

**PORT POURRI**



**BRIAN  
INGPEN**

**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.

**CAPE TIMES**

**OCTOBER 2008**

- 01 OCT 2008 - INTERESTING SHIPS APLENTY IN CAPE TOWN**
- 08 OCT 2008 - CLOUDY HORIZON AS ECONOMIC CRISIS TAKES TOLL ON SHIPPING**
- 15 OCT 2008 - MOL DOMINANCE ON MAIDEN VOYAGE**
- 22 OCT 2008 - STEAM TUGS AND PILOTING**
- 29 OCT 2008 - DAL - THE LONGEST-SERVING LINE ON SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE**

**1 OCTOBER 2008**

**INTERESTING SHIPS APLENTY IN CAPE TOWN**



**TOP:** Aboard the **FPSO Akpo**.  
*(Company photograph)*



**TOP:** POSH-SEMCO tug **Salvaliant**, towing **BOABarge 7** and rig from Galveston to Malaysia.



**TOP:** **USS Correiga** sailing from Cape Town in the 1950s.



**LEFT:** Crane lifting the upper part of a leg of the jack-up rig.



**LEFT:** New container cranes taking shape in Cape Town

Of paramount interest this week is the arrival of **USS Theodore Roosevelt** and the cruiser **USS Monterey**, expected on Saturday. The visit is apparently on, although a few bureaucratic glitches in Pretoria late last week could have caused the cancellation of the visit.

Officials should realise the importance of these visits from various points of view. About 6000 Americans coming ashore with dollars to spend represents sizeable revenue for Cape Town, while the politico-military message of support conveyed by the arrival of one of the largest aircraft carriers should release massive energy here to ensure an enthusiastic welcome for the vessel and her escort.

The green lobby need not fear. The nuclear systems aboard our impressive visitor are subjected to far greater scrutiny than the bonus-laden Eskom executives could ever wish for their nuclear power station.

Those with mountainside eyries will be the first to see the carrier as she approaches from the north on Saturday. Such folks often report interesting vessels skirting the Atlantic seaboard, and they may catch a glimpse of the massive floating production, storage and off-loading vessel **Akpo** en route from Korea to the Akpo oil and gasfield off the Nigerian coast south of Port Harcourt.

Once on site, she should produce about 225 000 barrels of oil (*80 percent condensate*) per day which will be loaded by tankers via a buoy about 2 kilometres from the FPSO. Gas produced will be piped 150km to a platform and then to the Bonny Island LNG terminal for export.

There is local interest in the tow as the Smit tug **Wolraad Woltemade**, one of three towing the 310-metre, mega-million dollar vessel, will be in port for bunkers and stores today. I am sure that the engineers will also use the opportunity to attend to some maintenance on the engine. Local surveyor Dennis Henwood is aboard **Akpo**, keeping an eye on things for the owners.

Although I could not get confirmation from the Chinese consulate prior to deadline, I understand that **Yuan Wang 3**, a space tracking vessel, characterised by several large antennae, may berth today. Doubtlessly, the Chinese will be well-pleased with their space venture - including the spacewalk - in which the tracking vessel probably played an important role. She has been here before during various Shenzhou space missions.

I recall several American tracking vessels calling here from the late 1950s as the Americans were naturally interested initially in Russian space adventures, and then their own encounters with space.

More a communications-eavesdropper than a space-tracker, **USNS Pvt Jose F Valdez** was a frequent visitor to Cape Town in the 1960s. She was named after one of American's most highly decorated soldiers of World War 2 who lost his life amidst the most heroic of actions to defend his compatriots during the Allied advance through France.

Oozing communications aerials and a host of other equipment for monitoring cold war radio traffic, the ship had the curious nickname *Galloping Ghost of the Ivory Coast*, an irreverent reference to her speed of about 9 knots, and the fact that she frequented the coast of West Africa. That route during the dark days of the early independence of some African states seemed to co-incide with the movements of Russian trawlers, themselves sporting a forest of aerials.

