

# Airport sand clogging up ferries

By STEVE BALL

HONG KONG'S ferries, battered by collisions with floating refrigerators, gas canisters and other garbage thrown into the harbour, are now getting clogged up by sand from the airport reclamation.

Sand and silt got into the engine of one of Hong Kong Ferry's new \$35 million catamarans and put the vessel

out of action for more than a month earlier this year.

While that problem seems to have been solved, the firm faces higher maintenance costs because sand is clogging the engine's cooling system, forcing the boats to go slower.

A similar scare affected some of the high-speed ferries to Discovery Bay, but the area's management has

given them a clean bill of health.

George Lung Hon-chiu, the marine engineering manager for Hong Kong Ferry, said the problem started when sea water was pumped into the cooling system.

Small particles in the water attacked a rubber seal, with serious consequences.

"If the seal is broken or is not working, water will enter

the engine and damage its internal parts," Mr Lung said.

One catamaran on the Tuen Mun to Central run came shuddering to a halt when its seal broke, letting water into the engine. The water quickly removed the engine's lubricating oil, and the gears seized.

The engine manufacturers said they had upgraded

the seal to prevent a re-occurrence.

Paul Gannaway managing director of MTU Hong Kong said he did not know of anywhere else in the world where such measures were necessary.

He said the problem had worsened in the past 18 months and it seemed probable the extra dredging and reclamation works caused it.

Mr Lung said another probable reason was that the engines kicked up a lot of sediment from the sea floor when running at high speed in the Central reclamation area.

The silt and mud was also covering the inside of the cooling system pipes, making the engines hotter, Mr Lung said. The pipes are now cleaned every two or three months instead of ev-

ery six months as originally envisaged.

"We need to lay up the ferry and then remove the mud from the tubes with chemicals. We can do this overnight so we do not affect the ferry's schedule, but it is expensive."

Jeremy Marriott, managing director of Discovery Bay Transportation Services, said his high-speed boats with MTU engines

had been checked and were not affected.

"It looks like we have been spared. Unlike Hong Kong Ferry, we don't go around the north Lantau coast where there is all this dredging for the new airport. The water quality between Discovery Bay and Hong Kong is okay."

All the ferry operators agreed floating rubbish was a far more serious hazard.

