

Tug@zine

all about tugs

*All about . . .
the summer
of '82*



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It's all about the summer of '82

This issue tells the story of a round trip made back in 1982 for the purpose of visiting ports. Back in those days things were much easier than it is -regrettably but necessary – today. Except for Marseille where its security was at the same or higher level than in many of today's ports.

Anyway – I thought it was a good moment to publish this long-read as much has happened in the years following 1982. Family-owned businesses disappear, gobbled up by the big players. Sometimes due to competition, sometimes due to lack of family members with an interest in towage and salvage.

The said article may trigger memories of how it was back then. That's a good thing. As the saying goes: 'He who does not know about the past will not understand the future'.

It is of interest though that two of the companies that were in the forefront in 1982 are family-owned and have survived or re-started. Have a pleasant read during your holidays!

Job van Eijk (editor)



The front page shows the tug LAURENT CHAMBON, a product of the Dutch shipyard Jonker & Stans, that started out as a salvage tug but by 1982 was used mainly for shiphandling duties. Dimensions: 33,30 (oa) / 30,50 (bp) x 8,00 mld x 4,50 m with a draught aft of 4,40 mt. Main engine 1.320 hp at 300 rpm. She was sold in 1987. The photograph below shows her in Piraeus, Greece, in June 1990, as SPIROS LEKKAS managed by Portolos Salvage & Towage, Greece. In 2002 or 2003 in lay-up at Perama. Later purchased by Standard Shipping but did not sail. 2018 sold for scrap. Spotted 28 November, 2018 scrap in progress

photo: Hans Hoffmann

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Summer of '82

43 years ago two Dutch tug photographers, Job van Eijk – our current editor - and the late Joop Smeins decided to explore the French ports in search of tugs.

by Job van Eijk

The aim of the trip was to photograph as many of the tugs as we could. Remember this was prior to the digital age so we stocked a big supply of B&W and colour negative film as well as colour positive (slide) film for cameras taking 24 x 36 mm up to 45 x 60 mm film. We also took a choice of lenses with us allowing us to go from wide angle up to 1.000 mm zoom. In addition we intended to market the Lekko International tugboat magazine to which both of us were contributors.

We left on **1 May** taking the main routes south via Luxemburg and Switzerland ending late 2 May at **La Ciotat**. Geographically this was a good spot and became our base for a few days allowing a range from the Italian border up to Marseilles. As luck would have it the tug *Marseillais 16* showed up in the port. Normally there were no tugs stationed at the port. As a point of interest we were told that when a newbuild ship was to be launched from the local shipyard the houses on the quay opposite the yard had to place the flood boards since the displaced water during launch could only go one way – in the direction of their front doors as the quay would be swamped.

Anyway when we take a look at the map of France the southern – or Mediterranean – coast is crowded with ports. Most of these, however, serve as yacht marinas or as fishing ports



The shipyard at La Ciotat, May 1982

photo: Job van Eijk

where hardly any tugs are needed. Going clockwise the serious part of the trip started near the Italian border in Monaco. Here one tug was spotted. *Saint Roche* was a barge tug owned by the local construction company **EMMR**.

We took a stroll around the port to see the big yachts many of which we were told rarely left port even though fully manned. We also visited the big oceanographic museum. Since 1982 the port of Monaco as well as the land area has seen a dramatic increase in size. While the construction work saw tugs and workboats at the port once completed these disappeared from the scene. The first big port is **Toulon**. This port is

host to the largest **French naval base**. 99% of all towing is carried out by Navy tugs. The port also accommodates some ferry services and shipyards. As Toulon is a relatively sheltered port tug assistance for commercial traffic is only required during bad weather but otherwise relatively bog ship can leave port without a tug. Toulon today also hosts one of the four big ETV's, a service that hardly existed in 1982. At the time the first two ETV's for the French Government had only been around for a few years protecting the French Atlantic Coast. Photographing was extremely difficult due to the distance we had to stay from the water. The only reasonable close passing was by the Navy tug *LT / Latanier*.



