



Historical background of Suzan Kruger Ferry



The Susan Kruger at Murray's Bay Harbour

Built in 1959, and commissioned in 1978, the *Susan Kruger* was purchased from a private German company at a cost of approximately +/- R 243 400¹ [some have underestimated it to have cost R72 000.00]. Originally the 'pleasure boat' was called the "White Lady".

'M.S. *Susan Kruger* has used her present Volvo engine since being built in 1959 and has always maintained her Norske veritas + 1A1 K sheltered classification. By definition this implies that the service area is restricted to open stretches of water not exceeding 5 nautical miles this is obviously an arbitrary figure that I have no hesitation in accepting the present power for the Robben Island service provided that the specified speed of 11 knots is acceptable from the time aspect. There is most certainly no problem in maintaining headway or in manoeuvring with this power.... the two engines ran smoothly on a short demonstration run. It must be quite obvious that in 18 years old engines there are parts which are worn in varying degrees but not necessarily requiring renewal...the original Swedish engines have not broken down problems are due to natural fatigue...Repairs to *Susan Kruger* amounts to R 13 718 and entails repairs to auxiliary machines water pump radar cargo hull safety equipment electrical plant needle sealing and painting. Work on two GM diesel machines has commenced and *Susan Kruger* will be delivered to Murray and Stewart on 28.12.77 and will be in service at approximately 12.1.78.²

¹ *Cape Times*, Cost Estimates on Robben Island Ferry Vary', 27/12/1977'

² Telex from C.B. Robinson 22/12/1977

The vessel was purchased and brought to Cape Town with the assistance of a cargo ship at an additional cost of (+/-) R48 000.00. *The Argus* reported she arrived in a

‘non-conference ship ...equipped with lounge, bar and holiday features, Susan Kruger then known as the *White Lady* was essentially a pleasure boat with windows all round. It had a pair of diesels of about 170 HP giving a speed perhaps of about ten knots.... Anyone acquainted with small ships staggers at the prospect of this low-lying craft with its glass accommodation making a winter crossing to the Island. And coming to Cape Town in a South-Easter would be another voyage to remember. The captive clients may yet negotiate a hair-raising sea passage not likely to be shared by the law abiding.’³

Susan Kruger made her first trip from Cape Town Harbour to Murray’s Bay Harbour [Robben Island] in November 1977. The *Susie*’s performance was always closely monitored not only by the crew but by companies. For example, in early 1987, the *Susan Kruger*’s generator and propulsion engines were tested and Peninsula Power Products reported that they ‘were still working and performing correctly’.⁴

In May 1989 the *Susan Kruger* needed maintenance work including a new funnel, toilet system, exhaust system, repair work to the hull and rudders. The total cost of the repairs was estimated by Engineering Works Limited to cost R 39 986 excluding South African Transport Service Charges and General Sales Tax [GST]⁵

Many ex- political prisoners remembered the trip to the former Robben Island Maximum Security Prison by Susan Kruger as follows:

MR MADLAVU: “There were five of us on the boat *Susan Kruger*. The three of us were in the same case, and the other two were in the other case. One thing that also struck us as odd, was that as we entered the boat we were kept below the deck, not to see the waves. We only saw the waves as we were travelling. Yes, the experience was quite unprecedented. The travelling on the boat itself to the Island was historical in the sense that I had never been on the sea before. It tended to make some of us want to vomit and we felt that we were now being cut off from society and we would never come back. Never see our families and our friends and I remember one of my co-accused mentioning that when we return we should not expect to see our parents alive, and indeed that happened to some of us, but it was as if an umbilical cord was being cut. We did not know what to expect where we were going,

³ 57-7117, SA, Press Enquiries, RT20, 21/12/1977

⁴ Field Survey Report, Peninsula Power Products, Serviceman J. Voogt, 14.07.87

⁵ Tender from Engineering Works Limited, 10 May 1989

what kind of life we would live and whether we would succeed to cope with the conditions of living on Robben Island, but it was something of that nature as we were being ferried through the boat”⁶.

“In 1980, in March 1980, ja, and in April I was, we were taken to Robben Island, we were in a group of 14 with others we met at Leeukop Prison. They used to take political prisoners to a certain place to accumulate into a reasonable number for escort, and then they escorted us to Robben Island by road, ja, and then on the eve of our boarding the boat, the night before getting to Robben Island, they took us to Victor Verster Prison, which I later knew as Victor Verster Prison, that's where we slept for the night in single cells and then we were given food in the morning and drove to the docks, to Cape Town. That's where now I described my story in my Robben Island memoirs, that we were in this boat called the Susan Kruger, which ploughed the Atlantic Ocean”⁷

“Yes, we were very lucky because when we arrived we arrived at about five o' clock somewhere in the harbour there, and I mean we waited there I think until maybe somewhere seven or eight. We were just called - in chains escorted to the boat Susan. Oh, it is Susan, I think it was named after the wife of Kruger or something like that Susan Kruger. In the boat there where our place had been reserved and some warders with dogs inside the boat. So well, we arrived on Robben Island relatively smooth although this touch of sea sickness did I mean affect some of us”⁸.

“When there was an emergency case then they called us out to take people over. In those days we used the patrol boats, you know those new patrol boats that we have in the early 80s, 83/84. Otherwise we used the old Diaz or the Issy or the Susan Kruger when there was emergency cases and we took people over.”⁹

⁶ Interview with M Madlavu. Robben Island Memories Project. 11.10.98

⁷ Interview with T Mkhwanazi. Robben Island Memories Project. 7.01.1999

⁸ Interview with M Mthethwa . Robben Island Memories Project . (undated)

⁹ Interview with Mr J Moolman. Ex – Warder Robben Island. (undated)

Reason why RIM request permit from SAHRA to dispose Suzan Kruger vessel.

Purpose. The MV SUSAN KRUGER in present state is not safe for Ferry Operations or any operations.

Repair and upgrade costs will be beyond financial viability, and with repairs and upgrades MV Susan Kruger will have to comply with the new SAMSA regulations thus adding additional excessive costs to RIM. The rate of deterioration is excessive an average of 30 % from 2015 -2017 with regards to hull plate thickness well above safe acceptable limits. Therefore, the vessel is unsuitable to meet RIM's needs for passenger ferrying and cannot be further utilised.

In 2015, during the vessels planned dry dock, RIM had many repairs and maintenance done to ensure vessels sustainability for operations. During its 2017 Dry dock, it was found that those maintenances did not minimise the rate of deterioration, in fact, the rate had been higher.

It should also be noted that a vessels lifespan is approx. 30 years, the current age of the vessel is 58 years, which is double its life cycle. The vessel is outdated and cannot meet the demands that RIM requires.