

THE HISTORY OF

TUGS

**An In Depth and Up-to-Date Record
of the 1989 Cult Classic Television Series**

**SPECIAL TREES, THE SUDRIAN STATION MASTER &
MKTHEINSTRUMENTALIST
(WITH COVER IMAGE BY EN2)**

THE HISTORY OF TUGS

As of 31st January, 2025

AUTHOR'S PROLOGUE

So, considering how many times people (aka me, Special Trees) bring up this series, and people aren't fully aware of everything that happened during the production of TUGS, I decided to create this for the sake of having a go-to for having all of this noted. Hopefully this will help all of those who haven't spent a lot of time learning about this show. The date at the top will represent the last time this Google Doc was edited.

For those unaware of the show, “*TUGS*” was a 1989 children’s drama television series, created by Robert D. Cardona and David Mitton. The show is about two rival tugboat fleets, the honorable Star Fleet/Tugs, and the devious Z-Stacks, competing for the various contracts in the Bigg City Port during the 1920’s.

If you have yet to watch “*TUGS*” and are reading this, the entire series is available on YouTube, in both [playlist](#) and [singlar video](#) forms. This is because this is written in a way that assumes you already know the basics (characters, locations, episodes, etc).

Also, since I’ll be using these terms within my discussion on the models, here’s a guide on boat terminology I’ll be using throughout;

Bow = front

Stern = back

Port = left

Starboard = right

Superstructure = the main “body” of a tugboat

Cabin = the 'head' of the tug behind the face.

Regards - Special Trees

Co-written with The ‘Lord’ Sudrian Station Master and MKtheInstrumentalist

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CLEARWATER FEATURES 1986 LIMITED

BACKGROUND (1964-1986)

During the production of various shows created by Gerry Anderson throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, two people would meet during their productions by the names of **Ken Turner** (directing various episodes of “[Captain Scarlet](#)”, “[Joe 90](#)”, and “[UFO](#)”), and **David Mitton** (special effects technician on “[Thunderbirds](#) (original 1965 series)”, “[Captain Scarlett](#)”, “[Joe 90](#)”, and “[UFO](#)”). They would later form the company, *Clearwater Films* sometime in the early 1970s. Ken Turner would later leave the company in 1979, being replaced by the American born **Robert D. Cardona**, and the company renamed to *Clearwater Features*.

The company would mostly do work for various commercials, but their most famous piece of work would be producing the first two series of “*Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends*”, later retitled “*Thomas and Friends*”, from 1984 to 1986, with David Mitton as director and Robert Cardona as producer alongside with the show’s creator **Britt Allcroft**.



Afterwards in early 1986, Robert and David would begin having ideas to produce their own series, something that would challenge them and aimed for a more older and mature audience. After floating around show ideas from planes to cars, they were eventually inspired to make one about a fleet of talking tugboats based on the American harbors during the 1920s, following Cardona meeting up with a tugboat captain in San Francisco. Extensive research went into the industry of tugboats, using several books such as “On the Hawser” (Lang & Spectre, 1980), [interview chronicles](#) and photographs for reference, citing the Disney short Little Toot as inspiration, and visiting several American ports like New York and San Francisco for inspiration, where many real life vessels served as the basis for many of the show’s characters, for example the preserved “Eppleton Hall” paddle steamer in San Francisco became the inspiration for the character O.J.



The duo discovered that the tugboat industry was handled differently between the east and west coasts of America, so they decided to add fleets based on both. The Star Fleet would be primarily based off of the Crowley Tugboat Fleet in San Francisco, whilst the Z-Stacks would be based off of the Moran Fleet of New York (which the name “Moran” became the inspiration for Zorran’s name, as it rhymed).

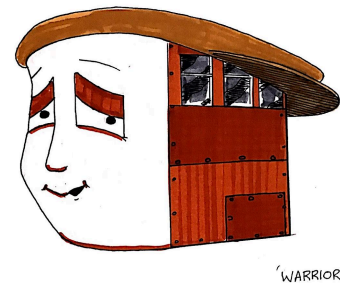
In late 1986, “*DBP Models and Effects*”, a model making company (that had previously made models for “*Thomas*”) were contracted by David and Robert to build the cast of “*TUGS*” characters.

PRE-PRODUCTION STAGES (1987)

By early 1987, ideas were beginning to take shape, with various story ideas and concepts being thought of, episodes being planned to be roughly 30 minutes long each.

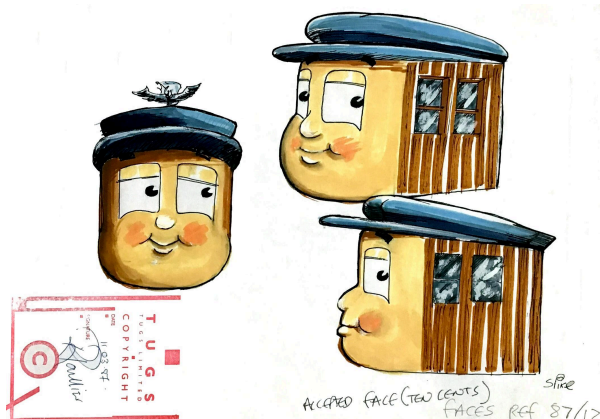
On 27th February 1987, the earliest recorded date for anything “*TUGS*” related, the second draft treatment to the first episode, “Sunshine”, having yet to have a finalized name, would be written.

Within this time, many early elements would be thought of, but later scrapped. Some examples, Warrior being named ‘Slouch’ and having a different wheelhouse and hat design, the Z-Stacks were originally called “*The Black Stacks*”, the original #4 and #5 tugs of the Zero Fleet being called Zues (assumed to be a typo of Zeus) and Zob respectively, and O.J. originally being a middle sized harbor tug instead of a steam paddler and was intended to have a ‘flash wide boy’ personality. Humans were also meant to make physical appearances in the show.



Slouch

As well as this, several character ideas and concepts were thought of too. Most notably, a huge, tough dredger character called ‘The Smoker’, who was based off of Telly Savalas. Another dropped character was Delta Queen, an upriver paddle steamer of whom her design would be later given to O.J.



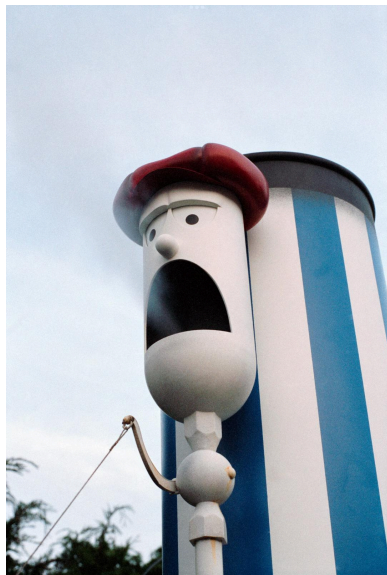
Around this time, model work for the series would begin, with Ten Cents’ model being one of the first built, ranging at 20 inches in length. With the earliest date of blueprints going back to 20th March 1987 and the earliest concept art of his head being © stamped by RR, the company secretary at the time, on 11th March 1987. This model would have various tests done for it, before landing on the finalized face design the rest of the tugs would have. The final design of the face was

initially conceptualised by Paul Knight's mother. Additionally, Ten Cents originally had a dark oiled-timber superstructure, but this was changed to the fully plated Star yellow superstructure - his wooden cabin is a remnant of this original livery, something that Top Hat's model also shares.

Model construction would continue on for the next 9 months, each tugboat model costing £6,000-8,000 each (at the time) for construction. A total of 17 different tugboat models were made by "DBP Models & Effects". The seven Star Tugs, five Z-Stacks, the Fire Chief, Boomer, Bluenose and two Ghost Tugs. The latter two models would not have the mechanisms the other models mentioned have. An additional Diesel Tug was also built, but would remain unfinished. They would also build additional smaller boats for the background, and non-tugboat characters for the series (such as Grampus and Izzy Gomez).



The models were built by several model makers who worked at DBP Models, such as **Chris Tulloch**, who built Ten Cents, Sunshine and Izzy Gomez, **Chris Lloyd** who built Big Mac, Warrior, Zak, Zip and the Diesel Tug, **Simon Parker** who built Top Hat and O.J., **Peter Boys** who built Sally Seaplane, **Jeremy King** who built Zorran, the Coast Guard, Davy Jones, Frank and Eddie, **Paul 'Spike' Knight** who built Hercules, Zug and Grampus and **Michelle Jones** who built Bluenose.



Other secondary characters, cranes, barges and buildings were built by "Albatross Models". Two large scale whistle props were made by DBP Models, built by Chris Lloyd - one for a Star tug and another for a Z-Stack. The Star whistle was also interchangeable with a large scale version of Ten Cents' hooter, which would be used during "Jinxed"'s shoot, and seen on the set of "Sunshine". While both the normal close-up Star Tug whistle and Ten Cents hooter models would have footage filmed with them, they would eventually end up being unused in what was released.

The reason for Ten Cents' hooter being the only one to have a face on it was because of it originally being a 'Jiminy Cricket' like figure to Ten Cents. An ocean liner model was also built, done by a model maker in Germany.

About thirty buoys were built by Paul Knight and Jeremy King, consisting of both character buoys and faceless ones. The background cars and trucks would be built from various matchbox kits by Albatross Models.

Chris Lloyd recalled the completed model of Zip accidentally falling off the workbench and falling to the floor, damaging the prop severely. It took two weeks to rebuild Zip, in which Jeremy King took on the task of rebuilding him.



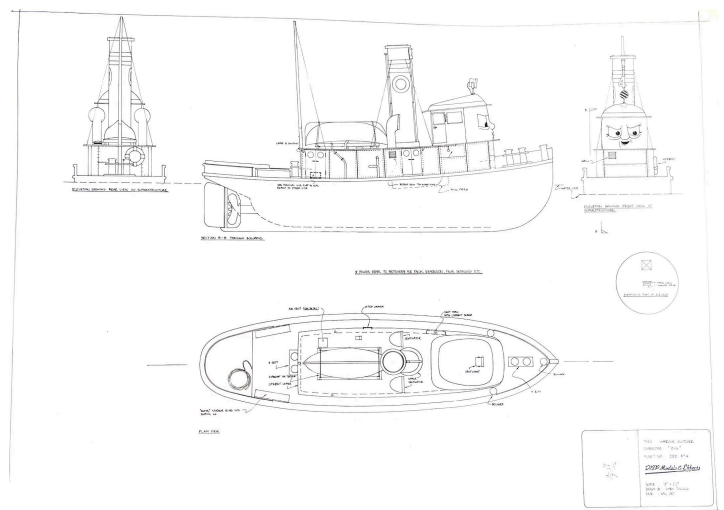
Grampus also originally had eyelids made that would be placed on his goggles. However, these eyelids would be scrapped before the series was filmed, likely due to the crew knowing the eyelids wouldn't stick on when the model would be underwater. According to his builder Paul Knight, he had also initially sketched out Grampus in a Star livery as well. This would obviously never come to fruition either.

Lillie Lightship (who was built by **Rob Thompson** of 'Albatross Models') originally had two air vents near the front of her face, but would later be removed during the filming of "Sunshine". As well as this, Lillie was originally meant to have flat faces, like Lord Stinker and Big Mickey (who on another note had his faces removed by the time filming began), but to blend in with the tugs, Lillie's faces were re-sculpted by DBP Models to be more curved in style.

It should be worth noting that Scuttlebutt Pete, Little Ditcher and the Fultan Ferry were slated to have had faces sculpted for them but were removed before filming. It's unknown if they actually were sculpted, let alone if they're still in existence.

Zorran was originally going to have a low-slung superstructure, as David thought this would give him the look of 'sneaking about with your head low', but on the model, the crew agreed it looked ridiculous and so added an extra rim to his superstructure for height. Additionally, Zorran's eye mechanism was too big and would lift his fedora hat every time the eyes went up, but the crew kept it as they thought it highly suited him.

On the 1st April 1987, early blueprints for Zug were drawn up, with the Z-Stacks' stacks originally having lighting bolts on the sides of their stacks, but were replaced with zeroes due to the design feeling more appropriate to the time period. 2nd April, Zip's blueprints are drawn. 3rd April 1987 would have O.J.'s original middle sized harbor tug blueprints



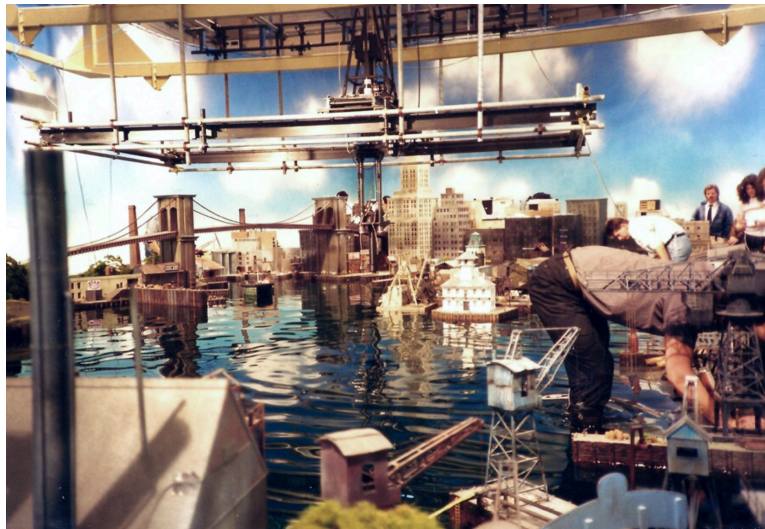
done, and Zak's blueprints by 9th April 1987. On 10th April, Top Hat's blueprints were drawn. On the 28th April 1987, the second draft treatment for "Sunshine" would be © stamped by RR, the company secretary at the time. Sometime during April as well, Big Mac's blueprints would be drawn, and later © stamped alongside Zug's blueprints and concept art for Sunshine on 29th April.