Another interesting arrival is the Chilean sail training vessel **Esmeralda**, due on Monday, although weather may intervene to change her ETA. A previous visitor to Cape Town when she was illuminated brilliantly at night, the 55-year-old four-masted sailingship will be open to the public during her stay at Number 2 Jetty.

My shipping week began at A Berth on Sunday where the upper sections of the legs of the jack-up rig aboard **BOABarge 7** were being removed. En route from Galveston to Malaysia, the rig was under tow by the POSH-SEMCO tug **Salvaliant** when they encountered the storm that hit the Cape about a fortnight ago. The rig, I am told, rolled so heavily in the mountainous seas that the legs flexed viciously, fracturing the legs.

After surveyors had finished with their inspection, the routine bunker call for the tug has ended with a complex \$3-million operation in which Elgin Brown was contracted to reduce the length and weight of the legs to avoid further damage during the remainder of the passage. The legs will be repaired during the major refit in Malaysia.

Local ship repairers and agents - King & Son in this case - are an ingenious lot, especially when one looks at the logistics of that job. A special crane came from Johannesburg; huge lugs had to be welded onto the top of each leg to secure the crane's elaborate lifting gear; welders from Elgin Brown and Toprope did remarkable work to shore up the legs; to cut through the legs, the acetylene torch lads worked on scaffolding erected inside the legs, and the job was done.

Not only did the operation bring good foreign exchange to the country, but it gave the dignity of work to about 100 people per day.

Directly and indirectly, a ship calling here affects the livelihood of many people including port officials, agents, chandlers, forwarders, stevedores, bunker suppliers, shiprepairers, taxi drivers, Waterfront shopkeepers and restaurateurs, and others. Thus officialdom and the private sector should explore every avenue to ensure that the harbour is full - for the good of everyone whose very existence depends on the port.

Besides the regular callers, the more warships, cruiseliners, bunkerships, rigs and other ships in port, the better.

## CLOUDY HORIZON AS ECONOMIC CRISIS TAKES TOLL ON SHIPPING



**RIGHT:** Arriving off Cape Town is the Singapore-registered tug **Boa Mighty** towing the new-built semi-submersible barge **Boa Barge 30** on which are loaded the barge **Boa Barge 41**, **Boa Barge 42** and the hull for SBL vessel **Boa Galatea**. (sbl = Seabed logging to detect hydrocarbons beneath the seabed.)



**TOP:** **Boa Galatea** was built in Shanghai and is being towed to Norway where the convoy will arrive in late October. **Boa Galatea** will be completed at Fosen Yards and delivered to Owners early next year. She and her sistership (*yet to be completed*) are of MT 6007 design and are the world's first vessels to be custom built for seabed logging operations. **Boa Mighty** and the 3 newbuilt barges are all presently available for charter on arrival in Norway.

Clearly, the spotlight was focused on **USS Theodore Roosevelt** over the past few days. Elsewhere in the harbour were other unusual and interesting visitors: the cruiser **USS Monterey** at the Waterfront; **Yuan Wang 3** the Chinese space tracking vessel that shifted from the Eastern Mole to East Pier, conveniently opposite the cruiser; the Chilean sailingship **Esmeralda** also at the Waterfront; and the Portuguese sail training ship **Sagres** that came into Simon's Town for a brief visit.

Those directing the spotlights often do not get the credit. One such person is Lt-Cdr Greyling van den Berg, the navy's efficient and approachable media liaison officer whose assistance during the carrier's visit and at other times has been highly commended by all.

After Saturday's events, I found that zealous Waterfront security fellows had wheel-clamped my car, despite my parking it earlier in the day under the direction of the military police. Van den Berg appeared, assisted in having the clamp removed and saw me on my merry way.

