What's new in tankers?

A roundup of the latest developments in tanker design, construction, equipment and services

Boost for Conoco deepwater Gulf shuttle plans

The recent ruling by the US Minerals Management Service (MMS) allowing the use of floating storage vessels and crude oil shuttle tankers in deepwater areas of the Gulf of Mexico beyond the reach of subsea pipelines has given new impetus to the Conoco plans for US-built shuttle tankers announced last year. The wholly owned Conoco affiliate, Seahorse Shuttling and Technology LLC, has formed an alliance with the Alabama Shipyard of Mobile, Alabama, and Samsung Heavy Industries of Korea to design and build shuttle tankers ready for service in 2004.

Conoco and Samsung have completed the conceptual design for a so-called Gomax (Gulf of Mexico Maximum Cargo) shuttle tanker. The double-hulled, dynamically positioned Gomax will have a capacity of more than 550,000 barrels of crude oil and will be able to accommodate the 40-foot draft restrictions of most US Gulf ports. The ships will be built by Alabama Shipyard.

Among its fleet activities, Conoco currently operates six crude tankers in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean, serving US ports, and one shuttle tanker, Randgrid, which transports oil from the Conoco-operated floating production, storage and offloading vessel (FPSO) Banff in the North Sea. The oil company now manages five floating storage and tanker transport systems globally and has plans to install another four systems in South East Asia, the North Sea and Venezuela. Conoco, which recently merged with Phillips, was also the first major energy company to have an all-double-hull tanker fleet.

Earlier this year Conoco's US inland tank barge fleet was awarded an International Safety Management (ISM) Code certification by ABS, becoming only the second major oil company to have its inland barge operation ISM-certified. This was a voluntary initiative, as ISM compliance is only mandatory for ships engaged in international trade. The Conoco US tank barge fleet has been all double-hulled since 1998.

Dalian joins 300,000-dwt big league

The onward march of China as a shipbuilding nation continues with the delivery this month of Iran Delvar , the first of five 300,000-dwt tankers for the National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC), from Dalian New Shipbuilding Heavy Industries. China thus becomes only the third country, after Japan and Korea, ever to build a tanker of this size.

Until recently, the Dalian yard, in China's northeast Liaoning province, was the country's largest shipbuilder. However, there will soon be five Chinese yards, including the new greenfield Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding complex, able to build VLCCs. Dalian itself is to extend its main building dock by 175 metres to increase production capacity and enable the simultaneous construction of one and one-half VLCCs. Work should be complete by late 2003.

Iran Delvar and her sisters have been designed with a hull fatigue lifespan of 40 years. Dalian cooperated with DNV and a Korean consultancy on the design work for the ships.

Of the 10 largest oil company-owned tanker fleets worldwide, that of NITC is the youngest. Buoyed by a large, recent newbuilding programme in Korea, the Iranian company's fleet has an average age of 11.7 years. This will be further reduced with the delivery of the five Dalian ships.

World Tankers wins ballast award

World Tankers Management's fleet of 12 tankers has become the first in Singapore to be certified under classification society Lloyd's Register's (LR) new ballast water management planning (BWMP) operational notation.

"We have always striven to find ways to differentiate ourselves in the tanker industry," said Michael Bruce, World Tankers' managing director, at a recently held ceremony during which LR presented the tanker operator with a certificate recognising its proactive approach to ballast water management. "I believe this award recognises World Tankers' proactive commitment to meeting the highest standards of ballast water management, without waiting for future legislation to be enacted."

According to LR, its BWMP notation accounts for the potential loss of hull integrity resulting from unplanned loads arising from ballast water transfer. "It provides a structured and auditable way of dealing with unique loadings experienced in seagoing ballast operations," says the classification society.

The introduction of invasive species into foreign waters via ships' ballast water continues to be a problem, and although some port states, including the US, Canada and Australia, have introduced legislation to prevent the spread of non-native aquatic life in their waters, there are still no international regulations on ballast water management. The issue continues to be debated and was recently addressed at the 47th session of the International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) Maritime Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 47) (see p XX for a full report on the meeting).

New firefighting system from Kashiwa

Kashiwa Co Ltd, a Japanese manufacturer of marine firefighting systems, has announced the launch of a new water mist technology, brand-named Hyper-Mist. The system has been designed particularly for extinguishing oil fires and comprises a high pressure pump, mist nozzles, selective valves, a control device, piping and couplings and a fire detector.

The company's client roster includes such well-known tanker operators as Euronav, ExxonMobil, Shell Marine International, Teekay Shipping and World-Wide Shipping. Kashiwa also produces anti-explosion and other shipboard control systems. According to the company, its products have been installed on over 90 per cent of all tankers built in Japan.

NOL creates product tanker arm

QSingapore-based Neptune Orient Lines (NOL) has established a new subsidiary, Neptune Associated Shipping (NAS), to own and operate 22 of NOL's clean petroleum product tankers. NAS, which is also headquartered in Singapore, will consolidate the shipowner's existing harbour, coastal and medium-range tanker operations.

Chief executive and president of NAS, Joseph Kwok, said that the company was looking to expand its energy transport business in Asia, especially in the growing markets of India and China, and added that the company's aim was to become one of the major clean petroleum tanker operators in the Asia Pacific.

The product tanker announcement followed NOL's cancellation of an initial public offering (IPO) of its crude oil tanker unit, American Eagle Tankers (AET). NOL had planned to list AET on the New York Stock Exchange and on the Singapore bourse, but decided to withdraw the IPO since AET's offering price was not satisfactory. Six newbuildings will be delivered to AET in the next 18 months, which will increase its fleet capacity to 3.1 million dwt.

Record low tanker spills in 2001

Data from the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Ltd (ITOPF) show that the incidence of accidental tanker spills from recognised international seaborne trade in 2001 was arguably the lowest since the organisation began compiling its database of accidental oil spills from tankers, combined carriers and barges in 1974. ITOPF categorises incidents by size, with large spills defined as greater than 700 tonnes of oil. Analysis of data for the year 2001 shows only three recorded incidents over 700 tonnes, the largest being the Baltic Carrier which spilled 2,400 tonnes of heavy fuel oil cargo as a result of a collision in the Baltic Sea in September 2001 (see Tanker Operator December 2001/January 2002, p 9). The remaining two incidents occurred in the Arabian Gulf and involved the transport of, allegedly, embargoed oil from Iraq.

Remote detection of oil spills

Ionics Agar Environmental has launched Leakwise WL, a new wireless oil sheen detector and oil build-up monitor which uses Orbcomm satellite communication and cellular networks to alert operators of oil leaks and spills. Designed for installation onshore near terminal storage tanks and pipelines and at sea close to tanker jetties and offshore tanker buoys, the Leakwise WL sensors can detect the presence of as little as 0.3 mm of oil on water and monitor its build-up.

The floating sensors in Leakwise WL use the latest technology of high-frequency electromagnetic energy absorption and are unaffected by dirt or oil coating or by changes in water level, salinity and temperature. This enables reliable operation with no false alarm and very low maintenance costs, according to the manufacturer. The Leakwise offshore detector is mounted on a stable wave-rider buoy and contains a solar panel with rechargeable battery, digital signal processor, transceiver for the bidirectional data link and antennae for satellite and cellular communications.