

1. SUMMARY

The ro-ro passenger ferry PRIDE OF HAMPSHIRE was berthed at Cherbourg on the morning of 25 September 1994 when No 2 lifeboat launching equipment failed whilst the crew were undergoing lifeboat drill. The lifeboat fell, pitching six of the 32 occupants into the water. All were accounted for, but 16 persons were taken to hospital. The cause of the accident was due to breakage of the lifeboat suspension link joining the aft lifeboat hook to the suspension chain of the fall block.

The suspension link was made of alloy steel which had not been suitably heat treated for use in a marine environment. As a result the link weakened due to stress corrosion cracking, finally breaking catastrophically.

Examination of the damaged davit structure found that welded joints, crucial to the integrity of the structure, were of inferior quality with incomplete penetration and lack of fusion. These welds rendered the davits unsafe, although they did not contribute to the accident.

The investigation raises issues of quality control procedures for lifeboat davit suspension components and davit structure welds. The problem of quality control is a matter that must be addressed by the shipping industry as a whole and not just by P&O Ferries.