Over time, the various concepts would begin to take shape. Early on, treatments drafts for episodes would be written with the intention of being 30 minutes long, but as the treatment drafts became more finalized, it was decided that the episodes would be 20-22 minutes long instead, due to the crew coming to the conclusion that 30 minutes would be too long for the audience to sit through.

During these early drafting stages, there were plans for an episode titled "Rebuild", later titled "Tired Tugs", intending to take place after the events of "Munitions". However, despite it getting various rough drafts, the episode would ultimately be scrapped before it could be finalized. It's speculated that some of the concepts for the episode would later be worked into "Warrior".

Treatment drafts would soon become more fully developed 20 minute scripts, and would begin to shape itself more like what the final series would be in terms of tone, characters, and pacing.

Many of the crewmembers who had worked on the first two series of "*Thomas*", such as a variety of the modeling crew, stage crew and the series music composers, **Mike O'Donnell** and **Junior Campbell**, would sign and transfer on to work on "*TUGS*".



The plan for how the series would be filmed would be similar to that of the production of *Thomas*, being filmed at Shepperton Studios near London, England, with a large motion control camera rig being hung over the set (built by cameraman **Terry Permane** over around three months), being a huge tank of water instead of a huge table, having 2nd version of the same Clearwater Pericope camera system used on "*Thomas*" be made for "*TUGS*", and shot on 35mm film on a Mitchell motion picture camera. Unlike most videotape, film more easily allowed

for different frame rates to be shot, and for TUGS, usually running at a rate of 36, 48 or 96 frames per real-life second. The original plan was to have the set be 80x80 feet and the harbor based around a large peninsula, with the original Bigg City Port being more heavily based on the Manhattan area of New York City, and most episodes being written with this version of the set in mind. The set built however

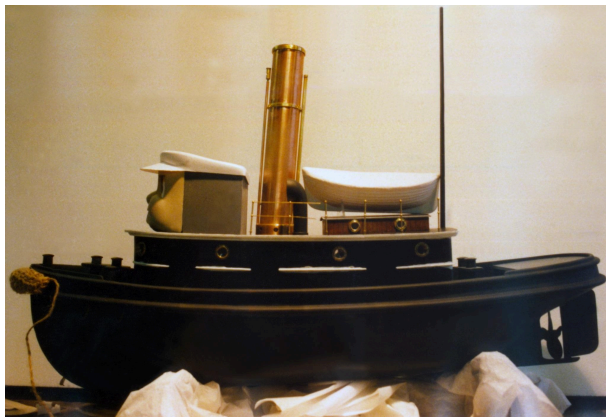
would end up being scaled down to being a 45x25 feet tank (with a depth of about 14 inches) and the harbor based around a bay formation and nearly only 1/6th of the originally planned size. The series would be filmed at T-Stage, an old boiler house with a large shed. This would be attached to a maintenance garage that would become the model storage workshop.

Outside the T-Stage building where “*TUGS*” would be filmed would stand two enormous wooden standees of Ten Cents and Zip, and would be present throughout the whole of production.



Ten Cents and Zip also received static dummy models with no internal mechanisms, which were built by Paul Knight. These models would be used primarily for promotional purposes and touring. These models do not survive today.

The models were originally going to be motor-driven, but the weight proved to be too heavy for them to move on their own. The models also threatened to turn turtle as the water went over the grip. Another problem that arose was that when a tug was free-floating, they would bob about like a toy. Instead, an underwater trolley was attached to the keel of the tug, which would be pulled along with string under the water. The smoke would be achieved through a smoke machine, which using tubes, would be piped up through a hole in the tugs’ hulls which would then pass through the stack. The water in the tank would also be mixed with blue vegetable dye to give the water a sense of depth. During filming of the series, the dye in the water often tended to get very scummy. Over the course of filming, the tank was drained and refilled either once or twice. As well as this, nuts, bolts, flies, moths and mice would often fly or fall into the tank and would have to be removed.



Due to “*TUGS*” being one of the first productions to use entirely live action practical effects in a tank of water, the crew used this opportunity to experiment with new tactics. At some point during early production, tests were done to consider putting goldfish in the tank to swim around. However, due to the toxicity of the dye in the water, the goldfish sadly did not survive. A picture of a goldfish was put up in the workshop as a memorial.

The models themselves would be built from fiberglass whilst the stacks were made of brass to avoid overheating and melting. At one point, one of the fiberglass hulls got stuck in the mould, which had to be cut in half, resulting in the crew starting again.

There were five wooden hull patterns for each tugboat size (Switcher, Harbour Tug, River Tug, Paddle Tug and Ocean-Going Tug). Other parts of the models were brought from Addleston Models (a model shop close by to DBP). Reportedly, the front bow fenders from Addleston did not fit right on the model, so a lady was commissioned to knit the fenders for all of the models.

The faces were made out of resin clay, most of which would be sculpted by Paul Knight and Michele Jones. Many of the characters in the show would have their facial designs inspired by real life actors and actresses. The examples for most of the cast include Ten Cents being based off American actor Mickey Rooney, Big Mac being based on American actor John Wayne, Top Hat being based off English actor George Sanders, Hercules' faces being a mix of American actors Clark Gable and Errol Flynn, Zorran's being a mix of fictional character Dick Dastardly (from Hanna-Barbera's "[Wacky Races](#)"), English actor Terry Thomas, and American actor Lee Van Cleef. Zug's off American-Hungarian actor Peter Lorre, Zip's off American actor George Raft, Zak's off Romanian-American actor Edward G. Robinson, Grampus' off American filmmaker Woody Allen, and Lillie's off American actress Marilyn Monroe.

22nd June 1987, documents listing off the floating cranes, Big Mickey, Snatcher and Lord Stinker (with his original name, Lord of the Flies) is © stamped by RR. On 30th June 1987, blueprints for Sunshine would be drawn.

Sometime in July 1987, Hercules and Zebedee's blueprints would be drawn. On 10th July, the blueprints for the smiling/frowning whistles would be drawn. 7th September 1987, blueprints for the Diesel Tug were drawn by Paul Knight. Blueprints for the finalised paddle tug version of O.J. would be drawn sometime in September 1987 as well. On 14th October 1987, a "Jinxed Tug" treatment script would be © stamped by RR.

By the fall of 1987, model work was reaching completion, and the finalized scripts were being finished, and the set being prepped for filming, with various tests being performed, one of which for Sally Seaplane being done on 23rd October 1987 followed by a week of test photography in a "demo of set", which consisted of various promotional stills (and potentially B-Roll) being taken.



PRODUCTION (1987-1989)

The original plan was to have "Sunshine" be the first filmed, as indicated by pictures of his model taken during the pre-production, where he's seen with the colours/livery he has before joining the Star Tugs, being white with a maroon-brown deck (as well as additionally having a black stack base, black rims and brass handrails). For unknown reasons, "Jinxed" would end up being pushed forward as the first

episode filmed, with Sunshine's model being repainted into his Star Tug livery for the filming of "Jinxed".



The episode would begin filming sometime within November 1987, with Ten Cents and Sunshine towing Boomer to Lucky's being filmed on roughly the 13th November 1987. Footage would be shot from Monday to Friday on a weekly basis from 9am to 5pm, with the crew free from filming during the weekends. Having to constantly bend down to the models' height often gave the crew back aches or cramps after the day's work.

Once a day's filming was finished, the film reels would be taken away to the laboratories. The 35mm rushes would then be viewed by the crew at

Shepperton's viewing theatre the next morning, where any problems or potential adjustments regarding the footage was highlighted and reported to David Mitton.

Often during filming, the models would get water slosh over into the electronics and would need to be taken out of the tank to dry out. More sophisticated props like Top Hat took more longer mechanical maintenance. Other models would frequently get damaged during filming.

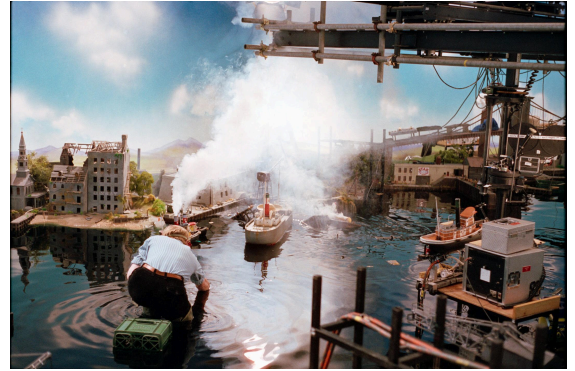
During the filming of "Jinxed", Sunshine's handrails and stepladder are painted white, being the only time in the series they would be painted.

Seen during the scene of Boomer sinking is a green buoy with 'WRECK' painted on it. An interview with Jeremy King revealed that the buoy was purposefully painted with hungover eyes for a laugh, to go with its name of 'wreck'. During pre-production, this in-joke was poked at more by the crew, with a speech bubble being attached to the buoy saying "When Does the Bar Open Round Here...?"



When filming started, the wooden frame version of the Diesel Tug hull was placed at Lucky's Yard, but was swapped out with the red hull early into filming for unknown reasons, with tarps placed on the bow and stern. Presumably this is because they realised "Jinxed" needed to be made compatible with future episode's theoretical continuity only after it had begun filming.

On the 7th December 1987, the first explosion scene of the series was filmed; a scene of Boomer colliding with Izzy Gomez, sending him careering into a small wooden dock with a shed and a gasoline barge, exploding upon impact. This scene would later be affectionately known as “The Gomez Incident”.



A model of a white steam yacht was also seen around on the set of “Jinxed”, but has never made an appearance outside of a few behind the scenes photos featured in a 1990 issue of the magazine “Model Boats”. It’s unknown if it would serve any significant purpose in the show. Its name, barely visible in one photo of the models in T-stage's small storage closet on standby for filming, is 'PILOT'. Considering “Jinxed” was the first episode filmed, this may have been intended as an in-joke to its intended appearance in the series' pilot episode. It is unknown where the prop is today.

During the filming of the episode, the Fire Tug would appear with his model incomplete without his front bow fender and flag, as well as wearing a prototype face during the munition barge scene. It was decided that the face was too simplistic, and so Big Mac’s faces were used as the basis for the finalised Fire Tug faces by adding bagged eyes and a cleft in his chin. These faces were sculpted by Paul Knight. Later on in the episode’s filming, he would appear with his finalized faces and a bow fender when he tows Boomer and the burnt schooner back into port. On a side note, the schooner model towed in would have the burnt and blackened sail mast for the rest of filming. Additionally, the same schooner would also be painted navy blue on the starboard side, whilst being painted white on the port side.

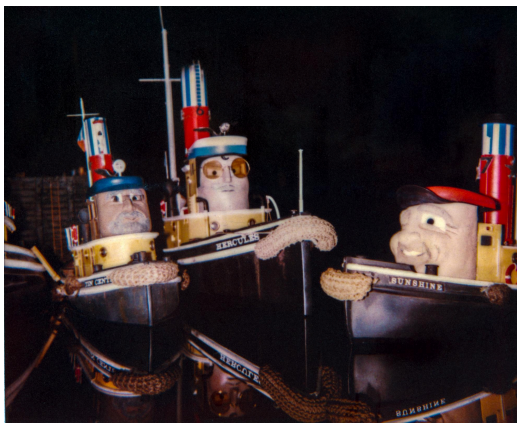


One of O.J. 's facemasks would be missing its teeth and eyelids. One of Top Hat and Warrior’s faces would also be lacking eyelids, with the latter two’s being only seen in promotional pictures taken around the time of “Jinxed”’s main shoot.

During filming, the model of Boomer would be refitted from a tugboat to a houseboat for the purposes of the episode’s plot, now having several bushes, a deckchair, umbrella and a greenhouse being added to

his decks (with the greenhouse initially being placed where his lifeboat sat, ending with the greenhouse being moved to the stern), vents now facing towards his stern and his stack removed. Boomer's new yellow hat would be made from a casting of O.J.'s boater hat.

Filming for "Jinxed" would wrap up sometime around 25th December 1987, with the final scene filmed being Houseboat Boomer leaving Lucky's. On the same day, filming of the episode "Sunshine" would begin, with the two daytime briefing scenes at the Star Dock (this is evidenced through the same placement of a shrimper and the yellow Lucky's buoy by the liner terminals in photographs for the filming of the Houseboat Boomer scenes and "Sunshine" briefing scenes). By this point, the previously mentioned facemasks for O.J., Top Hat and Warrior gained their eyelids, and in O.J.'s case, his teeth. The wooden frame Diesel Tug hull would once again be placed at Lucky's Yard.



