

# GOLDEN CROSS – ARDENTINNY BOUND



By **GORDON NEISH**  
gordon@dunoon-observer.co.uk

THANKS to the efforts of a group of local volunteers a historic Clyde ship, which was up on buoys in Falmouth, Cornwall until last week, is heading home to Holy Loch Marina.

Tug *Golden Cross* was

launched by Scott & Sons of Bowling in 1955. Her launch was brought forward so that she could assist the then-new *Royal Yacht Britannia* on her first overseas departure.

Buckingham Palace remembered this and, for *HMY Britannia's* farewell voyage between London and Portsmouth, *Golden Cross*

was invited to be the sole official escort vessel.

When a group of Argyll residents heard that the 86 foot, 132 ton *Golden Cross* might be sold overseas – or even scrapped – they immediately stepped in with a plan to rescue the vessel and bring her to Cowal.

The owners of the Whistlefield Inn, Loch Eck, contacted the tug's owner, Oriental actress and martial arts expert Suzie Wong to offer assistance.

A spokesman for the group trying to save the historic vessel said: "Over past years, Suzie used her tugboat, crewed by volunteers, to carry a Safety at Sea message to a wide audience of young and old alike and, working closely with RAF Search and Rescue, highlighted their sterling rescue work and that of the Royal Navy and HM Coastguard.

"With imminent Coastguard station closures looming on the horizon, it seemed an ideal time to bring this Clyde-ship home and give her a useful community role to promote Safety at Sea in the Clyde, Cowal Peninsula and Western Isles."

There was no shortage of

volunteers to assist. Dave 'Taggart' Smith, a retired police officer from Kilmun, Pete 'The Voice' Marshall from Ardentenny and Andy 'De Walt' Henderson from Blairmore signed up as crew. Soon Glasgow company Window Plus were joined by Dunoon-based Waterside Property, whisky giant Whyte & Mackay, Forbes Decor of Dunoon and Aeolus Windpower as sponsors.

The national timber company Timbmet offered to totally re-deck the ship and Oban based Alba Sailing offered to provide a life-raft and safety equipment. A further substantial donation came from an unnamed benefactor in Paisley.

Captain Stuart White, a retired ex-captain of *Golden Cross*, who has been giving advice to the project group said: "It certainly restores your faith in human nature when you see such support to save Scots maritime heritage. Suzie Wong gave up a promising film and theatre career to try to save this vessel for future generations to enjoy. Her achievements and efforts over the years have now been rewarded by a very generous Scots community."

However, the whole project was in danger of failure last month because it was apparent that, although the tug was fully operational, her Crossley of Manchester main diesel 4-cylinder 2-stroke engine (now the last working example of its type) had received little maintenance whilst the tug was moored on buoys in Cornwall for three years.

It was felt that the 650 mile journey to the Clyde would be too great a risk to take. Then Douglas McManus, Marine Officer at Greenock for Svitzer Tugs, approached his directors and gained their agreement to send the tug *Ormseby Cross* south to collect her ageing relative and bring *Golden Cross* home. The convoy will leave Falmouth on Tuesday (September 27) and, dependent on weather conditions, is expected to arrive at Holy Loch Marina on September 30.

*Golden Cross* is expected to remain at Holy Loch until space becomes available in dry dock for maintenance.

Suzie Wong commented: "I am so pleased that my little tug is being offered a permanent home in Argyll and Bute and will be able to



continue her community role of promoting safety at sea.

"I would also like to thank Fiona Hyslop MSP, cabinet secretary for culture and external affairs, for giving her support to all of my Scots friends and I am pleased to note that *Golden Cross* will now also promote Scots exports, technology and innovation next year by holding functions for home and overseas guests at the Crowne Plaza Glasgow, SECC."

Residents of Argyll and Bute and companies based in Scotland have certainly ensured that, in future years, *Golden Cross* will have 'a safe passage and following seas'.