



HAIDA GWAII HIGHLANDER, a 30-ft William E. Munson-built (Edmunds WA) landing craft, is the backbone of Danny Robertson's Highlander Marine Services business venture. The bow loading ramp is a necessity for serving remote areas on the islands of Haida Gwaii.

Getting Started

New Marine Venture set to fill a Niche in Haida Gwaii

— BY CAPT. BARB HOWE —

Danny Robertson's first boat was a soft bottom zodiac with a 2 hp Seagull outboard engine that served as the SAR vessel for his imaginary 'Cost Guard' station on Qualicum Beach, complete with a young hand-painted sign. His new boat is the 30 ft alu-

minum landing craft HAIDA GWAII HIGHLANDER from William E. Munson in Edmunds WA and his new sign reads, Highlander Marine Services - the paint just dry.

Danny has worked for or around most every marine industry on the islands and has a good understanding of



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departs by water and depending on what is being transported, this can involve multiple trips up and down a ramp. “Here it’s more like a ladder with our 26 foot tides,” he says, recalling with a chuckle a friend who lost a fridge to the “overloaded skiffs teetering their way to the beach” syndrome.

Already in discussions with the Ministry of Forest’s Lands and Natural Resource Operations for the Haida Gwaii Natural Resource District, Robertson says there

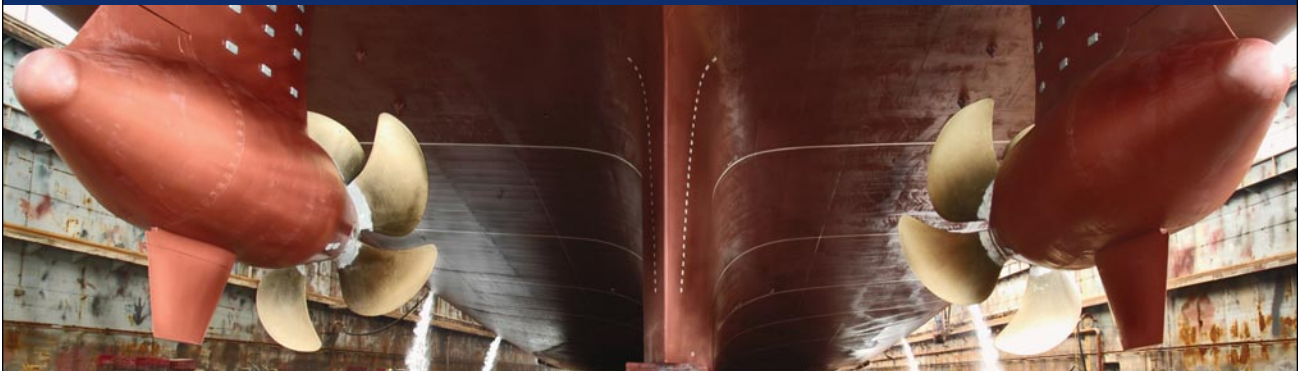
There’s room for 10 passengers inside, and on the foredeck, for shorter voyages. Operating range is approximately 300 nautical miles with 2.5 tonnes of cargo/passengers on board.

what local types of work there are and the challenges to get that work done. “It’s all about good viable solutions for moving things around from shore to ship to shore efficiently and safely,” he says. It’s a niche waiting to be filled, considering the number of calls he gets asking “When is your boat going to be ready? I’ve got just the job for it.”

What kind of work does he anticipate? He notes that when you live on an island almost everything arrives or

is keen interest in what the HAIDA GWAII HIGHLANDER can do to move forestry personnel and ATVs to remote areas that are currently serviced by helicopter at around \$2,500 per hour. Parks Canada has also expressed interest, as have local tour operators, and the Haida Gwaii Watchmen program which staffs remote ancient Haida village sites in Gwaii Hannas. He also anticipates supporting local tourist and passenger requirements as well as accommodating film crews or groups with special

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needs as the vessel's large open and stable deck can serve as a filming platform and also provides easy on/off for folks with physical limitations.