During filming of the two Star briefings, the models of Ten Cents and Zip wore 'joke' faces for fun, modelled after Robert Cardona (Ten Cents) and David Mitton (Zip). The David face was also worn by Sunshine, during the filming of the ending briefing scene. Zorran also wore a [Spitting Image](#) dog toy of US President Ronald Reagan's face, which was cut down to fit within Zorran's wheelhouse.

During the filming of the first briefing scene, assistant cameraman **Giles Christopher**'s shoes would be used as stands for the trollies, potentially due to the crew not having enough trolleys for the models, a common problem in early filming stages.

Eventually at some point during production, the system of putting the clapperboard on a pole to reach in front of the camera from the edge of the set would be invented, to save time as Giles Christopher would have to walk through the tank to get to the camera to use the clapperboard and get out of the tank. This proved to be a beneficial technique, as this idea would later be used and implemented for the filming of future seasons of "*Thomas*".



During the main shoot of "Sunshine", which continued into 1988, Sunshine would be repainted once again into his white livery for the rest of the episode's main shoot, with the Duchess Docking starting filming on 8th January 1988, and would continue until at least 13th January 1988.

Somewhere around the Duchess docking being filmed, the models would have their positions be rearranged for unknown reasons, where promotional pictures were taken and a shot of Sally Seaplane flying over the Duchess would be filmed, with Grampus passing by the foreground. This shot would be used across all versions of opening credits, and said promotional pictures used across various pieces of merchandise, mainly ones adapting or featuring the episode “Sunshine”.

In said shot, Grampus can be spotted with the maritime flag for the number 8. This is the only time this flag would be seen in the show. At this point, the Fire Tug had also gained his flag.

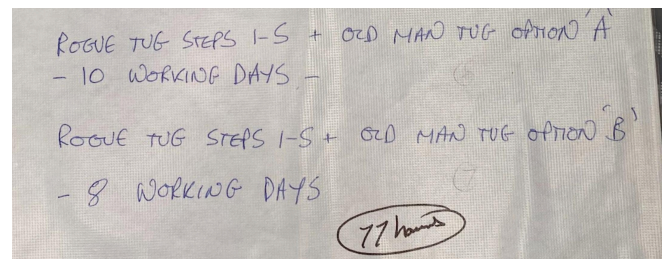
At some point during filming of the dockings, the Coast Guard loses his aft flagpole. This was likely repaired at some point during this episode or the following filmed.



Originally, the next episode after “Sunshine” was going to be one called “Harbor Life”, in the original finalized episode order. A prop made for the episode can be seen in some pre-production pictures where Warrior is wearing a dented-in version of his smoke stack, his normal one being visible in the background to one, with early drafts to the episode having this event happen. However, for unknown reasons, “Harbor Life” was scrapped.

To replace the canned episode, **Tarquin Cardona** would write the episode “Pirate”, loosely based on an idea written down early on in pre-production. The episode introduced 4 new characters, who were repurposed from 4 pre-existing models. Bluenose would be repainted into the character Sea Rogue, Boomer would be modified into the

character Old Man, and the two Green Eyed Villains would be repainted from the two Ghost Tugs. The conversions of Sea Rogue and Old Man’s models took 77 hours (approximately one week).



During this, Sunshine would also receive his final repaint, once again in his Star Tugs livery. The whistle on Ten Cents’ model would also finally have its eyes painted on, now matching up with the large scale model of his whistle. Hercules’ front flagpole would also end up being cracked/damaged, and was thus taped back together. As well as this, a red danger sign that was seen on the rocky hill between the Star Dock and the Naval Yard (and present for the previous two episodes) would be removed. Sometime between “Jinxed” and “Pirate” being filmed,

Scuttlebutt Pete had his front window changed, from having white frames to having brown frames, matching the rest of his body. His megaphone's position was also changed.

Additionally, a new utility truck painted in the Star Tug & Marine company colours was made and would be frequently seen in the background for the rest of the series, replacing an old wooden black truck owned by Captain Star (that was present during "Sunshine" and "Jinxed"). This was apparently deliberately done by David Mitton to subtly show in universe that Star had earned more money as a result of gaining the Duchess contract.



After all the model changes were done, "Pirate" began its main shoot. During filming, David Mitton would often have production meetings with TV companies that ran over, so Chris Tulloch, who by now had taken up the role of the show's art director, was asked to step in for him as a second director.

"Pirate" would be the first proper time the crew decided to 'redress' the set into different locations, notably around the Liner Dock/Seaplane Hangar area. The Liner Dock would be redressed into the Pirate's hideout warehouse and the Naval Yard was temporarily

redesigned into the old quay. Lucky's Yard would also have the "Lucky's" roof signs removed for half of the episode.

During "Pirate"'s main shoot, the episode "Sunshine" would end up going through some rewrites, and required new scenes to be shot. Those being a scene where Ten Cents runs into Lillie Lightship and Hercules talking to each other while searching for Sunshine, and a shot of Sunshine heading back Upriver in the fog.

Also during "Pirate", the closeup shots of Captain Star and Captain Zero's megaphones which were inserted on large scale prop of the Star and Zero piers respectively were filmed, likely as pick-up shots for "Jinxed" and "Sunshine".



Also during the main shoot, the final "Dun Tuggin'" scene was also filmed, with Boomer's model being reconverted back into his houseboat guise, with the vents still backwards. This variation of the houseboat Boomer model would have the front bow fender now missing.

Somewhere around this time, the liner model would be modified. For the shooting of “Jinxed” and “Sunshine”, it would be dressed up as The Duchess. It would be modified into the Princess Alice, now having two stacks instead of three, would have four air vents placed in between the stacks instead of six, having an alternate front superstructure from The Duchess, removing the promenade deck on the stern side of the model, and now having only three lifeboats on the model (two of which being lowered) instead of the Duchess’ seven properly placed lifeboats.



One weekend, when Chris Tulloch was away on a short break, he read one of the scripts that was due to be filmed, “High Winds”, about Hercules bringing in three damaged ocean liners jammed in the estuary during a bad storm - this in itself was adapted from an earlier script called "Trapped" where a liner blocks the harbour mouth. Tulloch realised that the episode would be impossible to film due to the size of the water tank they were using. Over a weekend, he would end up writing a new script, about Zebedee running into an old gangster friend of Captain Zero named Johnny Cuba, while retaining the original title. After being approved by Robert upon showing him the script, of which Cardona encouraged Tulloch, “why don’t you direct it?”, and with David busy supervising the editing of the episodes already shot, the episode was greenlit, and became the fourth episode filmed, with Tulloch directing.



Tulloch would use giant fans on the side of the set to achieve the ‘strong winds’ on the set, as well as using them to make the water go in a particular direction. During filming of the episode, Tulloch broke a notable film rule called ‘crossing the line’, (which refers to crossing a line over to the opposite side of the character, where there the character’s positions are flipped) when filming the low angle shot of Johnny Cuba’s starboard side when he rams into the Coast Guard.

The scene of the Coast Guard heading back out to the estuary after interrogating Ten Cents and Sunshine at the harbour mouth (which the whole scene would later be cut from the episode) would be filmed on roughly 23rd March 1988.

The Coast Guard's aft flagpole, which is present for the Bigg City Port scenes of the episode, is lost once again during filming of the estuary scenes. This time however, the crew did not repair it, and would remain absent for the rest of the series.

During filming, the Diesel Tug's hull wooden frame would be changed out for the red hull version for the final time, with the red hull appearing in the episode without any tarps. The life ring on Sunshine's stern would also disappear by the time "High Winds" was filmed, never being seen again.

Boomer's houseboat model would be converted back into its tugboat guise for the filming of the first scene in "Jinxed", taking place out at the Estuary, with the black vents remaining facing the stern, instead of facing the bow (as it did during "Jinxed"'s main shoot) and stern life ring now missing. Around this time, Johnny Cuba's model would have been built for the purposes of "High Winds" shoot as well.

The Old Docks scenes were shot towards the end of "High Winds" filming, and involved the Liner Dock to have the foundations removed to be redressed into the Old Docks. During the filming of these scenes, the front of Zebedee's hull would end up getting damaged, on the lower front of it. Hercules' front flagpole would also face major damage around the same time as well, a good part of it being snapped off.

Around this time, a promotional 'Sizzler Reel' video was made to attract investors into picking up the show. The reel included various clips from "Sunshine" and "Jinxed", as well as an early extended version of what would become the ending theme, lasting roughly eight minutes, as well as a demo version of the opening theme. It can be assumed that during the editing of the sizzler, early edits of "Sunshine" and "Jinxed" were also assembled together. Much later on, this would get redubbed by **Bill Mitchell**.

Towards the end of "High Winds" main shoot, some more new scenes for the episode "Sunshine" were required to be filmed. These included Zip and Zug offering to help Big Mac, all scenes at the sandbeds, including the scene where the Star Tugs find Sunshine on the sandbank and reshooting the ending scene, all seemingly filmed sometime in March 1988.



During the filming of the reshoots, sometime during or after the Sandbank scenes, Zip was once again severely damaged after a lamp on set fell right on top of him, resulting in him being repaired by Jeremy King.

When Big Mac gets stuck on the sandbeds, his bow's rubrails end up getting stained blue thanks to the dyed water, as well as several small spots of mud smears that were not cleaned off until several episodes later. Sometime between "Pirate" and the Sandbed scenes being filmed, Zip would gain a little black dot on his superstruce rim, on the bow side.

Sometime around this point, Mighty Mo's model would lose one of the two megaphones it originally had up to this point.



Around this time, a line of promotional picture shoots of the models were taken out on the set that was redressed into the estuary location. These photos would later be traced into 2D art for the purposes of promotional artwork seen within various tie-in books following the show's airing. Photos of *at least* all the Stars, Zeros, Lillie and Grampus are confirmed to have been taken, although photos of other characters are speculated to have also been taken.

After this, Tulloch stayed as director for "Warrior", originally called "*Warrior's Longest Day*", which began shooting as the fifth episode. Lucky's Yard was temporarily redressed into the Big Boulder Quarry Co. setting. During filming, a background derelict building with the name "Conway" on it gets destroyed as well. Another roofless, smaller building would replace it for future episodes.

Tulloch recalls the closeup shot of the rope snapping being one of the most memorable scenes to film, as the rope didn't snap the first few times and only broke *just* as the film reel ran out.



Around this time, O.J.'s model would gain two life rings on both starboard and port sides, with Ten Cents' model losing his starboard life ring and his nameplate would end up getting stained. For the shoot of this episode, required a new tramper model to be built for Old Rusty, and a barge redressed into the character of Pearl.

After the main shoot of “Warrior” was finished, the first half of “High Tide”, originally called “*Railhead*” was shot, with David Mitton returning as director. This part of the shoot mainly covered the scenes that took place within the unadulterated Bigg City Port set. Two Coal Yard scenes for “High Tide” and “Warrior” respectively would be filmed first, and would result in Warrior’s model getting some coal dust onto it, remaining throughout filming.

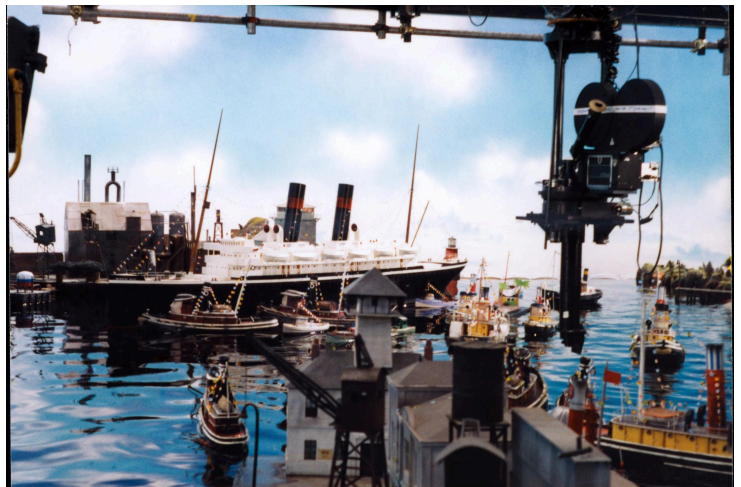
Afterwards, the Big Boulder Co. Quarry set would be redressed into the Steelworks set, with it's distinctive break in the roof now appearing on the opposite end, and soon afterwards, changed back into Lucky’s Yard for the rest of filming, with the red Diesel Tug hull having 2/3rds of it covered up by a single tarp. Notably, the iconic break in the yard building's roof was finally fixed here, and remains as such for the rest of the series.

Around this time, some generic close-up pick-up shots of Warrior, along with two shots of Warrior pulling a barge past the Fire Station would be filmed for “Warrior”.

Sometime during the shoot, Big Mac’s model would be cleaned up of both the leftover bits of sand from the sandbed scenes, rubrails slightly cleaned up, and mostly, coal dust put all over the model for the Coal Yard scenes mentioned earlier.

Also around this time, Sea Rogue would be repainted back into Bluenose, with the hull now being painted grey like the rest of his body, where as originally during pre-production and “Jinxed”’s main shoot, Bluenose’s model had a black hull. Hercules’ front flagpole gets fixed around this time, with Lillie’s front flagpole ending up disappearing from the model. Finally, the Princess Alice’s four air vents are now placed on the outside of the stacks, and now having six properly placed lifeboats.

