

In Depth: Shipyard De Hoop Seeks Out Niche Market Shipbuilding



Image Courtesy: Celebrity Cruises

Even in the years following the recession, many Dutch (and other European) shipyards were facing rough seas, due to the global recession and low-cost competition from Asia.

In the Netherlands particularly, all shipyards involved in offshore activities reported a wider fall in orders. The industry was scrambling to find new growth markets to fill the order books for Dutch shipyards. For a while it was critical if one of the continent's historic industrial sectors would be able to weather the storm.

In response to these challenges and in the wake of the closure of major (European) shipyards, Dutch shipyards were looking for ways to secure stability and growth for the future. Their expertise in advanced marine engineering led them to seek out niche shipbuilding and marine service markets. The surprising flexibility of one of those niche markets – the European cruise industry – has been drawing the attention of some European shipyards in recent years. Set to benefit from this upward curve was one of the leading Dutch shipyards – Shipyard De Hoop.

Unique VIP cruise concept

Shipyard De Hoop has recently secured an order for the design and construction of an innovative expedition cruise vessel for the company Celebrity Cruises. De Hoop's management is convinced that a decade of participating in smaller seagoing cruise vessel projects, with the associated design development and investment in knowledge, has now paid off.

De Hoop's CEO, Patrick Janssens, states quite firmly that this was – and still is – the ideal basis for entering the growing market of expedition cruise vessels. Their designers were prepared when the Celebrity Cruises challenge arose. Furthermore, with many Dutch suppliers and subcontractors on the client-approved 'makerslist', this project is a great opportunity for the Dutch shipbuilding industry as a whole.

Despite dynamic international competition, De Hoop won the prestigious contract as a result of their accumulated experience of technically advanced features on high-end offshore vessels, combined with the knowledge of developing luxury cruise interiors (for smaller inland cruise vessels). A year on from the initial discussion with Celebrity Cruises, the project is in a very advanced stage of engineering and steel cutting, and the first block sections are currently being erected.

The vessel, to be named *Celebrity Flora*, will be constructed entirely at the Lobith facilities, with yard number 488. With the official keel laying ceremony planned for later this year, the vessel's inaugural date is already set for May 2019.

"Celebrity Flora will mark an evolutionary turning point in the approach to ship design. The unique design, developed in close collaboration with the client, is an elevated and inspired approach to

marine exploration of the Galapagos Islands – creating a sense of being immersed in the destination, rather than just visiting it,” explains Patrick Janssens.

Although a number of expedition cruise vessels were ordered in the last year, none were optimised for the open water experience in warmer climates, or in an environment where nature is so special and diverse.

Designed and classed for worldwide service, the cruise vessel is optimised for experiencing the land and marine environment of the Galapagos in high comfort.

Celebrity Flora will be the first vessel to be built according to the latest probabilistic damage stability regulations, and therefore complies with the relevant Rules and Regulations for 2020, supplemented with the client’s constraint to comply with a two-compartment damage stability regulation.

“The amendment, stipulating these regulations, was implemented by IMO in June 2017, under protest of many ship designers and builders who considered these rules to be impossible,” Janssens proudly says.

Furthermore, other than complying with future international rules and regulations, the vessel also commits to specific Galapagos National Park Directorate Regulations, whereby explicit environmentally low-impact (exterior) features and materials were applied.

Six tugs for assisting offshore transport

Almost simultaneously with Celebrity Flora, another impressive order was placed at the shipyard. Surprisingly, this assignment came from the recovering offshore market, giving De Hoop a new boost to reconfirm their position in this market segment. The contract is for building six tugs for the TCO project of Caspian Offshore Construction (COC), for the further development of the Tengiz Oilfield.

The tugs will primarily be tasked to assist barges and vessels along a 75 kilometres long channel, through the shallow waters of the Caspian Sea, to the offloading facilities at Prorva. They will provide further support inside the offloading facility with other port-related work, to ensure all cargo will be delivered in a safe and efficient way. As such, the tugs are a vital part of the entire logistical set-up in the CaTRo, (cargo transportation route) and at Prorva.

Due to the special requirements for operating in the CaTRo channel and at the offloading facilities in Prorva, Dutch offshore tycoons, Van Oord and Blue Water Shipping, play a prominent role in providing material and equipment to the consortium (approximately 250 modules in total), and the six tugs are an important domino stone in the game.

The series of six are of two different (De Hoop in-house) custom designs – four larger and two smaller. The larger tugs, 13 x 10 metres, will feature azimuthing stern drive propulsion and have a bollard pull of 14 tonnes, while the smaller vessels will be assigned as harbour tugs, with a bollard pull of 30 tonnes.

Both designs are characterised by a special hull, with a shallow draught and large diameter propellers. The four larger ships will be built at the headquarters in Lobith, while the smaller two will be erected at the Foxhol facilities. The construction for all six has commenced immediately and delivery for the complete series is planned for the first half of 2018.

Approaching niche markets

Proving the versatility and flexibility of the shipyard in serving niche markets, De Hoop is currently also in the process of finishing a 135-metre river cruise vessel for Lueftner, which is due for delivery in early 2018. Furthermore, they have been awarded with the redesign and conversion of two hybrid Patrol Vessels FSIVs (Fast Supply & Intervention Vessels).

Tom Oomkens