

Takes 6,000 Passengers To Pay For New Water Taxi Engine Owners Aren't Making Fortunes

By THURSTON SMITH

Our two water taxi companies, maligned and tolerated but seldom praised, are properly speaking neither taxis nor regular launch services, according to their owners, John Durnan and Gordon Baker of Hanlans point.

Five years ago — after Baker bought up the Rill marine service, he and Durnan used to vie for business like warring city cab owners. That year he lost \$40,000 running his five boats on direct trips to the three island points, all in an effort, he explains, to supply a taxi service.

Although Durnan, in the business since 1938, calls his service a water taxi and has radio communication with two city cab companies, both he and Baker are hamstrung by the economics of power boat operation. For Baker it takes three people to pay for an average trip across the bay, for Durnan six, and a single passenger's dollar is a losing proposition.

Although both companies try to operate on a regular schedule as a service to the island public, often persons are kept waiting on docks or taken the long way home because, according to Baker, TTC regulations forbid a published schedule. The Rill marine owner, a driver himself, calls his morning commuter services from Hanlans "chartered trips", hoping the day will come when both companies can supply a better service according to time table.

"We must stay small, give the best service we can with the equipment we've got" explains Baker, who now has three boats running. "The permanent Islanders are very tolerant and the majority understand our problems."

His Bay Queen, Jewel and Rill along with Durnan's two, the Minnie D, and the Louise plus two independently operated craft are the optimum number for harbour trade, he thinks. The Bay Queen holds 44 passengers, costs \$12,000 and has a 200 h.p. Chrysler engine. The Jewel holds 33, the Rill 12, while the Minnie D can take 24 and the Louise 20.

Both Durnan and Baker have an answer for those who think they are doing a land office business. Both have bought new engines, one for the Bay Queen this year costing \$3,000, and one last year for the Louise. The Minnie D was laid up for two weeks this year with a broken shaft while the Jewel burst a valve six weeks ago, ruining piston and shaft for a \$400 repair job.

"Try to imagine 6,000 passengers lining up" Baker says, referring to how long it would take to pay for the new engine at 50c a head. Then it costs them between \$1,800 and \$1,900 just to get the boats in the water; drivers, radio despatchers and mechanics have to be paid. In addition to the weekly gasoline bill for Rill comes to \$350.

THIRD BOAT SOON

An average day's returns for Baker is between \$120 and \$150, for Durnan between \$100 and \$125 on his two boats. Durnan explains he only is beginning to

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get ahead this year, and will be putting his third boat in the water soon.

Baker has six drivers, including himself, four of them with more than two years experience including veteran Wes Smith, a part time driver from whom he bought the business. They are all Islanders as are Durnan's four, and all have usually had naval or aquatic experience, must be able to swim, and be courteous to the public.

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"The public have their preferences among the drivers" Baker explains, adding it takes a man a year to get onto the job and to know the people. Joe Taylorson has been with him three years. Dave Hart, two, Frank Baxter, a part time driver. two and Vince Evans, new this year, three months. For Durnan, Gord (Jimmie) Jones is the veteran while his son Jim, Bill Durnan, John's cousin; and Bill Parker are regular hands at the wheel.

They all must pay their own speeding fines when caught by the speed traps set up by the Harbour Police. The 11 mph limit in the Bay and the six miles allowed in the lagoons are often temptation to excess especially when irate passengers begin muttering about getting home faster by ferry boat.

NIGHTS ARE BEST

The big business comes in April and November, the months when the ferries run their belt-line skeleton service. During the Summer, nights are best, and Sundays when each boat should make \$75 in fair weather. Yet in the effort to keep a schedule of running alternate boats, the two operators often hear the complaint from waiting passengers they have plenty for a paying load.

"In addition the fellow who rightly says this trip has already paid for itself twice over, forgets the hundreds of day-time trips where we break even, or even lose," Durnan says.

What about the driver's life? Certainly not all peaches and cream and aquatic feasts accord-

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"In addition the fellow who rightly says this trip has already paid for itself twice over, forgets the hundreds of day-time trips where we break even, or even lose," Durnan says.

What about the driver's life? Certainly not all peaches and cream and aquatic feasts according to Baker. "It takes time in dealing with people; that's the big things. After a while you don't even pay any attention to the scenery and the lagoons," he adds.

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