“Regatta”, originally called “4th of July” would be the sixth episode to be fully filmed throughout the early summer of 1988. During the main shoot, Grampus’ model would have little stubs attached to the model, so the flags could be stuck on during the scene where the Stars rescue Grampus from being blown up. Sometime during early June 1988, the scene of Zorran finding out about Grampus is filmed. During promotional shots of Hercules taken of this scene, the head of crewmember **David Relfe** was accidentally caught in



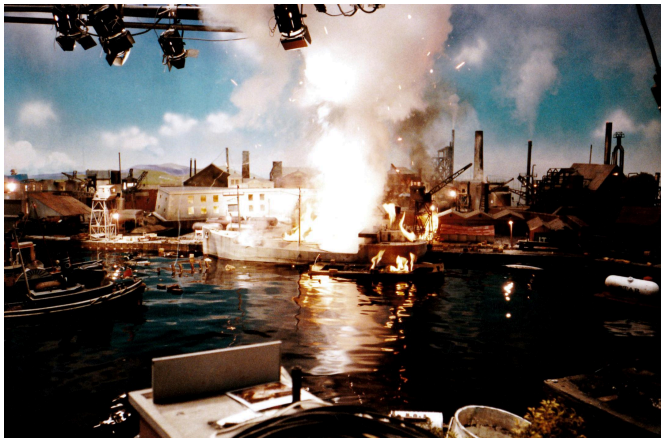
between the city buildings. They also filmed insert shots of Sunshine passing by Lucky's Yard before bumping into Ten Cents for the episode "Sunshine".

Also during June 1988, Castle Vision would be launched, and would get their hands on the rights to produce video releases for the series "*TUGS*".

Many of the character's face masks would be repainted, most notably Grampus' clenched face, which now had an open mouth, most likely an entire repaint of the face after it was scratched up for the shooting of the scenes when he is pulled out of Lillie's hole for "Regatta". Zug's enraged face would also be repainted at some point to feature different teeth and a slightly open mouth.

During this time, various insert shots for "Pirate" would be filmed, including the Green Eyed Villains covering up Lillie Lightship with a tarp, covering up a bellbuoy with a tarp, and a shot of Grampus spitting out water during night. During this time, one of the Ghost Tugs' models would be painted black, as opposed to the more brown tone of the models during "Pirate"'s main shoot.

Sometime around this point, the model for Puffa would have been built, replacing Little Owl/The Goods Engine due to David Mitton not thinking the model was "very realistic". **Adam Masters** joined production around this time as an assistant editor to head editor **Phil Sanderson**, with "Regatta" having been filmed around this time.



The second half of "High Tide" would be shot after this, these being mainly the scenes taking place within and around the canal, requiring a part of the set to be redressed, with the Marine Exchange with three signs now having them missing.

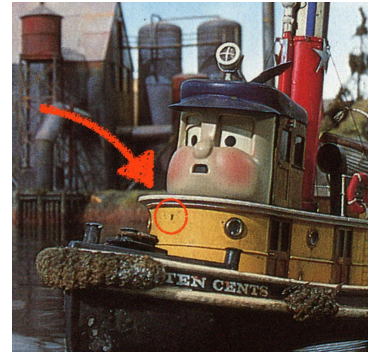
Around this time, the 'PILOT' yacht model that was on set during "Jinxed" would have its top deck repurposed into another similar white steam vessel.

"Munitions" was filmed as the eighth episode, and would go on to suffer heavy delays during filming. Whilst the crew usually aimed for a "15-day turnaround" per episode, [an interview with model-maker Jeremy King](#) revealed that the pyrotechnic scenes in the episode delayed it by at least four weeks, taking a whole month to film, with special effects technician **Ross King** supervising the explosions of light balsa, wax and fireballs.

The flying debris that hit Warrior was a complete fluke done during filming, but the crew thought it was too much of a good take to reshoot, and so added a new line into the script.

During filming, the Diesel Tug hull would have the tarps removed once again, and would stay like this for the rest of filming on the Bigg City Port set.

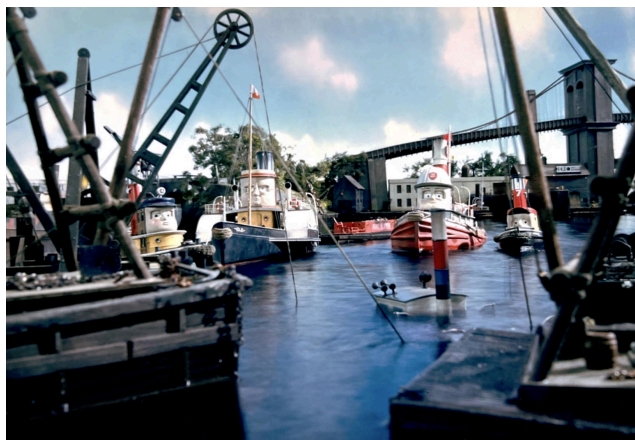
Towards the end of filming “Munitions”, Ten Cents’ model would be heavily covered in soot for the final scene of the episode. Despite being heavily cleaned up afterwards, a noticeable black speck would be left over on the front part of his superstructure.



At some point before “High Tide” began shooting, another story ended up being scrapped, simply known as “Night Story”, which was about Lord Stinker sinking and being rescued, Sally Seaplane needing to make an emergency landing, and the launch of the Diesel Tug. For unknown reasons, this episode would be dropped.

It was decided that in its place, would be a more developed version of an early planned b-plot for the episode “High Tide”, where Ten Cents and O.J. have to race Zorran, Zip and Zug in order to tow in some Schooners, only for said Schooners to have their quarantine flags up, with Zorran joining them. This plot also included a scene of a ferry trying to avoid a small boat out of control, only with Ten Cents and Sunshine instead of OJ.

The episode would be named “Quarantine”, with Tarquin Cardona to once again write up the script. This ex-“Railhead”-B-plot would be merged with another script, “OJ’s Bad Day”, including two new characters, Burke and Blair, based on real life murderers Burke and Hare, wanting to scrap O.J., OJ’s incident with a “ferry” (here without any speedboat), and both Ten Cents and OJ saving each other. As seen in the sticker book that adapted this original version, OJ’s own then-separate ferry incident was intended to be much more dramatic than the one combined with “Railhead”’s speedboat version.



After having the two Ghost Tugs models repainted again and modified into the models of Burke and Blair and adding a front window to the Fultan Ferry’s model, “Quarantine” would begin filming as the ninth episode of the series in August 1988, with Chris Tulloch once again stepping up to direct.

During the filming of “Quarantine”, a few pickup shots for “Munitions” would be shot. Most notably the closeup shot of the lined-up buoys. Also around this time, the Seaplane Hangar would be used as a Fire

Station, with two fire barges, two red buoys, and a slightly modified version of red Zero light barge/“corporation lightship” put around the hangar to convey this.

Towards the end of filming for the episode, these redressings would be removed, and can be seen missing during the second to last scene in the 15 minute cut of the episode, when Burke and Blair are told that O.J.’s not for sale.

“Quarantine”’s shoot would require O.J.’s model to be weathered up with soot for the purpose of the episodes’ plot. A minuscule black speck of soot was forgotten to be cleaned off the top of his boater hat and remained as so for the rest of production.



“Ghosts” would be shot right after “Quarantine” as the tenth episode, with Mitton returning as director. At this point, Ten Cents would have his stained nameplates replaced with new ones. Sometime during filming, Top Hat’s cross facemask would lose its eyelids, which would remain unfixed for the rest of the series. The Galleon was built by **Graham Riddell**, which was modified from a Revell Santa Maria galleon kit which he built on a Saturday, before they were due to film the Galleon scene on 7th September 1988.

During “Ghosts”’ main shoot, the drawbridge in the canal would have spikes added underneath the bridge, likely to give it a scarier look to fit with the episode tone.

During this, some additional shots would be filmed for the episode “Jinxed”, these being the closeup shots of Ten Cents before and during the Lucky’s Yard pileup.

Following Ten Cents’ weathering from the filming of “Munitions”, a tiny black speck can be spotted on the front of his superstructure, which is present throughout the filming of “Quarantine” and “Ghosts”, but the crew managed to clean most of it off by the time they shot the upriver episodes.

During or after “Quarantine”/“Ghosts”’s main shoots, the liner model would be modified again into the S.S. Vienna, being repainted into having a white and gold

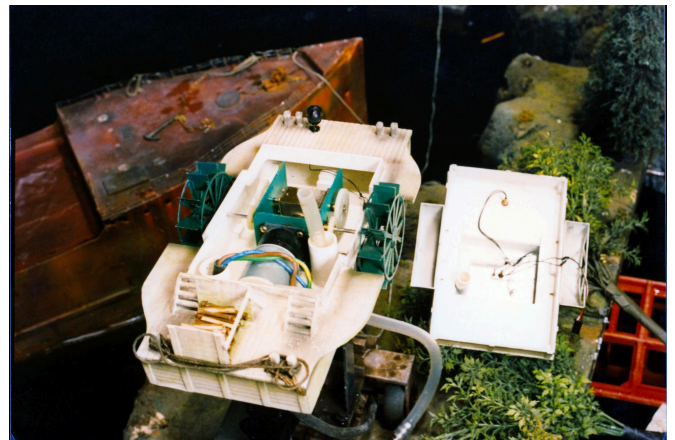


livery, fitted with The Duchess' front superstructure, and once again supporting seven lifeboats.

Around this time as well, various B-Roll shots and a few winter shots on the port set would be filmed, possibly for an unproduced alternate version of "Bigg Freeze" taking place in Bigg City Port (originally titled "Bigg City Freeze"). David began to get frustrated with working on the highly restrictive port set, and on top of the fact the crew were beginning to run out of money, it would result in them deciding to move one of the already-planned episodes to the location of Upriver, that episode being "Trapped".

The Upriver sets would all be filmed on one side of the set; the bay area where Lucky's Yard, Ballantines and the Derelict buildings were originally placed. The estuary scenes for the port-centered episodes were also filmed here. Many of the character and setting concepts and inspirations for upriver would originate from "The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas. Vol. II" (Tatley, 1983).

"Trapped" would involve Chris Tulloch being tasked with reworking the episode into taking place in the Upriver setting. Originally revolving around the Z-Stacks getting a liner stuck across the entrance to the port, would be rewritten into Zorran and Zug getting a tramper stuck across the channel Upriver. Tulloch would create a new character for the episode, Billy Shoepack, being based on an alligator tug from the United States/Canada. Additionally, Billy Shoepack was originally only known as "Shoepack", with the name "Billy" being added on to his nameplate at the last minute. Billy was built by Jeremy King.



"Trapped" was shot as the eleventh episode with Tulloch as director, although as it was at such short notice, Billy Shoepack's model was used with incomplete internal mechanisms used to move the eyes and wheelhouse, and only one face made.

Ten Cents has his black speck cleaned here. The model of Nantucket (which had been so-so for the shooting of "Quarantine" and "Ghosts") had to be reconverted into the character of Old Rusty, for the shooting of a single closeup pickup shot for "Warrior".

Around the time during "Trapped"'s 24 day shoot, amidst October 1988, at least eight episodes of the series had already been edited, with four of them reaching completion by this point, those being "Sunshine", "Pirate", "Regatta" and "Munitions".



During the editing and recording process, the episodes' scripts would be modified from their shooting scripts, in order for episodes to fit exactly into the 20 minute runtime for every episode, with the main episode content being 18 minutes and 30 seconds, the other 1 minute and 30 seconds being for the opening and closing credits. It was also around this time the crew were starting to run low on money, so would set out to have direct-to-video releases of the four completed episodes to get back money. By October 1988, it was expected to have all the episodes ready to air by January 1989.

At some point in early editing, there was talk of adding animated moving mouths on the tugs, due to a concern the viewer wouldn't be able to tell which character was talking at a time, but was quickly rejected as it was thought the voices were distinctive enough anyway.

At some point during the editing, Phil Sanderson asked Chris Tulloch to do a temp narration to help him with the cutting of shots. Tulloch improvised different accents for the characters. The producers were satisfied with Tulloch's performance and made the characters have their voices based on the accents that were improvised when it came to do the final voice acting, whilst declaring Tulloch would join the voice cast and stay as the role of Zorran.

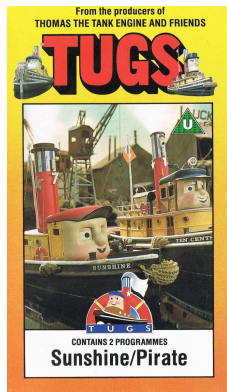
The voices for the characters would be provided by several actors, including **Patrick Allen** (Captain Star), **Simon Nash** (Ten Cents), **Shaun Prendergast** (Sunshine, Zak), **Timothy Bateson** (O.J, Big Mickey, Lord Stinker among various other characters), **John Baddeley** (Top Hat, Zip, Puffa), **Sean Barrett** (Big Mac, Hercules, Zebedee, Izzy Gomez among various other characters), **Mike O'Malley** (Warrior, Bluenose, Johnny Cuba among other characters), **Lee Cornes** (Grampus, Billy Shoepack, Boomer, Coast Guard), **Nigel Anthony** (Zug, Burke, Davy Jones), **JoAnne Good** (Lillie Lightship, Sally Seaplane) and Chris Tulloch. However, none of the voice actors would be credited for their roles during the end credits for unknown reasons, possibly due to being non-union freelance work. The lines were recorded live by the actors at Bluebird Studios, where the music was also recorded.

