

# offshore support

journal

Fast-track conversions  
put Equinox ahead in  
accommodation market

Polarcus claims  
pride of place with  
'green' seismic ships

De Hoop shipyard  
steers careful course  
through order boom

Brazilian yards  
to benefit from  
Petrobras plan



July/August 2008

osj  
offshore support journal

# Dutch yard keeps all the disciplines in house

Dutch shipbuilder De Hoop designs and builds a wide range of ships but the current focus of activity at the two yards it owns is offshore vessels, such as PSVs and DSVs, which it designs and constructs to meet owners' requirements

In contrast with many OSV construction yards that generally veer towards a range of standard designs, De Hoop specialises in building ships that are customised to meet individual owners' requirements. To this end, the yard maintains its own engineering department with project engineers and remains focussed on maintaining its in house expertise.

As De Hoop's chief executive officer Patrick Janssens explained, the company's core policy is to keep everything in house. "We are a medium size yard; not small and not large. We do not have any aspirations to increase capacity or to grow significantly in size; we occupy a niche which suits us and our customers," he told *OSJ*.

"A vessel from De Hoop is always a tailor-made solution. Our projects are characterised by innovative designs developed in close co-operation with an owner. Before entering into a new project, we have to convince ourselves that we can make a design that is 10-15 per cent overall more effective – be it better, faster, less expensive, greater capacity, more reliable – than our competitors."

"We strongly believe that one has to have up-to-date shipbuilding knowledge and skills at hand to assure the quality of a project. In our view, this means that we need to have all the necessary facilities and disciplines in house, in order to be effective," Mr Janssens told *OSJ*.

Unlike many other yards – including some in The Netherlands – De Hoop is not interested in expanding as demand grows. Mr Janssens said he remembers clearly that not much more than four years ago, yards everywhere were in the doldrums and found it almost impossible to gain access to finance.

De Hoop's orderbook is full – the yard has work until 2011 and is talking to owners about potential orders for delivery in 2012 – but Mr Janssens knows that shipbuilding is a cyclical business. After a period of rapid growth, if a yard is not careful and over exerts itself, decline can be every bit as swift.



Among the most recent deliveries from De Hoop is Caballo Lusitano, which was built at its Foxhol yard in the north of The Netherlands

Apart from keeping its in house expertise going, at the heart of the success story which is De Hoop is a philosophy of maintaining direct links both with owners and with the workforce. "Ours is a very flat organisation; we are not big on bureaucracy at De Hoop, and we have avoided over-expanding. In fact, our biggest challenge, with an orderbook of the size that we currently enjoy, is staying small and flexible," said Mr Janssens.

Lobith, the town in which De Hoop is located, is a typical, small Dutch village near Arnhem, the fourth largest city in The Netherlands, situated 102km from Amsterdam. Using the river Rhine, Rotterdam is less than a day away in navigational terms. Situated at Lobith are two slipways measuring 200m x 60m and 120m x 22m, with two cranes alongside with a hoisting capacity of 30 tonnes each, and a crane alongside the outfitting quay with a capacity of 10 tonnes.

Not long ago, De Hoop actually operated three yards. In January 1999, the former Verolme Shipyard Heusden site was acquired and re-named Shipyard De Hoop Heusden. In 2001, De Hoop also took over Louisiana-based Houma Fabricators in the US, which became known as Shipyard De Hoop of Houma.

In this way, De Hoop gained access to the US offshore market, access which was translated into a series of orders for various offshore owners, some of which were built in the Dutch yards, and some in the US. The three yards (with each about 150 employees) complemented each other well, and together they could accept even more and bigger projects.

Mr Janssens joined De Hoop's board of directors in 2004, at a time when things had changed since the 1990s, and a decision was made to re-evaluate the company's strategy, particularly in view of the ever-increasing financial pressures, which had begun to limit capacity as much as capacity at the yards themselves.

A decision was made to consolidate the facilities, and in 2005 the Heusden yard was sold, followed by the Houma yard in 2006, a strategy that left the Lobith yard in a financially strong, independent position, ready for the future. "What remained was the shipbuilding knowledge and designs," Mr Janssens explained, noting that, as conditions improved and orders picked up, the company re-invested in production capacity, and acquired a small yard in the north of The Netherlands, at Foxhol.

De Hoop Foxhol started life with around 60 former employees of the Vólharding shipyard,

and allowed De Hoop to reach what Mr Janssens believes is the optimum size for its chosen strategy. In October 2007, Mr Janssens completed a management buyout of both.

De Hoop likes to maintain core expertise but contracts out a certain amount of work to section builders and to subcontractors with whom it has long-established relationships, as and when it need to. It is doing so currently, because its orderbook demands that it does so, with the yard in Lobith contracted to build a series of three small DSVs for Oceanografia in Mexico. These are vessels of some 124m with accommodation for 250, a 300 tonne Liebherr crane and 12-man saturation diving system. Complementing the orders for the DSVs is a smaller vessel for the same customer, a 70m PSV of very similar design to the recently delivered *Caballo de Mar*.

At Foxhol, the company is building a 60m PSV for Oceanografia, *Caballo Lusitano* – an interesting design with a number of segregations and a mud plant onboard, with the capacity to mix mud alongside a rig. Next to be delivered from Foxhol is a passenger vessel followed by a series of six PSVs, four of which will also have the capability to mix mud onboard, two having standard mud tanks, all six also being for Oceanografia.

De Hoop has now built approaching 1,500 vessels, and although obviously currently particularly strong in the OSV and inland passenger vessel market, remains able to design and engineer virtually any type. In the recent past, the yard has built specialised cargo vessels for Airbus, a shallow draught cable layer (*Sea Spider*) for Wagenborg Shipping and a semi-



De Hoop is currently building a large number of PSVs and DSVs

submersible diving platform, *Amethyst*.

*Caballo Lusitano* completed sea trials in June from the Foxhol yard, this being the first vessel launched from Foxhol since the takeover by De Hoop. The previous month saw the company announce orders for no less than seven ships (including the vessels for Oceanografia mentioned above), along with a contract to develop the design of a DSV to be built at Niigata Shipyard in Japan for the Dutch shipowner Noordhoek Offshore BV. Delivery is planned for 2009.

Another notable recent delivery was *Bourbon Trieste*, for Groupe Bourbon. This 82.25m vessel has DP2 class, a 100 tonne active heave compensated offshore knuckleboom crane, oil recovery, firefighting Class I, water spray system

and standby rescue facilities for 150.

De Hoop is, evidently, a success story at the moment, but as highlighted above, Mr Janssens is well aware that times can change and that the shipbuilding business can be a fickle one. He remains confident that even if there should be a sharp reduction in demand, the company will be well-placed to weather that.

"There are many drivers behind our current success and orderbook," Mr Janssens concluded. "The market for the kind of passenger vessels we are building is growing, too, as the number of older people in the world grows. We are still experiencing a high level of enquires – sometimes three to four a day – and we believe we have the company set up in such a way that we will be able to manage any potential downturn." OSJ



De Hoop also constructed one of Groupe Bourbon's latest newbuilds, *Bourbon Trieste* an 82m long vessel of DP2 class