

## SOMEONE SHOULD GET MOVING !



*The Freedom-class vessel **African Pearl** sailing from Cape Town in mid-January. She has a similar gantry arrangement to **An Hua Jiang** that called recently.*

*The crane/gantry configuration that many of the Freedom-class ships carried.*

The week-end's unseasonal cold front made life uncomfortable for mariners off the seaboard where swell height was five to six metres.

From my Scarborough eyrie on Saturday, I watched the Chinese bulk carrier **An Hua Jiang** roll her way past the coastline where a similar vessel, **Ikan Tanda**, came to grief in fearsome seas over five years ago, causing a real flutter in the local henhok.

Built in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a replacement class for ships that had come from European and American yards shortly after World War 2, these five-hatch vessels - known as **Freedom Class** ships - have an unusual crane configuration with hydraulic jibs that swing horizontally and are not raised or lowered by cables as happens with conventional cranes. The hook is suspended by wires from a carrier that runs along the jib rather like a gantry crane arrangement. When the ship is at sea, the headblock of the jib is stowed on the deck.

**An Hua Jiang** berthed in the Duncan Dock to discharge fertiliser and to load a part-cargo of steel before sailing for Saldanha Bay to top up with more steel products for Europe.

Also passing my vantage point was the cables ship **Rene Descartes**, inward from Cape Agulhas where her technicians carried out undersea cable repairs. She and **Chamarel** - the cables ship usually on station in Cape Town - double-banked at the Eastern Mole as space was tight with **SAS Spioenkop** and the passenger liner **Explorer** at the Waterfront's Number 2 Jetty.

Adding to the pressure for space at non-cargo berths was the withdrawal of the port's only bunkering barge that forced ships requiring fuel to shift to available bunker berths in the Duncan Dock.

**Rene Descartes** left for the Indian Ocean on Monday afternoon for another cable repair job near Reunion Island.

Having sailed from Cape Town in mid-afternoon on Sunday, the cruiseliner **Crystal Serenity** was another on my radar as she headed for Durban. Although she has stabilisers, I am not sure how many passengers were watching the Scarborough coastline pass by or how many were suffering the effects of the heavy sea. Perhaps some were still shell-shocked from negotiating the decrepit shed that passes for Cape Town's passenger terminal!

A reader tells me that Hamburg's terminal - built three years ago - now has about 60 cruiseliners a year. He writes that Hamburg expects 100 ships a year by 2010, and a second terminal is under construction. In December, Hamburg will see Cunard's **QE2** and their new **Queen Victoria**, while the third large Cunarder, **Queen Mary 2**, was in Hamburg earlier this year. Since those ships - and others - will probably be stemmed for Cape Town in 2010, perhaps someone should get moving to build a facility here!

Catching the eye at the Landing Wall over the week-end was the blue hull of the Capesize bulker **Alpha Friendship** that called for bunkers en route in ballast from China to Brazil.

These large bulkers are earning around \$38 per ton on a voyage charter, carrying iron ore from Brazil to the Far East, a healthy increase on the rate eight months ago.

Although lower than at the height of the shipping boom two years ago, charter rates are still good. A 160 000-deadweight vessel was taken on a four-month time charter by a Japanese company for \$66 000 per day, indicating that shipowning remains a profitable business. Despite rates for coal-carrying voyages usually peaking in the preamble to the northern hemisphere's winter when around \$22 per ton was realised for a trip from Richards Bay to Europe late last year, owners are still securing charters at similar levels.

Alan Olivier, Grindrod's chief executive, reflected this bullish situation during the presentation of his company's results last week. In his first such appearance as CEO, Olivier impressed as he outlined the performance of the Durban-based operation that for the last seven years, has returned remarkable profits, attracting investor support.

The two major ship-operating arms of the group - Unicorn and Island View Shipping - have contributed a significant percentage of the revenue as they ride the shipping boom, generated mostly by the thriving Chinese economy.

Vessels that IVS chartered in at relatively favourable rates are earning considerably more, while Unicorn's prudent decision some years ago to build hi-tech double-skinned products tankers has borne fruit as the demand for these ships has been such that some have been sold before delivery, netting good dollar profits. Those that have been retained in the fleet are earning far more than the budgeted daily rate.

Olivier said that since shipyards have focused on building containerships and double-skinned tankers, a future shortage of handysize bulk carriers will boost charter rates, improving the prospects for the group that already has several small bulkers on long-term charter.

Bunkering troubles in Cape Town last week were accentuated when the port's only bunker barge - a single-skinner - was withdrawn from service until later this week. Barges in other ports are also single-skinned and will have to be replaced within 18 months. Exploiting this niche are Unicorn and Smit Amandla Marine, both of whom have placed orders for double-skinned bunker barges to operate in South African ports from 2008.

Some ships - hull-down when I spy them from my voorstoep - are transiting between the Far East and South America. With some incentives and a beefed-up bunker service, more would refuel in Cape Town.

This ship-spotter derived pleasure from seeing **An Hua Jiang** pass by - as I did hearing Alan Olivier's positive shipping news.