Lt Michelle Botha, officer commanding, **SAS Tern**, the patrol vessel that carried media folks to the rendezvous point with **USS Theodore Roosevelt**, her executive officer and the rest of the ship's company were also great naval ambassadors.

During these special visits, dockland life continued as usual. Bulkers plodded along the coast, containerships queued for the few berths at the terminal, and tankers brought their fuel and chemical cargoes. Shiprepairers welded, scraped and painted, bunker ships called, while the trawlers headed for their fishing grounds.

However, some believe that it will not be business as usual for much longer as symptoms of a shipping decline are appearing. Global economic woes may reduce trade at a time when large numbers of new ships, ordered during the halcyon days of record freight rates, will be coming from Asian yards. Among these newbuildings are huge containerships and ore carriers that will put significant pressure on existing fleets. Simply put, more and larger ships chasing less cargo equals lower freight rates.

A major slowdown on some container trades has been manifested in the collapse of freight rates in the trans-Pacific and Asia-Europe trades and, despite slow-steaming to cut fuel costs, lay-ups of ships may result. European moves to outlaw shipping conferences - a backbone of the traditional liner trades that in South African began in the nineteenth century - will reduce co-operation between shipping lines, heralding greater competition and leading inevitably to further reductions in freight rates.

Rates for the carriage of grain, minerals and other dry-bulk cargoes have also slumped with one index showing a 70 percent drop from its recent high-point.

Although some orders will be cancelled as loans become scarce, the ships will be built nonetheless and sold to those with the financial means to invest in new tonnage.

"It is a scary prospect!" a shipping executive confided the other day.

Optimistic voices can also be found. "You need to grow your fleet when others are cutting back," a shipowner told me. "Then you are ready when things improve." Other sources pointed out that if rates fall, owners will send older tonnage for scrap, making room for new ships.

"China and the rest of Asia will rescue us again," hopes another, "at least to a limited extent." To support his optimism, he outlined the views of two senior executives who returned recently from China. One had spent three weeks there to assess its prospects. According to him, the country is booming with little slowdown.

Indeed, he was astonished how bullish the Chinese are, and how sanguine they are about economic crises elsewhere.

The other optimist - a shipowner - attended the recent World Economic Forum in Tianjin, meeting informally with various leaders who foresee that the average Chinese growth rate of 9.6% will continue. Although European and American demand for Chinese products has declined, the new plan is to stimulate domestic demand among a rapidly growing middle class. Remember that the Chinese middle class represents a vast number of people!

Reports indicate that "about 800 million Chinese are in agriculture, about 600 million too many", paving the way for large investments in infrastructure to support rapid urbanisation, much of which will necessitate the seaborne importation of construction materials.

Intra-Asian trade, our optimist noted, is growing rapidly and India is becoming a very big trading partner for China, while Singapore, the half-way house between India and China, is booming.

Apart from India, itself a growth miracle, the Middle East with vast reservoirs of petro-dollars, Vietnam and Brazil also present interesting opportunities for shipping.

Although containership owners may glean little joy from these scenarios, the bulk trades could profit from increasing Asian and Middle East demand for raw materials, grain and energy.

Tanker trades remain strong. Daily spot rates for VLCCs are over \$100000 while Suezmaxes fetch about \$70000. With oil and coal stockpiles low, the approaching northern hemisphere winter will boost the demand for tankers and bulkers, hiking their rates. Unusually low temperatures will also increase the demand for energy - and therefore for crude oil tankers and colliers, while the lower bunker price will help to reduce ships' operating costs.

Shipowners such as Grindrod whose tankers and bulkers are on fixed charters for the foreseeable future are better off and, as they repatriate dollar profits to South Africa, should weather the storm.

As freight rates tumble, shippers are of course smiling and landed prices of goods may decline.

In shipping, unusual things often happen, an adage that, in the current climate, is very true.

- **MOL Dominance** will arrive in Cape Town from the Far East on her maiden voyage this week, and her sistership, **MOL Dedication**, makes her maiden call at the end of the month.

