

# Inverclyde News

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READY TO GO: Bill Nicol, of Riverside Inverclyde, was one of the guests on the ferry during the trials

## HOVERCRAFT TRIALS START ON THE CLYDE

IT will take no time to go "doon the watter" and up again thanks to a new hovercraft passenger service now being tested on the Clyde.

Clydefast began trials of a 12-passenger hovercraft on the river this week.

And despite a damp start in bad weather, the tests proved to be no damp squib.

The three-day trial – which involved a Griffon 2000TD hovercraft – will allow Clydeport Harbourmaster the chance to assess the impact, if any, that a regular operation may have on other river users.

It will also give interested investors and local authorities the chance to experience for themselves what a hovercraft can offer in terms of alternative transport.

The trials came just days after it was

announced that a study was being carried out into the feasibility of a waterbus service on the Clyde, with Gourock, Greenock and Port Glasgow being touted as possible stops.

The hovercraft ran two round trips a day during this week's test period – between the SECC pontoon in Glasgow, Braehead, East India Harbour in Greenock and Dunoon.

Alistair Macleod, Chief Executive of Clydefast, said: "So far things have gone well and we are achieving the times we wanted to. Initial impressions are favourable and all the organisations involved have been very supportive."

"We are very excited about the test and indebted to Riverside Inverclyde, Glasgow City Council and Strathclyde Partnership

for Transport (SPT) for making the trial possible. It will hopefully demonstrate the potential for a permanent hovercraft operation to be brought to the Clyde.

"The service will be fast – for example a service from Dunoon to Glasgow will reach the city centre in 52 minutes, more than 20 minutes quicker than the present journey time of an hour and a quarter (by train and ferry). Rothesay will be included in a permanent operation which would add a further 15 minutes to the journey."

He added: "Another bonus in using the hovercraft would be its ability to navigate through bridges which don't open. Some of the current Clyde bridges restrict catamaran ferries getting directly to the



MEMORIES: Bill Cumming, of Gourock, piloted a hovercraft on the Clyde 40 years ago

### From Page One

city centre, particularly at the Broomielaw."

Councillor Robert Moran attended the first trials on the Clyde. He said: "Despite the bad weather the hovercraft was able to move up and down the river with ease. I hope the trials are a success because there is potentially a very positive impact to Inverclyde from this and will be another reason people will come here."

A permanent service would operate to and from Glasgow Broomielaw, Braehead, Greenock, Dunoon and Rothesay and could carry up to 130 passengers.

The craft can travel in the open seas at speeds of up to 40 knots but the river speed would be reduced to a level acceptable to the Harbourmaster.

Hovercraft were last seen in regular use on the Clyde in the late 1960's, and one of the original pilots was Bill Cumming, who lives in Gourock.

Bill Nicol, Chief Executive of Riverside Inverclyde said: "Riverside Inverclyde is delighted to support the Clydefast hovercraft trials since this could be a step towards providing an exciting and effective way of linking Inverclyde with the wider metropolitan region."

"For me, it is a positive demonstration of not only assisting a local businessman, Alistair Macleod, but of cross-organisational working with colleagues at SPT and Glasgow City Council."

Ron Culley Chief Executive SPT added: "We're delighted to support this trial. Development of the Clyde as an additional transport channel helps the ongoing regeneration of the area."

"By encouraging varied and fun ways to travel along the River, we can continue to make Glasgow a vibrant location for people to visit."

Councillor George Ryan of Glasgow City Council said he "welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate how the river can be utilised for regular passenger services".

Turn to page 2