So Garden Island it is.

"I'm keen to know if the Navy really is going to relocate to Jervis Bay and when. When we want to bring a ship in to Garden Island we need extra security and Navy permission and that's not always easily obtained.

"For example they won't confirm our berth bookings for next year. We need to know a year in advance and no confirmations means no cruise ships. I'm going to talk to Martin Ferguson (Minister for Services and Tourism) about it

"Meanwhile the berths are there, access for trucks is great compared to Circular Quay which has now become so difficult to service in terms of fuelling and semi-trailers that some ships are getting their supplies in other ports.

"Then there are the Quay's restaurants. I've actually had one furious father phone me to complain that the Queen Victoria will berth there during his daughter's wedding. He's cross because it will block the view and thinks he's entitled to some sort of recompense."

There was a similarly frothing father in Brisbane last year who actually managed to get The World, another of Queen Ann's floating palaces, to change its berthing arrangement while his daughter tied the knot. A Circular Quay restaurateur observed at the time how ridiculous it would be to open a restaurant at the airport and then complain about jet noise. To which somebody else pondered: "Exactly what's in the words 'Overseas Passenger Terminal' that people don't understand?"

So what does it take to metamorphose from Queensland schoolgirl in Gympie through giving up \$3.1 million a year (assuming dividends) to a job where everything from shipboard antics to decisions on capital expenditure are under what she calls her purview?

"I'm the oldest of three girls and Mum and Dad were both pharmacists and quite entrepreneurial. At one time they also owned a meatworks and some racehorses. I'd been very good at maths and science at school and it seemed natural that I should have a career in health care of some sort.

"I liked the idea of radiography because one got paid for studying and the idea of an income appealed to me so I trained at Royal Brisbane Hospital then went to Queensland Uni and studied economics and politics.

"At 20 I married a man I met at uni - Michael Hogan, who's now a Sydney PR consultant. We have one son and we've just celebrated our 33rd wedding anniversary."

The rest of her history is what Google was made for.

Today her working environment is bright and practical. One thing she's steamrolled at Carnival is fresh flowers at reception changed every day and on her personal desk but changed only every week, an interesting touch of frugality!

She's also redecorated the place with bright prints of wonderful posters from the old P&O and Orient Line. Historic images of POSH days on steamers when travel promised romance, adventure, port outbound, starboard home. It's all a highly visible recognition of the value embedded in the history of the brands she now runs.

One corner of her personal office is conventional, unexceptional; diagonally opposite is her working corner with a wall of her posters and the big bunch of fresh flowers on her desk. It's not girlish, not even queenly and compared, say, to the outrageous lairs of Port Lincoln's fishing czars it's positively under-stated... It does, however, look like a comfortable creative corner.

"I printed hundreds of them," she says, talking of her posters, "and they're everywhere in this building and throughout all our offices. They're all over the place."

What next? How long will she stay around? - "I spent 12 years at Westpac in one job or another. You need to take a long-term view. We're planning 09 and 10 now.

"I don't like jobs with a set tenure because one tends to run out of steam about a year before departure, looking for your next position rather than excelling in one's present role.

"I'm here until whenever. This business is just powering along."

It would be neat to leave Queen Ann with an original smart alec-ism but we must go in debt once more to Carroll du Chateau's interview for a closing anecdote...

"She is," says former Australian High Commissioner to New Zealand Allan Hawke, 'an Australian role model and a brilliant public speaker. I remember her standing up in front of 230 of the top leadership in Defence wearing a bright orange dress. She looked at them towards the end and asked: You work it out for yourselves. Who are they going to work for - you or me? It smacked them right between the eyes.'" ▲