

# ON THE WATCH



**MONSTER 2003 CRUISE: Will NCL gain any points with the judge if they manage to have these photographs introduced as evidence in the possible court case with "Monsters in the Morning"?**

Photo: bikeweekguide.com

# Scary Monsters

As if it didn't already have enough public relations troubles in the US, Norwegian Cruise Lines (NCL) is fighting a \$1.3m lawsuit involving irate monsters.

US broadcasting giant Clear Channel Corp is the plaintiff, suing NCL for breach of contract over its cancellation of a cruise for listeners to one of its radio shows.

"Monsters in the Morning" is a popular syndicated show with a hard-core audience of north Floridians and others who identify themselves — loudly — with the culture of the Redneck Riviera. The monsters turn out regularly and in force to meet for bouts of monstrous partying in all kinds of settings — for example, on NCL cruiseships throughout the Caribbean.

But this year, the Monsters are short of a venue.

Clear Channel claims that NCL unilaterally backed out of a done deal for a week-long cruise that was to have started on 16 October.

Not only is it too late to find another vessel, the huge radio network says it provided invaluable



**NO LADY: The Internet site Bikeweek Guide kindly provided On the Watch with this lovely example, and the ones above, showing what took place on Monster Cruise 2003.**

Photo: bikeweekguide.com

free publicity for NCL and its 1,900-passenger *Norwegian Sun* (built 2001), gearing the Monsters up to cruise.

In cancelling, NCL had claimed

that the Monsters were too rowdy for its family image.

Since then, NCL has added that any free publicity the company received was more than discounted by subsequent on-air tirades, after which NCL president Colin Veitch and other corporate officers received "numerous harassing phone calls" from the disappointed Monsters.

Not to belittle the image-wrecking potential of hordes of monsters on bikes on your cruiseship — or the dismay one would feel if they had one's home phone number — but from a public relations point of view, NCL should probably worry harder about its Hawaiian inter-island service.

NCL spent millions of dollars just on lobbying Congress to let it run a domestic cruise service under the US flag, and then has spent millions more (and counting) on repairing, building and crewing to get the service up and running.

But since this summer's start, US newspapers from the New York Times to the local college rag have spent the several weeks covering NCL with reams of bad

press. Reviewers and customers complained of cold food, unscheduled changes of destination, sullen service, malodorous plumbing and soiled towels — and all this at high prices.

One columnist at the University of Massachusetts newspaper, returning to school from a family cruise on the 2,000-passenger *Pride of Aloha* (ex-*Norwegian Sun*, built 1999), went so far as to tell his fellow students they should be more grateful for the level of service in their student mess hall.

Last month the consumer website *cruise critic.com* announced it would be censoring its user message boards devoted to NCL because, since the *Pride of Aloha* started cruising, the postings there were "negative" and "not fun".

And although the Singapore-owned company has worked hard to spin the snafus as mere "growing pains", it didn't show much talent for damage control when it responded to low levels of tipping by imposing a mandatory daily "gratuity" to each passenger's bill.

## Strange fruit of our surfing

"The devil makes work for idle hands" and "there are lies, damn lies and statistics" — combining these two wise sayings with a few pearls of wisdom gleaned from various container-shiping websites leads to an interesting if dubious conclusion.

"If the containers on a 9,200-teu ship were laid in a row they would reach 35 miles in length," writes Germanischer Lloyd (GL).

"We carry enough Australian wine to Europe and North America to fill 10,000 Olympic swimming pools," writes the CP Ships website.

"A fully laden 4,200-teu operated at maximum speed of 24 knots per hour would consume 73 gallons of fuel per mile or 140 tonnes per day," writes the APL website.

"A potential 2.7m empty 40-foot containers annually are being shuttled across the Pacific, at an estimated cost of \$500 to \$800 each — between \$1.3bn and \$2.2bn industry-wide," says the Transpacific Stabilisation Agreement (TSA) website.

On the Watch calculates the following from these industry gems:

- The number of containers returned empty across the Pacific each year divided by 9,200-teu and then multiplied by 35 miles gives a distance of 20,000 miles, which, as luck would have it, is roughly there and back across the Pacific.

- A full 4,200-teu ship burns \$380,000 of fuel per Pacific crossing, and 1,285 sailings of these empty vessels would be required to return the unfilled boxes, costing a total of nearly \$500m in fuel a year.

Has anyone ever thought about building a tunnel under the Pacific?

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