15 OCTOBER 2008

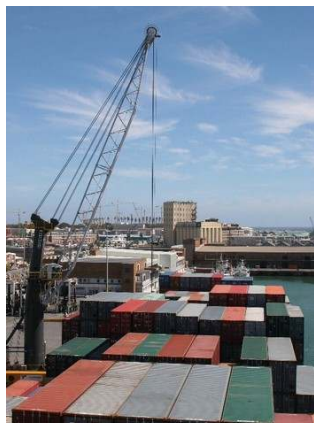
## MOL DOMINANCE ON MAIDEN VOYAGE



TOP: **MOL Dominance** arriving in Cape Town on her maiden voyage from South America.  
Photograph : Capt. Michael Valcic



TOP: Cape Town's harbour tug **Palmiet** spraying water on the occasion of the maiden voyage arrival of **MOL Dominance**.



LEFT: The new heavylift crane discharging cargo from **MOL Dominance** at Cape Town's Multi-Purpose Terminal.



LEFT: Safmarine's newest Master, Captain Louise Angel (29) has taken command of the containership **Safmarine Ngami** on the company's South Africa-USA trade. Captain Angel went to sea as a cadet with Safmarine and has moved through the ranks to command. Her husband, Captain Michael Angel whom she met when he was 2nd Mate and she was 3rd Mate in the fleet, is also in command at sea.  
Photograph : Safmarine

New ships usually generate interest, and the maiden arrival of the 4215-teu **MOL Dominance** last Friday was no exception. A harbour tug sprayed water through her fire-fighting nozzle, and a function on board ensured that the vessel enjoyed an appropriate welcome to Cape Town.

MOL (Mitsui-OSK Line) has an association with South Africa stretching back to 1917 when the signalman in the old Clock Tower recorded the arrival of OSK's **Kasato Maru**. The frequency of the service to South America increased and, in the 1930s, the company operated several passenger-cargo liners between the Far East and South America, using South African harbours as waypoints.

World War 2 disrupted the growing service, but I remember OSK ships resuming the service in the 1950s, and some went to West Africa. Their black funnels with white banded logo were distinctive, and to a youngster wandering around the docks, they represented a link to the mysterious language and culture of Japan. With all the fascination of a 10-year-old back then, I watched as Japanese crewmembers, sitting on the poop, with bowls and chopsticks in hand, tucked into their lunch of rice and fish, pausing briefly to grin at me occasionally. Doubtlessly, I was as much a conversation piece among those friendly Oriental folks as they were at our supper table that night.

Since then, Japanese shipping underwent large-scale restructuring, from which emerged the giant MOL shipping line that, with its containerships, bulkers, tankers, car-carriers, ferries, cruiseliners and coasters, is the largest shipping operator.

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing until Japanese yards were eclipsed by the Koreans and more recently by the Chinese, the shipbuilding boom produced highly automated ships with intricate electronic systems, a trend that transformed seafaring into a considerably more sophisticated profession.

As expected, the Chinese-built **MOL Dominance** represents the latest generation of fast containerships with 36560-kW MAN engines, and she will be joined soon by five sisterships on the Far East-South America trade. All of the 260-metre ships are owned by the German-based Rickmers group and are on 10-year charters, an indication that MOL and their partners, K-Line and PIL, expect significant growth on that trade.

I was interested to learn that in some of the containers aboard the vessel were sugar, timber and, for discharge at Port Elizabeth, Brazilian-manufactured Volkswagen parts.

She is registered in Majuro, the largest of numerous atolls that comprise the Marshall Island group, spread over a vast area of the Pacific, south west of Hawaii. Its shipping register now boasts the fourth largest number of ships, a remarkable achievement in the very short period since the establishment of the register. In contrast, the South African register continues to have one large commercial ship!