LATANIER was on of the Navy tugs at the Toulon naval base

postcard: photo Marius Bar - coll. Job van Eijk

Centre of the tugboat activities is the Port of **Marseilles**. This is the biggest French port with a large number of liner services operating from the port. In 1980 some 104 million tonnes of goods were handled at the port. In 1982 the two shiphhandling tug operators at the port were Nouvelle Société **Provencale** de Remorquage and Compagnie Marseillaise de Remorquage et de Sauvetage **Chambon** et Cie. They each handled 50% of all traffic. The **Port Autonome de Marseilles** is also managing the nearby ports of





LAURENT CHAMBON was built in The Netherlands - seen here at the Marseille tugboat base in May, 1982

photo: Job van Eijk



MARSEILLAIS 3

photo: Job van Eijk



PHOCEEN

photo: Job van Eijk

Lavera, Caronte, Port-de-Bouc, Fos and St. Louis-du-Rhone. The most important one is Fos which can be compared for traffic with Rotterdam / Europort. Bulk cargo is handled and the biggest ships in the world can be accommodated.

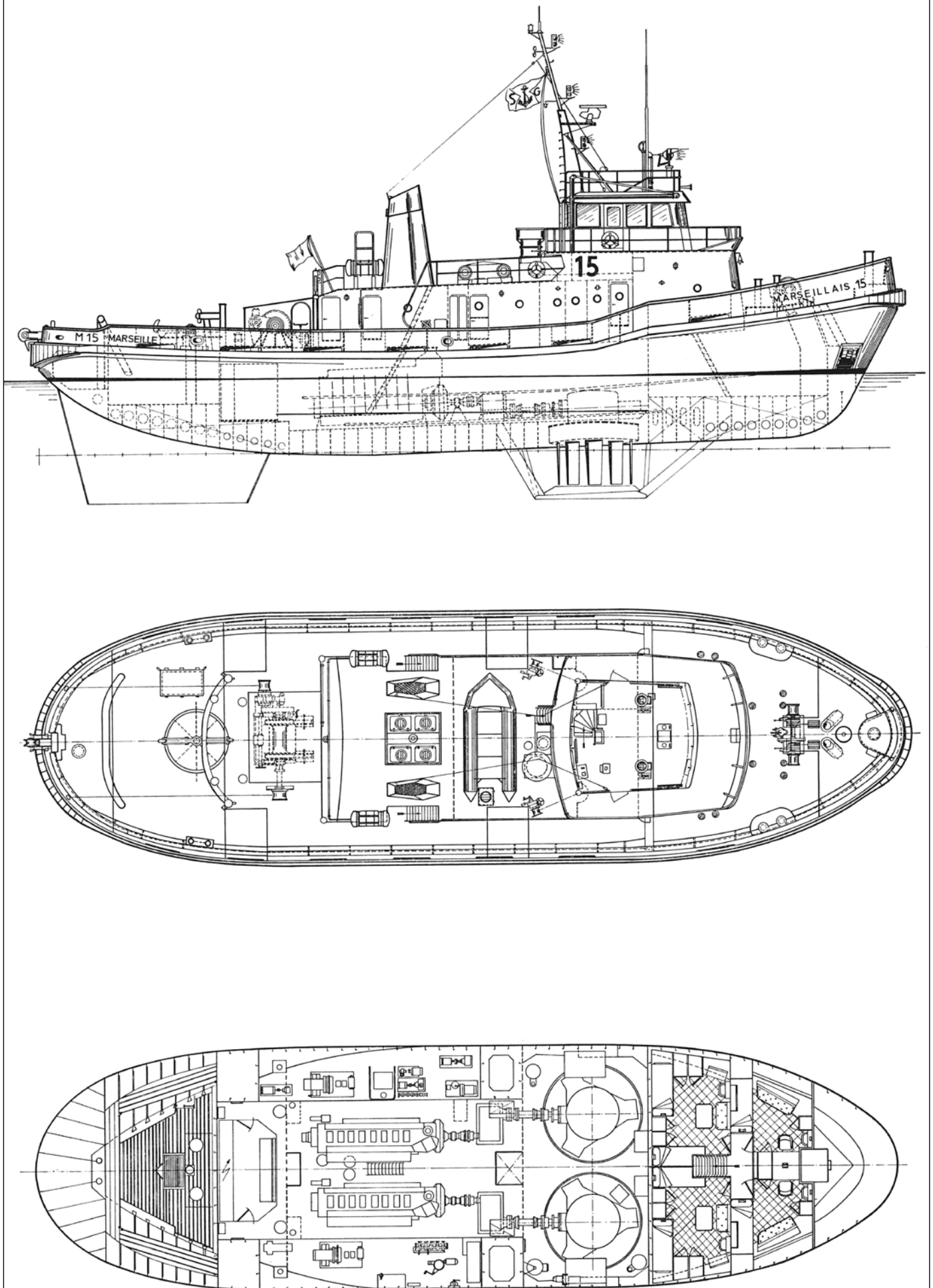
Cie. Chambon was founded in 1873 and – by 1982 – was a multi-faceted company with interests in shiphandling, distance towing, salvage work and offshore support. Chambon International operated the deepsea tugs *Chambon Mistral* (VSP- 1978 – 4.200 bhp – 50 tbp), the VSP (Voith tractor) *Marseillais 17* (1976 – 2.600 bhp) and the conventional tugs *Chambon Sirocco* and *Chambon Bora* (both 4.960 bhp – 68 tbp), The Chambon subsidiary Cie. Des Moyens de Surface was active in the offshore industry with supply vessels, crewboats and pipecarriers.