During the recording session for "Regatta", JoAnne Good, Lillie's voice actress, reportedly collapsed from her chair in hysterics after reading Grampus' solution to save Lillie from sinking by sticking his face in the hole in her hull.

The show's dramatic theme (and overall series score) would be composed by Mike O'Donnell and Junior Campbell, with Pete Zorn playing the saxophone.

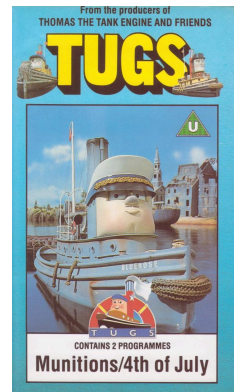
By some point in November 1988, “Trapped” would wrap up production, leading into Up River’s filming, which would go through rewrites to work Billy Shoepack into the plot of the episode, who’s model would have its internal mechanisms finished.

At some point around this time, the four episodes that had been edited, “High Tide”, “Warrior”, “Quarantine” and “High Winds”, would have their music and dialogue recorded. It was also decided to extend the episode runtime from 20 minutes to 22 minutes.



Close to filming starting for the episode, the series would make its public debut on VHS on 17th November 1988, with video releases of the episodes “Sunshine”, “Pirate”, “Munitions” and “Regatta”, two episodes per tape. These tapes would be released by Castle Vision.

Up River would be shot as the twelfth episode, with one of the lakes scenes reportedly being filmed on 22nd November 1988. During the shoot of the Uptown scenes, Little Owl would end up getting repainted, name now missing from the model’s right side.



During shooting, one of Ten Cents’ cross faces would lose its eyelids, and would remain like that for the rest of the series.

During the shooting of the final scene of the episode, a television crew from ITV would shoot footage for a behind the scenes segment about “TUGS”, for a series called “Movie Magic”. The segment featured interviews from David Mitton, Robert Cardona and Chris Tulloch. ([said segment would be uploaded to Youtube](#) by user **The Star Switcher** on Christmas

2018).

At some point around this time, Bluenose’s model would be repainted into Sea Rogue again, with the model now supporting white handrails instead of dark blue like back during “Pirate”’s main shoot and with several patches of Bluenose’s gray paintwork still being visible - notably the top deck and lifeboat deck. The model would remain in this condition for the rest of production. Additionally, as a joke among the crew for how many times the model was changed between Bluenose and Sea Rogue, the model now featured some off screen scribbles such as “Schizoid” on the stern and “Which Tug Am I?” on the bow’s deck.

After the Uptown shoot for Up River was finished, the crew took promotional pictures of the Stars and Z's lined up (respectively) on the Uptown set, along with stills of Ten Cents, Sunshine and Zug with an icy schooner during sunset (also for promotional use). Finally, the thirteenth and final episode, "Bigg Freeze" had started filming with the Uptown scenes in December 1988, the same month the crew were contracted to wrap up filming. Allegedly however, filming continued into January 1989, with people at Shepperton Studios threatening to kick the crew out due to them having overstayed their time. In fact, nearly half of the crew at this point had either left or been laid off by Robert Cardona because of this.



During the episode's filming, Hercules' front flagpole would completely disappear from the model, never to be seen again.

On 23rd December 1988, a workprint for "Trapped"'s 15 minute cut would be edited together, along with having a post-production schedule written, planning it out from that month up to March 1989.

Shortly after the series wrapped up filming (after 15 months of exhausting production), set-up ruler photos of the models for all the Stars, Zeros, Lillie and Grampus would be taken, to be used for reference for potential merchandise of the characters.

POST PRODUCTION **(1989-1990)**

At some point in December 1988, it was decided that the episodes would be shortened down to *15 minutes* per episode, instead of the planned and filmed 22 minute versions. At some point, the different cuts would co-exist, and were divided into "long (20-22 minute)" and "short (15 minute)" versions, with plans seeming to continue making more extended cuts, with "Jinxed" and

PRODUCTIONS SCHEDULE - 'TUGS'

December 23rd, 1989

	Trapped High Winds Warrior Quarantine	Trapped High Winds	Trapped High Winds		
	EDIT	F/X	MUSIC	V/O	DUBB
Jan 2-6	Munitions Regatta Sunshine	Warrior	Warrior		
9-13	Ghosts Pirate Railhead	Quarantine Pre-Mix Warrior	Munitions Regatta		
16-20	Up River (Long & Short) Jinxed	Munitions Regatta Pre Mix - Quarantine	Ghosts Sunshine Pirate		
23-27	Jinxed (Long & Short) Freeze	Ghosts Sunshine Pirate	V.O.	Trapped,Pirate H.W's, Regatta Ghosts,Sunshine (Q?),Munitions	
					SCRIPTS
					Trapped High Winds Warrior Quarantine
					Munitions Regatta
					Sunshine Pirtae Ghosts
					Up River

“Up River” slated to have both versions made concurrently.

This never came to be however, possibly due to cost issues. Not helping matters was the episode “Bigg Freeze” due to being low on money, and going into overtime the episode began filming in the T-Stage in January 1989. The latter would mean that all the necessary shots needed could not be filmed. The solution would be to cut the episode short and work out what they had in the editing room. The 22 minute only scenes that were shot for it would’ve only existed in the rushes, scripts and publicity stills.

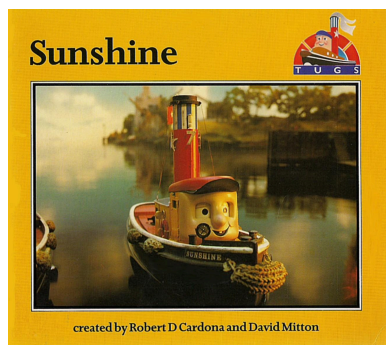
This would overall leave the four 20 minute cuts that were released early on VHS back in November 1988 to be the *only* extended cuts to be *officially* released.

These would be edited throughout December 1988, and continue on until February 1989, pushing back the expected transmission date from January 1989 to April 1989. Somewhere around this point would be when “Railhead” and “Warrior’s Longest Day” would be renamed to “High Tide” and “Warrior” respectively.

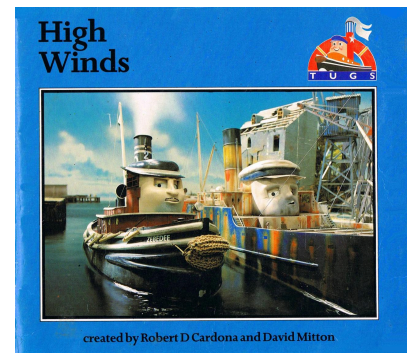
On 11th January 1989, the series would appear for the first time on television via its appearance on “Movie Magic”, a segment featured alongside a tour of Shepperton Studios, and largely, on the making of the British-Swedish film “Erik the Viking”.

On the 21st March 1989, a press launch of “*TUGS*” would be held on the preserved warship HMS Belfast in London from 11:30am to 3pm. Patrick Allen would attend the event dressed as Captain Star.

The show itself would later air in the United Kingdom on ITV every Tuesday at 4pm from the 4th April 1989 to 27th June 1989, with all episodes as 15 minutes. This would be the only run the show would have on British television despite apparent talks of reruns in 1990 which never happened. An extensive advertising campaign including press clippings and even radio adverts had been circulated during the show’s singular British run, and the show was positively well received.



Despite this, very little merchandise was available around this time outside of four photo books adaptations of the episodes “Sunshine”, “Pirate”, “High Winds”, and “Warrior’s Longest Day”, with all four books seemingly based on the original extended cuts of the episodes, with the latter two books



having scenes and promotional stills not present in the only-released 15 minute cuts of the episodes. According to newspaper cuttings, the price for the photo books was originally going to be £4.95, but

likely due to the fact it may have been considered overpriced, the value was shortened down to £1.99 instead. In the summer of 1989, a VHS release containing the episodes “Trapped”, “Ghosts” and “High Winds” would be released, featuring their 15 minute cuts.

The ending song for “Bigg Freeze”, known as “*Across the Sea*”, performed by Sue Glover, was considered for an extended single on record, along with the series music - likely a finalised mix of the extended theme heard on the sizzler. An advertisement played at the end of the airing of “Bigg Freeze” stated this record was “now available in all high street record shops”, but as of 2023, no copies of the record have been found whatsoever. Presumably the idea was abandoned.

Further photo books would be produced and were released through a second and third run (with the price of the books now being increased to £2.50). Some of these photo book adaptations, including ones previously mentioned, would feature scenes and promotional stills that were either in the originally filmed 20 minute cuts, or as the case with a small handful, are based on different script drafts.

These photo books would be the only way various deleted scenes and promotional stills not featured in the final 15 minute cuts would see official release. Overall, 10 of the episodes from the series were adapted into a photo book by **Penny Morris**, with the exception of “Munitions”, “Regatta” and “Quarantine”. Although the latter two episodes were later adapted into sticker books, with “Quarantine”’s being titled “O.J’s Bad Day”, and both differ greatly from their filmed counterparts compared to the photo books.

The children’s book series company “Buzz Books” also produced four original story books (written by Fiona Hardwick) tying to “*TUGS*”. These included “Kidnapped”, “Nothing to Declare”, “Treasure Hunt” and “Run Aground”.

Several pieces of other merchandise were produced, including two annual books (one in 1989 and one in 1990), a board game and two ERTL model toys of Ten Cents and Sunshine. Several other coloring and activity books and a poster magazine were produced too. Two final tapes containing the episodes “High Tide”, “Warrior” and “Bigg Freeze” on one tape, and “Jinxed”, “Quarantine” and “Up River” on the other, would be released throughout 1990, once again only containing the 15 minute cuts.

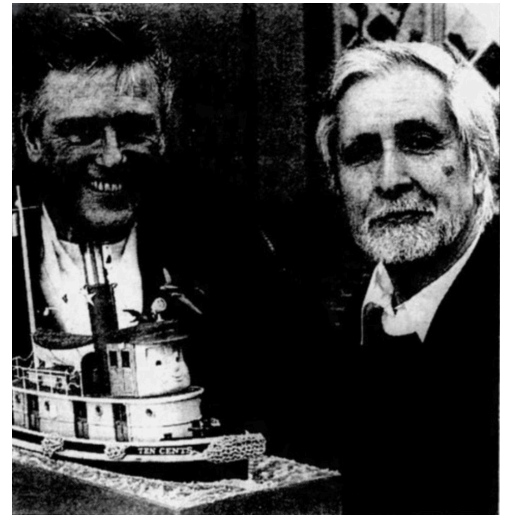
A second series was allegedly planned well in advance of the first series completing filming. Mitton and the crew had outlined more than 96 story ideas for future “*TUGS*” series as mentioned by him in [an interview](#) in 2008. The plan for Series 2 would move away from the Bigg City Port set, and focus more on the Upriver sets, as they were easier and cheaper to film in compared to the Bigg City Port set. New characters were also set to be introduced. However, due to the nature of the show’s production, it’s unknown if plans for Series 2 made it beyond these ideas by Mitton.



An American dub of the show was also in the works, with Robert Cardona trying to pitch the show to American investors as early as 1988. A test dub of the first episode “Sunshine” had already been made, featuring the voice talents of known voice legends such as Rob Paulsen, Jack Angel, among others. According to Cardona, two to three other episodes were also dubbed with this cast, although it is unknown which episodes they were, nor have they been ever seen or found.

A “Publicity Packet” was produced to further publicise the show to investors, including an outline summary of the show, several promotional pictures from episodes (some exclusive to the pack), bios of the core characters, and promotional artwork seen nowhere else.

Several publicity events would take place as well. In March 1989, David Mitton and Robert Cardona brought the dummy models of Ten Cents and Zip down to Gloucester docks. On the 12th October 1989, Mitton attended the opening of a floating restaurant on board the tugboat Allen in Exeter. The following year from the weekend of 22nd-23rd June 1990, Mitton brought the props of Ten Cents, Sunshine, Top Hat, Zorran and Big Mac, as well as his tugboat “Kennet” (painted in Star Tug colours) to the ‘TUGS Day/TUGS weekend’ event, also at Gloucester and were displayed in the museum’s school room. When the event was over, many of the models were put back into their boxes wearing their shocked/surprised faces (as if to say they were afraid of going back into their storage boxes). This was also reportedly the last time the Top Hat prop was ever seen.



Robert Cardona would also be interviewed for “Model Boats” magazine for their July 1990 issue, revealing the behind the scenes of the show, and the series making it to other countries, including Australia, Portugal, and the current attempts to pitch the series to America.

Also to note, at some point, Britt Allcroft would catch wind of “TUGS”’s existence, and would get furious over it. There’s claims that Britt tried to sue Robert and David over it, but lost due to difference in face colours between the grey ones in “Thomas” and the flesh-toned ones in “TUGS”, but there’s currently little proof of this lawsuit happening besides said claims. It’s also unknown when these events would’ve happened, and has been placed at this point in the Google Doc due to having happened sometime before the following events.