**MOL Dominance** was berthed at F Berth where once a cargo shed stood. About fifty years ago, a fire damaged that shed. I recall a photo-spread in the Cape Times the following morning showing a number of those magnificent Dennis fire engines - then the latest models - at the scene, and the firemen spraying the burning cargo in the shed.

In planning its reconstruction, the harbour authorities wisely created a passenger terminal that also had extensive cargo storage space for the southbound Union-Castle mailships that, until that time, had used E Berth.

To cater for the multi-purpose use of the berth, especially the growing volume of containers and steel being handled there, the obsolete terminal was demolished a few years ago.

Credit should go to Transnet National Port Authority for providing a second large crane at the multi-purpose terminal, enabling container ships to halve their time in port. The two cranes also facilitate the discharge of heavy-lift cargo such as earth-moving equipment, trucks and agricultural machinery, imported from North America, the Far East and Europe aboard NileDutch, MACS or Galborg ships.

From the starboard wing of the bridge on **MOL Dominance**, I had a good view of the Singapore-registered tug **Boa Mighty** at A Berth. Astern of her was the newly-built semi-submersible barge **Boa Barge 30**, carrying another two barges, **Boa Barge 41**, **Boa Barge 42** and the Chinese-built hull for **Boa Galatea**, a seabed logging vessel (*SBL*) that detects hydrocarbons beneath the seabed.

**Boa Mighty** is towing **Boa Barge 30** and its cargo to Norway where they will arrive in November. **Boa Galatea** will be completed at the Fosen Yards and delivered to her owners early next year. She and her sistership (*yet to be completed*) are the world's first custom-built SBLs.

Welding equipment on the wharf indicated that a bit of strengthening of the supports for the barges and SBL aboard **Boa Barge 30** was necessary before the tow could continue, especially as it will arrive in the depths of the Norwegian winter. The convoy sailed on Saturday.

Whether the tow was diverted from the Suez route because of the on-going piracy in the Gulf of Aden is unclear, but owners are becoming very wary of sending their ships through that choke-point where even large containerships have been attacked recently.

In addition, the major Indian seamen's trade union is discouraging - and may even prohibit - its members from serving on ships transiting the Gulf of Aden. Bearing in mind the thousands of Indian seafarers and the number of ships with entire Indian crews, this could impact shipping. Other unions may follow the Indian example.

**MOL Dominance** and the unusual tow provided yet another interesting week at the docks. A pity that no public facility exists yet for close-up views of ships!

22 OCTOBER 2008

## STEAM TUGS AND PILOTING



TOP: **MSC Catania**, the largest containership on the regular trade to South Africa. Once the Cape Town container terminal has been dredged, the wharf extended and huge post-panamax cranes come into operation, even larger ships will probably be seen on the South Africa – Europe trade.



TOP: The Mumbai-registered bulker **PFS Narayana** sailing from Cape Town for the River Plate to load grain. She had arrived in ballast from India.



TOP: The project cargoship **City** called at Cape Town en route from Walvis Bay to Mombasa.



LEFT: The attached **Orinoco River** represents the end of the line for SAILS, the short-lived South African-based container-ship operation that was liquidated in October.



RIGHT: Towed into Cape Town some time ago with a vegetable oil cargo, **Biz** is undergoing rudder replacement.

I called on Captain John Drummond, a retired harbour pilot with whom I had a most enjoyable chat the other morning. An unassuming man with a kindly twinkle in his eye, he is a former Union-Castle officer who would have been aboard the ill-fated **Roxburgh Castle** had he not broken his arm in a motor accident. Several days after the reefership had sailed from Glasgow in February 1943 - sans the injured Drummond - she was torpedoed by **U107** off the Azores.

For a brief period, he was on **Windsor Castle** - then a troopship - and within days of his transfer to the hospital ship **Llandoverly Castle**, the mailship was sunk by aerial torpedo in the Mediterranean.