Jumping the TC Hoops

Robertson is quick to say that he worked with Transport Canada Marine Safety right from the start of construction. He explained to TC in Prince Rupert what he was intending to build and asked the seemingly straightforward question - what did he need to know about regulations? He was given a copy of TP1332 *Construction Standards for Small Vessels*. "TP 1332 isn't exactly easy reading," he quips, and he eventually found himself working directly with Russ Dillon, Manager of Marine Safety in Prince Rupert. "Russ was phenomenal" Danny says "he was professional, straight up and un-intimidating in his support and walking me through the TC process."

Building the HAIDA GWAII HIGHLANDER also involved White Rock naval architect Alex Brydon (Merlion Marine Services). Danny says his head was swimming with TC regulations and factors associated with the vessel being built in Washington - some days musing that he "might as well have been building the boat on the moon." Alex was essential, he says, during the south of



PHOTO COURTESY OF HIGHLANDER MARINE SERVICE

The simple, well laid-out, pilot station has a 16-nm Furuno 1623 radar (top left) and a Garmin Gpsmap 700 plotter/sounder (top right) surrounding a good old-fashioned card compass. Two Icom vhf's, an M-504a and a locally programed F-520, are mounted (out of view) above the windscreen.

the border construction, specifically being sure the vessel met TC construction standards and will be issued the compliance plate required by TP1332 (the final stability data is still in progress as this was written). With Brydon's assistance during design and construction the HAIDA GWAII HIGHLANDER measures under 5 gross tons and meets the requirements of ISO 12217-1 *Small Craft*

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HAIDA GWAI HIGHLANDER underway with a load on. The boat tops out at 40 knots WOT and cruises at 25 knots (both speeds unloaded). Dual 250 hp Yamaha outboards give a reassuring 'get home' capability for remote operations.

Stability Standard. “Alex looked at the design drawings, took into account the anticipated operational sea states, visited Munson’s, and made sure the vessel met the stability criteria,” he says.

Does he have any advice for someone contemplating doing something similar? Yes - find out everything you can about regulatory requirements during the planning phase. An example of where you can go off track, he explains, was his decision after construction had started to increase the length to 30 ft (9.1 metres) from 28 ft (8.5 metres). Well into the construction process he was reading *Western Mariner* and came across a letter to the Editor from Steve Daigle (Daigle Welding & Marine Ltd, Campbell River) about how new regulations require a vessel over 8.5 metres to carry a life raft. “I hadn’t factored in a life raft he explains – but am glad now that I have one.”

Marine Career Inspiration

Danny Robertson laughs when he talks about his early background in the marine industry. After his ‘Cost Guard’ station and hours spent scanning the horizon of Qualicum Beach for distressed seafarers, he acted as a kayak guide, instructed sail training, conducted passenger tours, and some towing and running pilots around Vancouver Harbour. His great grandfather was a Scottish deep sea captain and ship’s pilot. His Certificate of Competency as a Master — issued in 1909 at London

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Dock and printed on canvas - is framed and hangs in the Highlander Marine Services office near a photograph of his grandfather on a ship’s bridge with a pair of binoculars around his neck that look “big and heavy enough to sink a battleship.”

His Scottish heritage explains the company name but his real “a-ha” moment about a marine career happened when he was on the

GIKUMI with Jim Borrowman, then owner of Stubbs Island Whale Watching, Telegraph Cove. “We were on this beautiful old boat on an archaeology training trip and Jim was doing what he loved to do and that convinced me to obtain my certification from Transport Canada.” Danny now holds a Master Limited 60 ton certificate with an unlimited endorsement.

Danny anticipates that Highland Marine Services will grow and eventually another landing craft is on the horizon that could be dedicated to regular runs and will require local qualified operators and deckhands. Part of the focus of the company is to build capacity by providing work opportunities to local Haida Gwaii young people who aren’t sure where to start or how to get into the marine industry. Further down the road he anticipates another vessel dedicated to research and development work, and one committed to special tourism needs – locally staffed in partnership with existing operators.

But that’s in the future, right now he has a business to get started and a family to help and support. His wife Nika Collison is currently doing double duty as manager of the Highlander Marine Services office in Skidegate, as well as sailing on HAIDA GWAI HIGHLANDER as deckhand ... for now ... and their daughters Kuuyas, six, and Juul, three years old, are sure to have roles to play in this new company’s future. ◀

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