Unfortunately, the show's budget was in the red. The first series overall *officially* cost two million pounds to produce, but according to one of the crew purportedly went massively overbudget as far as 30 million pounds. Television South (TVS), the company that had funded Robert and David to make the show, had filed out for bankruptcy after a buyout. At the same time, yet another lawsuit was filed against the show's creators, by a man called **Desmond Cox**, who claimed Robert and David had stolen the ideas of "*TUGS*" from him. This lawsuit would continue on until 2000 with Cox and Robert settling out of court. No American investors picked up the show, most likely due to investors knowing the limited success the show would have with its unclear target demographic. The US dub was never greenlit.

With no money left, Clearwater Features was bankrupt, shutting its doors on 31st December 1990, leaving "*TUGS*" officially cancelled for good after just one season.

AFTERMATH OF CLEARWATER (1991-1998)

With Clearwater Features shut down, Robert Cardona bought the rights to "*TUGS*" following Clearwater and TVS' bankruptcy. He left the United Kingdom and moved to Canada, to help direct another similar tugboat show called "*Theodore Tugboat*", which was aimed for a younger audience. Theodore had been created independently of "*TUGS*" by Andrew Cochran, who only found out about the show after Theodore had already started pre-production, and with slight embarrassment asked Cardona to come on board to dispel any copyright complications.

Theodore would use the exact same Periscope Lens camera system as used on "*TUGS*", however it would be crane-mounted instead of ceiling-mounted, and use a tape camera instead of the Mitchell 35R film camera. Theodore would be a global success, running for five seasons from 1993 to 1998, consisting of 130 episodes, with Cardona directing 60 of them.

COX SETTLES TUGS BATTLE

14 July 2000

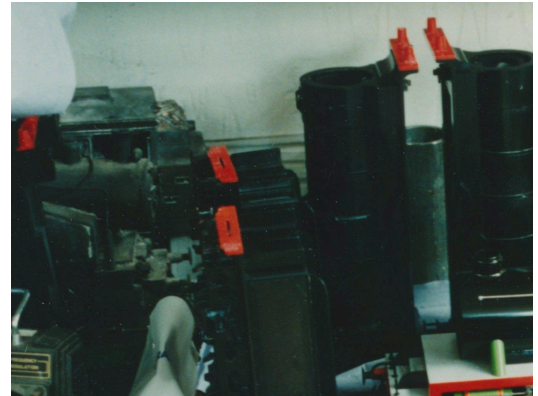
Independent producer Des Cox has settled out of court with TVS TV in a 13-year legal battle that centred on children's animation series Tugs. Cox, founder of Snowbow Productions, issued a



David Mitton, Mike O'Donnell, Junior Campbell, and some of the other "*TUGS*" crew members would go on to either return to or join production of "*Thomas*" when production of a third series was greenlit and worked on throughout 1991 and seeing release throughout late 1991 to 1992. Britt

Allcroft would purchase many of the models from “*TUGS*” to be used as set dressing in Series 3, such as many of the dockyard cranes, shrimpers, schooners and background buildings.

During the pre-production of the third series, all of the engine models would be refurbished. The models of Puffa and Little Owl can be seen in a photo of the refurbishments on a workbench. This likely means that the two locomotives had their parts cannibalized for the “*Thomas*” engines’ restoration or would’ve been reused for scrap dressing. Neither of the props’ whereabouts are known today, most likely due to these reasons.



Mitton would hold the director role until the seventh series finished production in late 2002, when he retired from “*Thomas*” following conflict with by-then owners of the show, *HiT Entertainment*, regarding the show’s direction.

Chris Tulloch would go on to serve as art director in movies such as “*Bullet to Beijing*” and notably one of the special effects technicians in the highly acclaimed movie “*Saving Private Ryan*”. Since the 2000’s, he has gained a new passion for songwriting and continues to perform as ‘Mandolin Jack’.

Robert Cardona would try to revive “*TUGS*” throughout the 1990’s, including making a 7 minute test dub of the episode “Trapped” that was edited to make the show more child-friendly. The test dub would be narrated by famous British actor **Brian Blessed**. This dub would also never see light.



In 1992, “*TUGS*” would make its dubbed debut in Japan, following deals under Robert Cardona’s new company, *C.C. Entertainment*, being aired regionally on television across various points in the country from July to August 1992, with all the episodes using their 15 minute cuts for all TV broadcasts.

When finally making its official country-wide debut on television, episodes would premier on Fridays every week from 2nd October

1992 to 25th December 1992, airing from 7:00-7:30. For unknown reasons, “Bigg Freeze” was placed as the 12th episode of the series, and “Up River” placed as the 13th and final episode for their Japanese release.

There would also be two different ways the series would be released on home video in Japan. One way would be four rental exclusive videos, three of which containing 3 episodes each, and fourth and final tape containing the last 4 episodes of the series. These tapes would be made available sometime in 1992. It should also be noted that these tapes were commonly placed in the windows of stores and had been heavily bleached by sunlight. It has been extremely hard to find any rental tapes with unfaded covers.

The other way would be through retail available video releases, each tape containing only 1 episode of the series. Usually, two of these tapes would be released on the 20th of every month, from October 1992 to March 1993. March 1993 would be the exception to this rule, releasing three tapes instead of the usual two.

These Japanese video releases would be the first time the 15 minute cuts to “Regatta” and “Munitions” would see a home video release, previously being exclusive to TV airings within the previous countries the series had aired in.

The series would spawn several pieces of merchandise, having much more made compared to all other countries “TUGS” aired in. From bath toys and plushies, to stamps and toothbrushes. These items have become heavily sought after within recent years to “TUGS” fans.



On the 10th June 1991, “TUGS” would make its television debut in Australia, and would continue over three runs going into 1992 and 1993, however the final run did not air “Bigg Freeze” for unknown reasons.

Sometime within 1994, plans were being developed by a fan of the show to make a website dedicated to the series, due to the lack of information and way of finding fans available on the web at the time. By the spring of 1996, the first ever “TUGS” website would launch, called “TUGS Devotion Online”. Sadly no traces of the site are available in 2023.

Also around 1994, production of “Thomas” fourth series would be underway, with O.J.’s model being repainted and modified into the Lakesider III paddler, Izzy Gomez being turned into a non-faceless tramper and the S.S. Vienna’s hull was repainted into black, gained new black stacks with a white stripe

at the top, and renamed to the S.S. Roxstar. The fourth series would later be first released in late 1994 onto home video in the UK, and slowly everywhere else throughout 1995.

In 1995, the last new release of “*TUGS*” would be released, being a direct-to-video Finnish voice-over of the series. Only 9 of the 13 episodes would be released on Finnish home media, and would have the Finnish voices be done over the original English audio, instead of the music and effects track like the Japanese dub. The dub would also be very poorly translated. These video releases being the only time “Sunshine” and “Pirate”’s 15 minute cuts would see a home video release.

At some point, Cardona’s company C.C. Entertainment goes under and the rights to “*TUGS*” are once again transferred to Robert as an individual. Castle Communications which had also shared the rights with Robert up until this point gets bought by *BMG Rights Management*, making the show’s rights split between Cardona and BMG.

Around 1996, an American company called Sunbow Entertainment saw Robert’s US pitch, and saw potential in the idea, but thought it would need reworking. Robert Cardona would give them the rights to use footage from all thirteen “*TUGS*” episodes, however only from what materials existed of the episodes that had been publicly released, so no deleted scenes or rushes were used.



Originally conceptualized as “Boats-A-Float”, would later become the animated children’s series, “*Salty’s Lighthouse*”, and would first air on the United States network, TLC, in the fall of 1997 . An episode would last 11 minutes long, and consist of three parts; the animated segments starring a kid named Salty and his sea-based animal friends, music videos reusing footage from old black and white films, and the main segments using footage from the original “*TUGS*” episodes.

“*TUGS*” segments were **heavily** changed and edited from the original episodes, making the show more

child-friendly and as well reusing footage and making new stories, needing to meet the demand of forty 11 minute segments, which had to be written over the course of 3 months. Due to this, many story ideas and certain scenarios would be repeated over and over again, from Sunshine bumping into Ten Cents, the need to dock an ocean liner, a tramper getting stuck Upriver (at least seven times), just to name a few.

The original voice actors were replaced with Canadian ones, Mike and Junior’s original score was replaced, and several of the characters were altered, such as Sunshine and Captain Star becoming female, and characters being renamed (Big Mac renamed to ‘Big Stack’, O.J. renamed to ‘Otis’,

Zebedee being pronounced 'Zeebee', Johnny Cuba renamed and given a new personality 'Steamer', to mention a few).

All of the previously stated aspects have gained the show a negative reputation among TUGS fans, and made even more bitter thanks to "*Salty's Lighthouse*" being the highest quality footage of "*TUGS*" to ever have been seen, using the original 35mm film masters of the 15 minute cuts to all of the episodes, and one for the 20 minute cut of "Pirate". 1' inch videotape masters for "Sunshine", "Regatta" and "Munitions" 20 minute cuts were used as well.

"*Salty's Lighthouse*" would be the last official piece of "*TUGS*" media that would ever be produced. The series would produce its last 'new' episode on 26th June 1998 and the show would continue reruns on US television until 2003.

During 1997, during the filming of Series 5 for "*Thomas*", the Fultan Ferry's model would be used and seen for the final time for the episode "Gordon and the Gremlin", filmed 7th October 1997. The episode itself would officially premier on UK television on 21st September 1998. Series 5 would also be the final time Izzy Gomez's model would be seen.

INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM (1999-2019)

Back during 1996, ideas for a theatrical "*Thomas*" film would begin to bubble in Britt Allcroft's head, finally being able to go through with her film idea in 1999. Titled "*Thomas and the Magic Railroad*", filming would move over from the United Kingdom at Shepperton Studios, to Canada, in the city of Toronto. While models for characters like Thomas and Percy would be taken over to Canada by plane, a majority of props like more minor characters and background dressing would be taken over by boat in cardboard boxes.

As a result of this, many models and buildings used for "*Thomas*" would end up being majorly damaged or destroyed. Some of these models would be background ships used in the background of episodes, including models of the Big Mickey, the Coast Guard, Izzy Gomez and the Fultan Ferry props.

During production of the film, there were plans by David Mitton and various model makers for the "*TUGS*" characters to appear in the film within various scenes where Thomas does seaside runbys, but would end up being cut before filming due to politics between David and Britt behind the scenes.

"*Thomas and the Magic Railroad*" would release on the 14th and 26th of July of 2000 within the United Kingdom and the United States respectively, much to critical backlash, and being a box office bomb.

By the 2000's, "*TUGS*" had gained a cult following and its fandom began to gradually grow, due to several online fan sites to talk about the series, such as "TUGS Devotion Online", "Clearwater Forums",

"Star Tugs Pier", "Clearwater II", "The New Star Tugs Pier", and lastly the "Thomas Fan Forums", later to become the "Sodor Island Forums", or "SiF" for short.

During the production of "*Thomas*" sixth series in 2001, a new Big Mickey model would be rebuilt from scratch, where it would go on to appear across the rest of the series' run.

On the 16th May 2008, "*TUGS*" co-creator and director David Mitton passed away at the age of 69, as a result of a heart attack. Various production assets from "*TUGS*" and "*Thomas*" he kept would either be thrown out or end up being given to main "SiF" administrator, **Ryan Hagan**, who would decide to keep the materials he got secret from the public. Allegedly the most prominent production asset he acquired was David's fabled 96 unused story ideas for future episodes. These are yet to have been seen to the public, but have been confirmed by other members of SiF to be in Ryan's possession.



Following Mitton's death, his and Cardona's private storage unit at Shepperton Studios, which housed various assets from "*TUGS*" would be liquidised and cleared out, speculatively due to dispose of anything tied to David Mitton's possessions on paper. Some of these assets thrown out would include the original props. Robert Cardona reportedly visited the storage unit sometime after the liquidation and threw out anything that still remained within the unit.

However, an unnamed passing builder noticed the props, and salvaged as many as he could and loaded them into his van. Through TV adverts, he learned of a model boat enthusiast called Richard, who he'd donate the models to, and would be later restored by Richard to the best of his ability.



Throughout June 2012, four of the facemask cases from the storage unit clearout were put up for auction on Ebay (one case with O.J.'s faces; sold to Australia sold for about £400-470, one with Top Hat, Grampus, Sea Rogue and the Old Man; sold to Ryan Hagan for £376.80, one with Big Mac, Billy Shoepack, Fire Tug, Johnny Cuba and Old Rusty; sold to Elliot Killick-Ward for £336.81, and another with Zebedee and Izzy's faces; sold to a fan in the US for £350.00). To note, the first listing for O.J.'s facemask case went unsold, remaining at the original £200.00 asking price, but later relisted and sold shortly afterwards in the same month.

Later that year, Richard would begin to share word of the “TUGS” props he had, and would reach out to various people about them and showing pictures he was originally sent of the models’ conditions when they were originally sold to him.