Clutching a new master's ticket, he took a piloting position in East Africa as the pilot for three ports, including Mtwara that became quite busy as project cargo for the extensive groundnut scheme moved through the port, mostly in American-flagged ships. He moved later to Mombasa and then Dar es Salaam.

Aboard one of the Royal Naval vessels he piloted was his brother who as the navigator, bore the traditional naval nickname "*pilot*". When the officer commanding called "*pilot*", both Drummonds responded, to the frustration of the OC. "*What's your first name?*" he demanded of the harbour pilot, who, for the rest of the berthing operation, was addressed as John.

As winds of change blew through East Africa, Drummond moved to Cape Town as the "*spare mate*" aboard the harbour tugs, his East African piloting experience counting little amidst the strict pecking order in the Harbour

Service. "The old SAR&H," suggested a seasoned pilot to me once, "was the largest employer of holders of Master Foreign-going certificates in the world as all their tug mates, masters, pilots, and others further up the ladder had to have a master's ticket."

His competence was soon recognized with his appointment as master of the 1959-built **Danie Hugo**, the harbour tug with pleasing lines and oil-fired engines that gave her 13 knots, a relative gallop for tugs of the day. When compared to her coal-fired counterparts, **Danie Hugo's** power (3300 ihp) and her range of around 2000 nautical miles made her the obvious choice for salvage or deep-sea towing operations.

John Drummond had several during his time in command of that tug. When others were focusing on their Christmas Eve festivities in 1962, **Danie Hugo's** crew were preparing their tug to tow in the freighter **Caravello**, disabled nearly 450 nautical miles north-west of Cape Town.

Drummond's log shows that the tug sailed at 1853 on Christmas Eve, and returned in time for New Year celebrations.

When the main engine of the high-sided Greek motorship **Mautric** went phutt during an unseasonal north-wester in October 1968, she bore down on Woodstock Beach. **Danie Hugo** and **TS McEwen** hastened out, the former putting up a line and the latter attempting to push the bow into the wind to reduce windage. **Danie Hugo** held the vessel long enough for the engineers to restart the engine, before the towing line parted. The arbitration court awarded R12000 salvage to SAR&H!

Under Drummond's command, **Danie Hugo** (and the German tug **Atlantic**) refloated **Sivella**, the Shell tanker that grounded off the Green Point lighthouse in 1968 and for a few hours threatened to become a worse disaster than **Torrey Canyon** had been to the British coast a few years before.

Piloting, though, was Drummond's delight for which he shunned promotion. His scrapbook shows a particularly memorable sailing. When he came on duty one evening and noted that the Chandris passenger ship **Ellenis** had been windbound for the day, he offered to sail her, despite the south-east gale that had pinned her to the wharf.

All four harbour tugs assisted in an intrepid manoeuvre that saw the ship towed upwind, and with the engineroom telegraphs at full ahead, the liner shot through the harbour entrance.

Stepping onto the pilot launch from his last ship - an Oriental fishing vessel - this gentleman pilot concluded a fine career that involved piloting thousands of ships, including bringing **QE2** into port in thick fog.

Readers looking seawards during their Sunday lunch will have seen the twin-funneled 312000-deadweight **Stena Victory** taking stores from Carrier Marine Services' launch well seaward of the Green Point lighthouse. The 333-metre tanker was en route from an Angolan oil terminal to India. She and her sistership, **Stena Vision**, are remarkable vessels whose beam is 12 metres greater and draught is about 4 metres less than similar VLCCs, enabling the pair to operate in shallower water. Propulsion and manoeuvring systems are duplicated and function independently.

Britain's new oceanographic research vessel **James Cook** is scheduled to berth at the Waterfront on Monday. The Norwegian-built, state-of-the art vessel with a dynamic-positioning system is dedicated to research projects ranging from "black smokers" (undersea toxic chimneys along the mid-oceanic ridge) and marine robotics, to - you've guessed it - climate change.

