



BRIAN
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Brian Ingpen hosts a weekly column in the **Cape Times**, called **Port Pourri**, where he shares with his readers the news about happenings in the Western Cape ports. He lives with his ear to the ground and his insights into the port vibes make for excellent reading. On this site, he shares his column and adds some photos as a bonus for an insider's view on the port life.

VARIETY OF SHIPS KEEP EYES TURNING SEAWARD



Top: Crane vessel **Saipem 3000** in Cape Town

Inward from Luderitz and bound for the coast, that remarkable vessel, **The World**, provided much interest for those at the Waterfront over the week-end. Owning a suite on board, rather than paying a passenger fare, is a concept now used by several companies, and even on some of the more conventional cruiseliners, affluent folks book out a suite for years.

Since a non-negotiable for many such passengers is frequent communication with their stockbrokers, the satellite link would have been humming as **The World** headed for Cape Town amidst the recent global stock market tumble.

In former years, radio officers aboard cruiseliners - and indeed on many passengerships engaged on point-to-point services - were kept busy sending messages from passengers to brokers, and they needed to ensure absolute accuracy. The poor old Sparks tapping a dit instead of a dah on the morse key could have inadvertently caused far-reaching implications for a shareholder.



Top: **Lica Maersk**, shortly before sailing for Europe

The next passenger ship to berth at the Waterfront is **The Topaz**, formerly Canadian Pacific's **Empress of Britain**, built in 1956 for the North Atlantic service. She will arrive on Monday morning for a two-day call. Although not suited to operate in the sub-tropics, she and her sistership **Empress of England** were chartered for cruises from Cape Town to South America in the 'sixties by the Max Wilson organisation in which Union-Castle had an interest. While certainly not my scene, those sun-fun trips were fully booked, mainly by South African revellers. Union-Castle put **Reina del Mar** on the South Atlantic cruise schedule until she was withdrawn from service in 1975. Her heavy fuel consumption (about 135 tons per day) and high portage bill simply could not sustain an ageing



Top: **Gerain F**, dredging the Cape Town Container Basin.

ship whose sole revenue came from passenger fares. For a while, Shaw Savill operated **Empress of England** (renamed **Ocean Monarch**) on their UK-Australasia service via Cape Town. I recall boarding her in the early seventies to bid farewell to friends emigrating to Australia, and I even enjoyed a cup of tea in the lounge. Now, you wouldn't get near the ship, let alone aboard!

Away from the buzz of the Waterfront, the crane vessel **Saipem 3000** was at Berth 501 in the container basin, and, at time of writing, was due to shift to the Sturrock Dry Dock. She has been working off Pointe Noire, and, for the next two months, her heavylift crane will add another feature to the dockland skyline already crowded with oil rig towers. She is scheduled to return to West Africa where abundant contracts keep these crane vessels busy laying pipes and lifting gear or even sections of accommodation blocks onto oil platforms.



Top: The World sailing from Cape Town.

Photograph Robert Pabst

At the Eastern Mole is another vessel whose top-hamper is also noticeable. Having completed a contract off the Indonesian coast, the drillship Neptune Discoverer is in port to fit a mud pump, prior to sailing for South America in about three weeks' time.

Less conspicuous amidst these ships is **WC Challenger**, a small tug that is equipped to ferry workers to and from rigs off Nigeria, and another tug, Singapore, is due bunker next week.

I understand that at least three rigs, another two drillships and a large crane barge will be passing this way over the next two or three months.

For Cape Town, the collective revenue from these and other ships engaged directly or indirectly in the offshore oil industry continues to be phenomenal, and, from the doldrums of a few years ago, the local marine engineering sector has enjoyed a phoenix-like rise.

While on the subject of the oil industry, the tanker basin will be busy ahead of the scheduled maintenance shut-down by the Chevron refinery. Stocks of a range of fuels, including ships' bunkers, will need to be imported. In a ship-to-ship transfer, a cargo of diesel will be trans-shipped from the tanker **Kora Sea**, currently in the roadstead until another vessel can be chartered to take her cargo.

Besides **Kora Sea**, another two tankers and six containerships were in the roadstead when I watched the lightly-laden **Lica Maersk** berth on Sunday. My dockland ears hear that she was due to load about 1000 reefer containers for Europe, not a surprising scenario with the fruit season in full swing as evidenced by dozens of trucks queuing to deliver containers to the reefer stacks.

Hardly had **Lica Maersk** entered the harbour than the dredger **Gefion R** sailed, laden with mud from the seabed in the container basin, part of the programme to deepen the basin and to increase the terminal's capacity. She dumped her mud cargo well westward of the Green Point lighthouse.