Some of the people that would be reached out would be members of “SiF”. To avoid the models being separated, the members of “SiF” decided to all put money together to buy the props and keep them together in the UK.

In January 2013, the members of SiF brought all the models from Richard for about £8,000-11,000 approximately. The models acquired were Ten Cents, Big Mac, O.J. (still in his Lakesider III paint job from “Thomas” but retaining the original head and stack),

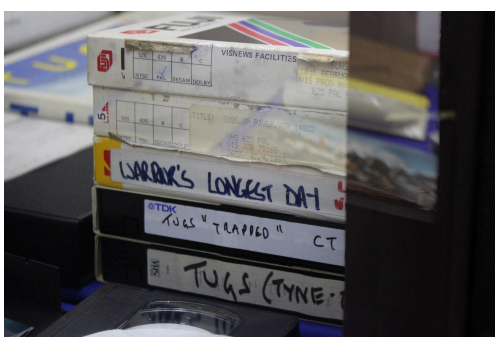
Warrior, Hercules, Sunshine, Zorran, Zebedee, Zak, Zug, Zip, Lillie Lightship, Sea Rogue, Boomer, the Fire Tug, Burke, Blair and Billy Shoepack.

Top Hat and Grampus are the most prominent characters to have their props missing. As of 2023, the props’ whereabouts are still unknown, although it is likely they were sadly thrown out during the storage unit liquidation (though others have speculated Mitton kept them and they currently reside at the Mitton estate). The other minor characters such as Lord Stinker, etc remain unknown, but are more than likely gone.

The same month they would get the props, certain SiF members would form the new group “The Star Tugs Trust”. The group’s stated main aim was to exhibit the props to the public. The group was formed by many ‘elitist’ members of SiF; Ryan Hagan, Sean O’Connor, Sam Wilkinson, Simon A.C. Martin, Chris Signore, Doug Roberts, Benji Clifford, and Jon Gransden. The latter two individuals would leave the Trust by early 2014. The organisation began touring the props to various parts of the UK throughout 2014.



Also in 2014, the Star Tugs Trust acquired a British Railways Mk1 railway coach at the Midland Railway in Butterley, Derbyshire, to house the props, being their current and permanent location.



From 2015 onwards, many crew members from “TUGS” would donate various production materials they had to the Trust for display purposes, from unused prop pieces, moulding and face casts, blueprints, many photographs during

production (reportedly 700+ in total), various scripts, documents, notes and several rare and unseen video tapes; of these are two tapes containing the American test dub of “Sunshine”, the Brian Blessed narrated dub of “Trapped”, a 15 minute “Trapped” workprint, a Sizzler Reel and a workprint of an extended version of “Warrior” (having its original title). All of these materials were given to the Trust on the intention of specifically sharing them publicly to the fans worldwide.

The Trust would however decide to not publicly show most of these materials, claiming they would breach copyright issues. Despite these claims, they would sometimes be screened to select fans behind "VIP events that required pay to access. The few times they would be shown off, would be to either a limited number of people, or with events with only a small number of people attending. A very limited amount of behind the scenes photos would also be put on display at the time.

In 2016, the Trust would have a private screening of their 20 minute “Warrior’s Longest Day” workprint, with people attending it being told not to take any pictures or videos of it.



In 2017, the Trust put out a fundraiser to help raise money to build a replica of Sally Seaplane, built by the original modelmaker, to ‘fill the gap’ in the display as ‘Phoenix’, a seaplane that would’ve been used for set dressing before Sally was a developed character, was removed from the display by the original owner following damage by the Trust. The fundraiser was successful, however, the final result of the replica was heavily criticized, as the model looked very bizarre compared to the real Sally, with gigantic lips and simplistic blue eyes. This was because the model maker had not been given any reference material to make the replica.

On the 28th September 2017, episode nine of “*Thomas*” twenty-first series, “New Crane on the Dock” would feature a speaking appearance from Big Mickey, now being given a face within the style of the “*Thomas*” universe, with a new voice actor. He would continue to appear in the show this way, until its final twenty-fourth series ended on the 22nd June 2020.

From 2018, the Trust would acquire loaned props from HiT Entertainment on props that appeared or characters that appeared in “*TUGS*”, such as the S.S. Roxstar liner prop in 2018, and Big Mickey’s sixth series rebuild in 2019.



In August 2019, another “private” event was held, showing off massive amounts of various behind the scenes documents, including scripts,

and a screening of the Sizzler and US dub of “Sunshine”.

During this event, one of the Trust’s members would create an invalid Non-Disclosure Agreement or NDA, which fans would have to sign as well as pay £30 to see the materials. Before said screenings as well, Trust members would try to convince fans in attendance to not take or record photos and videos, and to not talk about/release them publicly.

Furthermore, the props seemed to face continuous damage throughout their ownership under the Trust. Many of the props began to have several cracks, chips and other mild forms of damage on their faces and bodies, due to the constant touring of the props. On top of this, the Trust used the props for various dangerous stunts or placing them in unsuitable environments that would further damage the props, such as Ten Cents being left on the footplate of a steam locomotive, and Zip being dangerously too close to an engine’s firebox for a mere joke image (which could’ve easily melted parts and effected the paint of the one-of-a-kind model), and other models being placed in snow or sand. As well as this, the facemasks of the tugs were casted in order to make replicas to profit off them, resulting in *more* damage to them over time.

During this time as well, various fans would begin to [piece together TUGS’ behind the scenes mysteries](#), and would begin to ask the Trust questions about them, with the Trust mostly either lying or dodging said questions.

Relationships between “The Star Tugs Trust” and the rest of the TUGS fandom would begin to become heated, fans getting fed up with the Trust’s prop damaging, gatekeeping, teasing of unknown facts/materials in private conversations and petty attempts to make money.

DIGGING UP OLD HISTORY (2020-PRESENT)



By 2020, things would reach a boiling point. The Star Tugs Trust renamed themselves to “*TUGS: The Exhibition*” and the Midland Railway would temporarily close down, due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

On the 23rd June 2020, an audio recording of the Sizzler and a text document describing the footage would leak online via Twitter users, **MKtheInstrumentalist** and **Special Trees** respectively. This would be the first time many fans of the series would learn of its existence, including the existence of an extended ending theme, and various deleted and extended scenes and shots from both the episodes “Sunshine” and “Jinxed” which were featured within the reel.

A few days later on the 28th June 2020, TUGS: The Exhibition announced their first (and so far *only*) Q & A. Many questions they received were closely linked to asking their actions towards the props and the

recent leaks - most of these questions were ignored or fobbed off - i.e. any requests for info on scripts were not provided because "they are in paper form". The Q & A has since been deleted for unknown reasons.

Over the coming months, several fans began to take a deeper interest in the show following the leaks and wanted to know more about the show's production. Some fans would begin to form new threads on theories or revelations about the show, whilst others also made recreations of the newly discovered extended theme heard in the Sizzler, (most prominently a [recreation by AceofTrains](#), and a more [dramatic, finalised take on the theme](#) by **MKtheInstrumentalist** and **John Hayes**).

Throughout 2020, more and more materials and info about The Exhibition and what they owned and knew about would leak online. Some of these would include;

- Various behind the scenes pictures and blueprint scans never seen outside of events.
- Awareness of cancelled episode scripts for episodes such as "Episode Two" (aka "Harbor Life", title not known in 2020), "Hercules", and a script for "Railhead" (originally thought to be a cancelled episode revolving around Top Hat and Hercules until October 2021).
- The name "Little Owl" for the character previously only ever known and referred to as "The Goods Engine".
- A text document of someone recollecting seeing "Warrior"'s 22 minute workprint.
- Ryan having obtained various production assets from David Mitton after his death.
- Sam Wilkinson trying to get himself written into Robert Cardona's will.
- Picture of a Frankenstein looking facemask supposedly belonging to a crane character called "Snatcher", (which is a topic debated by some fans to what Snatcher actually was and ended up being. As of 2023, there are now three incarnations of the "Snatcher" character, including a rumored ghostly character with a facemask, the crane at Lucky's as mentioned in the 2nd draft to "Sunshine" and the Coal Yard crane seen in an early script for "High Tide").
- Various artifacts of the Diesel Tug, including his 1987 blueprints and a wooden casting of his hat.

By this point, all episodes had been confirmed upon strong evidence by fans (varying from different sources such as the photobooks, various promotional pictures and VHS episode descriptions) that all thirteen episodes were all indeed filmed to be 20-22 minutes, (as well as most being edited to that length), contradicting statements made by members of TUGS: The Exhibition, claiming it as merely a "myth".

Many fans also began to become aware that the show was intended to have a solid chronological episode order, that would've been present throughout the original extended cuts, with some



episodes closely tying up to the last. The most prominent examples of this are the events of “High Tide” being referenced in the briefing scene in “Munitions”’ 20 cut, and “Quarantine” tying to the events of “Munitions” in a deleted scene.

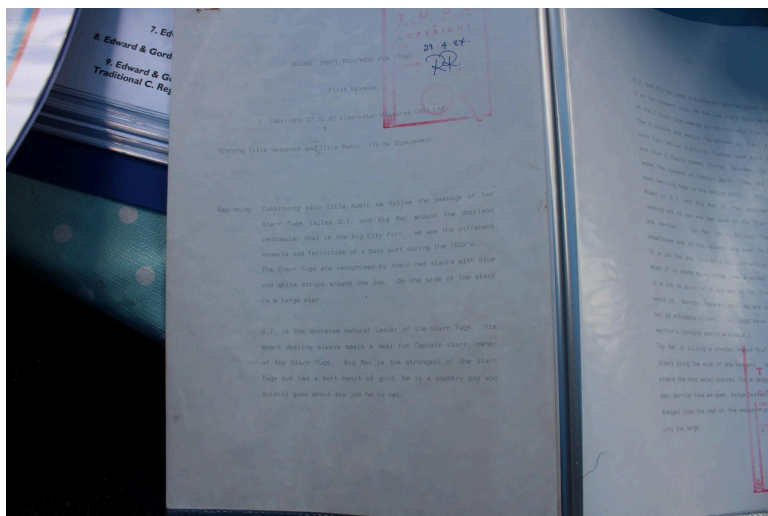
The original order was strongly believed to be “Sunshine”, “Jinxed”, “Regatta”, “Pirate”, “High Winds”, “Warrior”, “High Tide”, “Munitions”, “Quarantine”, “Ghosts”, “Trapped”, “Bigg Freeze” and “Up River”. As of 2022, the idea of a **solid** canon order for *all* episodes has since been contested by some fans due to the many inconsistencies the episodes have with each other, likely due to conflicting script drafts from different points in production being used between episodes. Some examples include the events of “Up River” implying to take place after “Bigg Freeze”, despite the blown up warehouse in the former episode being seen in said condition the latter, and Big Mickey appearing in a deleted scene in “Jinxed”, leaving to some debate on where the episode was planned to be place in the episode order.

2021 would prove to be a rich year for “TUGS” fans in terms of behind the scenes content being both released and getting a larger focus from fans.

On 15th June 2021, independent film company “I.T.H Productions” would tease at an upcoming project revolving around the series, being officially revealed on 23rd June 2021 as a documentary titled “TUGS: A Bigg Retrospective”. On the same day, YouTube user **EN2** released a [teaser trailer](#) of an upcoming “TUGS Iceberg” video.

On the 27th August 2021, **EN2** uploaded a [video explaining a “TUGS” Iceberg](#) made back in 2020 created by **MKTheInstrumentalist**, going over many of the mysteries and lore surrounding the

production of the show. This enabled more people than ever to see “TUGS” in a new light and dive deeper into the show.



One day later, from the 28th August to the 30th August 2021, TUGS: The Exhibition reopened for their first public event since early 2020; their first “Clearwater Event”, displaying both “TUGS” and “Thomas” props. This event would be unique from previous ones however, for the Exhibition displayed a huge variety of new production materials

never seen by the public. This included scripts to the 15 minute cuts, the original 2nd draft “Sunshine” treatment script (which confirmed the long standing fandom theory that Ten Cents and Hercules were brothers), several new photographs from production (including the promotional ‘estuary’ photos of Ten

Cents and Sunshine), and in an unannounced V.I.P section, a binder of several documents, from character descriptions, lists of names and businesses for potential characters and settings within the port, several character breakdown sheets and shooting schedules (primarily for “Trapped”, “Up River”, “Ghosts” and an early version of “Quarantine”). A prototype model for an ERTL Top Hat was also displayed at the event for the first time. Several new pieces of concept art were also shown off. At the same event, Ten Cents would be entirely repainted and would wear a replica cast of his face (which he continues to wear today) as an attempt to ‘repair’ the damage on the prop.

This event would also be the first time any information about the 22 minute runtime would be seen by the wide public, with a timing sheet for “High Winds” extended cut.



On the 16th October 2021, a popular Youtuber within the “Thomas” fandom, **The Unlucky Tug**, premiered his [TUGS analysis video](#), which would reveal the newly formed preservation group: “[The TUGS Project](#)”, much to the delight of fans.

The TUGS Project, headed by **TheStarSwitcher**, was made up of fans, who had gotten in contact with several crewmembers, and had given them various amounts of behind the scenes pictures taken during production, ranging from film negatives, to polaroids and prints (some of said photographs had been shown off at the Exhibitions 2015 Brighton tour, when many crew members visited to show photos).