29 OCTOBER 2008

## DEUTSCHE AFRIKA LINIEN (DAL) THE LONGEST-SERVING LINE ON SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE



TOP: DAL Kalahari



TOP: RMS St Helena sailing from Cape Town. The dedicated island operation has been going for 30 years.



TOP: DAL East London on the second loop service that includes East London.



TOP: Pretoria, DOAL's pre-war passenger liner that was taken prize at the end of World War 2, converted to a troopship, and initially renamed **Empire Doon**. On her transfer to Orient Line management, she was renamed **Empire Orwell**, and after many changes in ownership, including a spell under the Blue Funnel house flag, she was scrapped in Taiwan in 1987.

Familiar to ship-spotters in South African ports for nearly 120 years is the multi-coloured funnel sported by vessels of Deutsche Afrika Linien (DAL). As one of its main services focused on German East Africa, now Tanzania, the company was once known as Deutsche Ost-Afrika Linien, and has the longest history of any of the lines currently trading to South Africa and few global players can rival it for longevity.

Indeed, DAL has a rich history with their cargo-passenger vessels once anchoring off some tiny African ports to load tropical produce for the markets of Europe. On sailing day, oompa-bands of the old liners entertained passengers as well as the well-wishers gathered on the wharves from Dar es Salaam to Durban and Cape Town to Kamerun.

I found a reference to a pair of smart five-hatch freighters that bore the conspicuous DOAL funnel colours. The German-built 18-knot sisterships **Karoo** and **Kalahari** that came out in the late 1950s had a 60-ton derrick to handle heavy-lift machinery imports from Europe, especially during the mining boom of the 1960s and the period when huge dams, SASOL plants and powerstations were under construction.

As the container era loomed, the pair and their break-bulk consorts went the way of all ships, making way for the Germans to run one large containership in the South Africa-Europe Container Service.

DAL is the only SAECS founder member still under its original owners.

Scheduled to arrive from the coast this week, is one of the second-generation containerships, the 4000-teu containership **DAL Kalahari**, which with the smaller **DAL East London**, sports those traditional DAL funnel colours. Both are operating to Europe in a vessel-sharing venture with Maersk, Safmarine and MOL.

The current operation has two loops - a weekly service using seven larger vessels, while the second loop, a fortnightly service operated by the smaller geared vessels, includes East London to land vehicle parts for the Mercedes assembly plant at the port.

The frequency of the second loop will revert to weekly once the fruit season gets underway.

Mutual agency agreements between Safmarine and DAL terminate at the end of the week. Thereafter, DAL will handle their own ships, all documentation, and will market space on the two DAL containerships from new offices in the major South African ports and in Johannesburg.

*"Since ours is a smaller operation,"* says Ron Frick, the Johannesburg-based managing director of DAL Agency, *"we can offer a really personalised service to clients."*

Although southbound cargo volumes will probably be affected by the current weakness of the Rand that militates against local importers, there is still a considerable amount of cargo, ordered from Europe before the current financial crisis and yet to be delivered. Some of this is destined for large capital projects such as the construction of the soccer stadiums, Eskom's belated power station upgrades, and the Gautrain. Although much cannot be containerised and will arrive aboard project cargo vessels or the regular multi-purpose liners, a significant amount will come south in **DAL Kalahari** and her consorts.

Going north will be a steady number of boxes, and as the swing to containerised fruit exports continues, there could be even more pressure on capacity than there was this year, particularly during the citrus season when reefer ships took full loads in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban. However, although the exchange rate favours exporters, especially the fruit and mineral sectors, those hoping for an export

The troubles of SAILS, the locally-based containership operation whose relatively small vessels did not fit the economies of scale of successful long-haul trades, will be a fillip to more established lines who will absorb the small percentage of boxes carried by SAILS ships, one of which - **Orinoco River** - has been attached in Cape Town.

One sympathises with the SAILS folks, some of whom will be searching the jobfinders for employment at a difficult time in business, and when others are focusing on year-end functions.