The many photos had been and continue to be professionally [restored, color corrected and ‘dust-busted’](#) in an ongoing process for the public eye to enjoy. Some of the most groundbreaking reveals included photos of the 1987 Christmas Party (with the Mitton and Cardona ‘joke’ faces, as well as the “Reagan Zorran” pictures), a photo of Top Hat and Warrior alongside a burnt out Kraka Toa during the filming of “Quarantine”, and photos of the filming of the infamous “Gomez Incident” deleted scene from the extended cut of “Jinxed”. Since then, The TUGS Project has been releasing new photos semi-regularly (if you have [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#), please go give them a follow!).

Two days after, on the 18th October 2021, an audio recording of the US dub of “Sunshine” would leak online on YouTube by user **Captain Starr** in two parts, although with the first scene left unrecorded. [The audio would be later cleaned up by MKtheInstrumentalist and synced to footage by TheStarSwitcher.](#)

The 23rd October 2021 also saw a second ‘Clearwater Event’ display from TUGS: The Exhibition, being open to a limited number of people who would book to be at the event. It would showcase a binder containing various early story concepts and synopsis’, some of which revealing the name of “Harbor Life”, and existence of cancelled episodes, “Rebuild” and “Night Story”.

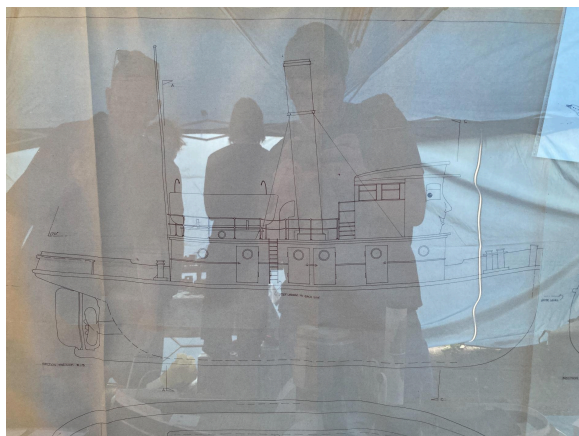
During Christmas of the same year, The TUGS Project released a treatment plan for “Jinxed”, or “Jinxed Tug”, featuring various deleted scenes and cut moments previously unknown.

As well as all episodes being filmed to 20-22 minutes, many also believed that the original 30 minute runtime plan also got as far into filming, with as many as the first four episodes filmed (“Jinxed”, “Sunshine”, “Pirate” and “High Winds”) being thought to have been filmed to 30 minutes during 2020 and 2021. However, in December 2021, this theory would be proven *false* following the release of the “Jinxed Tug” treatment plan.

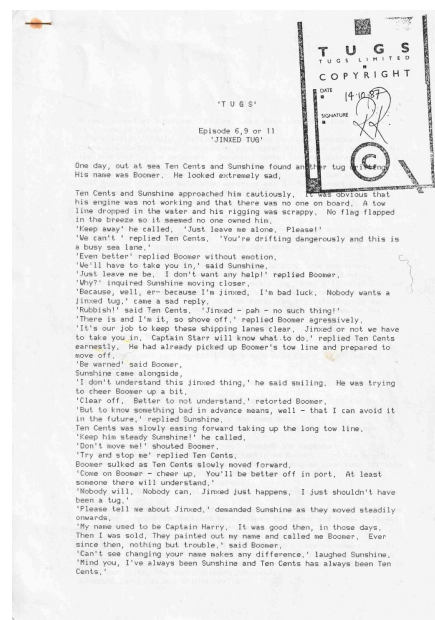
Around this time, would also start to see a rise in “TUGS” fan content. Fan made original episodes, examples being **EN2**’s audio-visual episode titled “[Rescue](#)”, [TUGScontinued](#) and their team’s work on creating an original set of 13 episodes, various [stories](#) by **TARDIS9**, “[Tugs Tales](#)” by **AlexProductions**.

There’s also been various fandubs produced for the series as well. A [Spanish dub](#) by **William B.**, a [German](#) dub, and a [fan version of the Finnish dub](#) by **LeonEngine** setting out to better translate and dub the series compared to the original.

On the 30th April to the 2nd May 2022, the first “TUGS”-only event since the rebranding. Various scripts to 15 minute cuts, a monitor showing behind the scenes pictures, and models would be on display. At this event, “TUGS: The Exhibition” became an official licensee of the “TUGS” brand, which only allowed them to make merchandise of their logo.



On 27th August 2022, the Exhibition would hold their third ‘Clearwater Event’. The event would have a VIP event return, but would receive massive backlash from some attendants due to the lack of “TUGS” items on display, being made up almost entirely of “Thomas”-only items, which would be tried to be hastily fixed on the last day of the event on the 28th August 2022, displaying various production notes, concept art, and even the original blueprints of O.J.’s original design as a medium sized harbor tug.



In response to the backlash, The Exhibition would host one last event on the 15th October 2022, with another VIP event to be held. At this VIP event, a TV on display would play three of the production videos The Exhibition had. Those would be the workprint to “Trapped”’s 15 minute cut, the workprint to “Warrior”’s extended cut, and the infamous Sizzler Reel. On the 16th October, 2022, recordings of them taken by **The Inferno Birdy** would be leaked online publicly, to the excitement of many fans, along with pictures of the also displayed “Railhead” script. Recordings of “Warrior”’s 22 cut and the Sizzler Reel can be found on YouTube and via [the tweet linking the original Google Drive](#).



On the 30th October 2022, **Special Trees** would decide to work on a Google Doc explaining the history of TUGS, done with the intentions of fans being more easily able to know about the show’s enormous history. **The Sudrian Station Master** would join work on the Google Doc on 31st October 2022, with **MKTheInstrumentalist** joining on 8th November 2022.

On the 9th November 2022, I.T.H Productions would release a [teaser trailer](#) for their Bigg Retrospective documentary, set for the spring of 2023, featuring snippets of interviews with the crew and fans as well as several new behind the scenes photos.

On 22nd December of the same year, Special Trees would release a teaser for this Google Doc onto Twitter, using the cover page with various paragraphs of text covering the logo to said cover.

On 23rd December, The TUGS Project announced the release of an [acquisition video](#) that was made for Castle Vision’s announcement of acquiring the rights to showcase and release “TUGS” on video in June 1988, along with the reveal of their YouTube channel. The video would premiere the next day on 24th December. It would feature a shortened version of the Sizzler Reel, being the first time clips from it were uploaded in full high quality.

On 24th December, I.T.H. Productions would premiere a 2 minute sneak peak of their “Bigg Retrospective” documentary on YouTube at 4pm UK time, featuring an interview with one of the show’s composers Mike O’Donnell, as well as some new behind the scenes pictures. Shortly after, a Q & A was hosted on Facebook by the documentary’s director **Lewis Gilbert**, from 8pm-9pm UK time, revealing some new information both about the show and the documentary.

On the same day, “The History of TUGS” would be released online, and the “TUGS” section of Castle Vision’s launch video would premiere online, featuring snippets from the Sizzler Reel.

On 30th December, another Q & A with Lewis Gilbert would be hosted on Facebook, being streamed throughout the same time frame as the last.

In January 2023, there was supposed to be a trailer release for “*A Bigg Retrospective*” was set for release, announced during the 30th December 2022 Q & A, but would be delayed due to a recent development within the project.

On 4th February 2023, I.T.H. Productions would reveal a release date for the trailer, along with another Q & A with Lewis Gilbert on Facebook to follow afterwards, both set for 8th February 2023 at 4pm UK time.

The following day on 5th February, due to conflicting booking schedules, it was announced that Q & A would be pushed back, along with the trailer premiere. The trailer pushed back by two hours to 6pm UK, and the Q & A to the day after the trailer on the 9th February. A YouTube link to the trailer would be posted the day after the push back announcements on 6th February. It would be taken down the following day due to the trailer having glitches, with a new link being posted on 7th February.

[The trailer finally premiered on 8th February at 6pm UK time](#), featuring snippets of interviews from fans and crew alike, several new behind the scenes photos, as well as an announced release date of 4th April 2023. The next day on 9th February, the third Q&A was hosted by Lewis Gilbert on Facebook, starting at 8pm to 9:15pm UK time.



On 17th March 2023, it was announced a specific time the documentary would premier, 4pm UK time. On 25th March, a special private screening of the documentary took place at the Reading Biscuit Factory, with crew members attending and reuniting. Ten Cents' prop was on display at the event, having been loaned from the Trust for said event.

On 2nd April, **Daniel Coffey**, known on YouTube as SmurfyDan, would upload his [interview](#) with Lewis Gilbert, asking questions relating to the documentary, his experiences with the series, thoughts on the infamous Exhibition, and other works.

On the 4th April 2023, at 4pm UK time, after three years in the making, “[TUGS: A Bigg Retrospective](#)” finally premiered on I.T.H. Productions' YouTube channel, running for 2 hours and 27 minutes. The documentary showcased an in-depth look into the production of the show, from pre-production to filming to editing, as well as the legacy the show left behind, featuring interviews from several cast,

crewmembers and fans alike. A huge surplus of new behind the scenes photos and concept art drawings were showcased off, as well as snippets of digitised rips of the Sizzler and 22 minute “Warrior’s Longest Day” workprint tapes, shown throughout the film. Paul Knight also showcased a work-in-progress Grampus prop replica that he had been working on (which he intends to paint in his scrapped Star livery). A third Q&A was announced afterwards on I.T.H Productions’ Twitter to take place on Facebook at 8pm UK time on 7th April.

The third and final Q&A on I.T.H Production’s Facebook page was hosted by Lewis Gilbert at 8pm UK time on 7th April, running until 9:20pm UK time. After the stream, he would put a comment below the original documentary video, crediting The TUGS Project’s contributions and **Michael White**’s appearance in the documentary, having forgotten to put them in the credits.

On the 22nd and 23rd of April 2023, TUGS: The Exhibition hosted their first event of the year, celebrating ten years since they first acquired the props. Despite being advertised as their quote “biggest event so far”, very few new behind the scenes materials were displayed besides some new miscellaneous concept art, rough sketches and model documents. Also on the 23rd April, Lewis Gilbert uploaded all of the original and unaltered behind the scenes photographs and sketches he received by crewmembers for “*TUGS: A Bigg Retrospective*” onto a [Google Drive](#) via I.T.H Productions’ Twitter account, following clearance to release them to the public. The drive also showcased several new photos and art that didn’t make it into the documentary.

As of 17th July, he has confirmed via Twitter that he is working through a scanning and restoration project of the photo collections of two TUGS crewmembers.

On the 22nd December, 2023, The TUGS Project would release a teaser trailer for an upcoming release of a production video, which was [later released on the 24th December](#). This would turn out to be a previously unknown version of the Sizzle Reel intended for the American market, being narrated by Bill Mitchell, instead of the original narrator present in the leaked recordings and Castle Vision Launch Video. The narration is mostly the same with the UK version, except for an added line “*and also, for the other children...who are euphemistically called...adults*”. This marks the first ever time in TUGS’ preservation history that all seven minutes of the Sizzler have been shown in high quality, both footage and audio. A video on getting and restoring this U-Matic tape is set to be released sometime within 2024.

On 1st January 2024, an anonymous Twitter account would [leak concept art](#) for the Diesel Tug’s face.

On 19th February, TUGS The Exhibition announced that they had gotten the license to officially release “TUGS” onto DVD for the first time, with pre-orders going up the same day. It would also come with a mini-booklet for the 15 minute version of “Sunshine”, and a fold out sheet with seven behind the scenes pictures. The source of the episode would come from a U-Matic videotape sub-master.

Across the later months of 2024, the Exhibition would also release DVDs for other episodes of the series, being more of the same as the mentioned “Sunshine” DVD. “Pirate” and “Trapped” in June, “Regatta” during July, “Munitions” and “Warrior” in October, and lastly “High Tide” and “Quarantine” in December.

On 20th December, it was announced that the original prop of Sally Seaplane had survived. Later, on 31st December, Top Hat’s prop was also shown to have survived, attracting much attention. The owner of two props would loan them to the Exhibition during the 5th and 6th of April 2025, alongside a replica of Grampus by Paul Knight, using the unused Star Tug livery.

This is where “*TUGS*” history currently stands today.

AUTHOR’S OUTLOGUE

It’s been thanks to these last three years (currently 2022 at the time of writing this) that this Google Doc would come to exist, and be as detailed as it is. Due to the nature of the show and how much we learn about it, this Google Doc will be eventually updated as new information is discovered or made available (or even just for minor updates). But, until the next development of “*TUGS*” mysterious and evergrowing history is made, this is where it currently stands.

Thank you all for reading, and to those who have been keeping this show alive now nearly 35 years later! Until that date at the top changes;

- Special Trees
- The ‘Lord’ Sudrian Station Master
- MKtheInstrumentalist

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

Cover image edited by The ‘Lord’ Sudrian Station Master

Production photo sourced from The TUGS Project

[Image edit used on cover by EN2](#)

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- Crew Members (Paul Knight, Jeremy King, Robert Gauld-Galliers, Chris Tulloch, etc)