Weather permitting, readers will see two oil rigs within days. Scheduled to berth at A Berth this week is **Scarabeo 7** that will be here for a major refit lasting about three months. The self-propelled **Ensco 8500**, a really big critter with a dynamic positioning system that allows her to remain on station without anchoring, will be off Sea Point, probably on Saturday. Her escorting tugs will bunker in the harbour.

The rig business is red-hot, possibly as a result of the weak rand. A local agent told me this week that, early next year, he is expecting to service five rigs, an FPSO and a large drilling vessel. Two of the rigs will be serviced from Walvis Bay while another pair will be here for refit, one lasting six months. It is probable that more repair business will be attracted to Cape Town as owners take advantage of competitive prices amidst the ailing rand.

Weak Rand could benefit local suppliers

UniCal's bunker tanker **Southern Valour** is kept busy refuelling regular callers and those using the port as their corner shop. One or two ships have been diverted from the pirate-infested Gulf of Aden. As seamen's unions pressurise owners either to use the Cape route or to make compensatory wage hikes - one union is demanding double wages - the handful of diverts could become a steadier flow, unless the conglomerate of naval units off Somalia takes decisive action against the pirates.

Even for regular callers, local rand prices for stores will be attractive, prompting many owners to place large orders for local produce. The marine engineering sector should also benefit from low Rand values that will make local quotations very competitive with those from foreign yards.

### **Officer shortages grow**

Safmarine's promotion of Louise Angel to command the containership **Safmarine Ngami** is a logical step. Not content merely to survive in a male-dominated sector, Captain Angel has excelled to the point where her first command came at a relatively young age.

She also represents half the human race that, although historically sidelined in the shipping sector, is a significant pool from which to draw to meet the dire shortage of qualified sea-going officers. That shortage will increase markedly as the older generation of officers retire or come ashore for other reasons, prompting some surveys to indicate global shortages among qualified sea-going officers to top 20000 within a decade. (*One survey suggested a shortfall of 90000 officers!*)

This trend manifests itself in subtle ways at present. Many find that when due to sign off for leave, they are instructed to continue on the vessel as the relief will only join at a later date, or officers' leave periods are truncated to relieve others who are far beyond their relief dates.

Flag states are being approached to sanction an increasing number of exemptions for uncertificated officers as the sources of qualified officers are much reduced.

In the near future, officer shortages may impair shipping operations both at sea and in ancillary services such as harbour pilotage or maritime training which require properly qualified and experienced personnel.

However, the financial crisis may force widespread scrapping of older ships and perhaps laid-up vessels may clutter many backwaters as was the case in the depression years.

To the long-term detriment of shipping, the current woes will cause cutbacks in training, a short-sighted move, the full ramifications of which will only be felt in about five years time when further officer shortages will be experienced.

Some suggest that savings should first be effected by culling four-by-fours and expense accounts before reducing the officer training budget.

### **St Helena passenger service 30 years old**

Thirty years ago, the small mailship **St Helena** made her first voyage to her namesake island and Ascension Island. In 1990, the larger, custom-built **St Helena** continued the popular and unique passenger service to the islands, drawing on the traditions of Union-Castle whose ships were once the lifeblood of the islands.

Although the on-off airport construction project on St Helena Island now has a preferred bidder, the associated logistical and practical difficulties inherent in the island's rugged topography may yet scuttle the project.

Some believe that the airport is unnecessary, and suggest that a fast inter-island ferry could convey passengers to Ascension whence they could fly to Britain or Cape Town. A geared containership, operating within an existing service from Cape Town to Angola or Europe, could meet the island's freight requirements.

Otherwise, point out others, a new ship should be ordered now to replace the existing vessel as the lead-up time for the construction of a specialised cargo-passenger ship is about five years.

In any event, the current leisurely island voyages aboard **St Helena** will continue for several years, a prospect that many will relish despite the sterling-related fares.