The Chambon subsidiary **Cie. Marseillaise de R & S** handled all shiphandling operations. At Marseilles the oldest tug they operated was *Laurent Chambon*, a salvage tug built by Jonker & Stans in The Netherlands in 1960. But by 1982 the salvage role was more often carried out by the newer Voith Tractors such as *Marseillais 15* (72 – 2.500 bhp). Smaller tugs operating at Marseilles were *Marseillais 2* (1966 – 1.500 bhp) and *Marseillais 9*, a Voith Tractor built in 1977 with an output of 2.250 bhp. When necessary additional tugs were called in from nearby Port-de-Bouc. The latter tug we also met at Fos. A chat with the watchman and some issues of Lekko International resulted in an invitation to board and inspect the tug.

On 5 May we visited the **Port Autonome** with the aim of obtaining a harbour pass. This was necessary since the port areas were fenced in with the entry points guarded. Our impression of the guards was they would shoot first and ask questions later so better be safe than sorry. Anyway the issues of Lekko International and our marketing presentation resulted in a minibus with a German speaking tour guide that took us all over the port stopping occasionally to allow us to photograph the tugs.

The same day we managed to locate the Chambon office where our visit resulted in an invitation to visit their tugs on location – the tugboat station near the





1

Marseille

2



3



4



1

MARSEILLAIS 15 waiting at the Marseille tugboat base photo: Job van Eijk

2

Running astern to our job, the sailing of a big tanker photo: Job van Eijk

3

The Master at the helm of the Voith Tractor photo: Job van Eijk

4

The tugs having been released due to high winds disconnect and run back to base. Astern is PHOCEEN photo: Job van Eijk

5

The crew and superintendant inspecting the faulty part that necessitated to break away from our second job that day photo: Job van Eijk

5



fishery port - where Chambon also had its repair facility. This was arranged for the next day.

We succeeded in photographing most of the Marseille tugs, both Chambon and Provencale. Around midday Chambon's technical inspector arrived and put us aboard *Marseillais 15* for an assist to sail a tanker with the aid of six tugs. This, however, was cancelled due to a steep increase in wind speed while the tugs were already hooking up. The next assist was expected for around 19.00 hrs so the Master invited us to stay on board for that one. This gave us a chance for a chat with the various crew members.

Around 1530 the tug was suddenly called up: due to the journalists on board the dispatch office had switched the planning and *Marseillais 15* was ordered to assist an incoming ferry. As most crewmembers had meanwhile gone ashore to carry out various tasks they had to be recalled. With the last man scrambling aboard the tug left its moorings with undue haste chasing its job which had meanwhile arrived. It was then that the starboard main engine decided to quit so the tug returned to its moorings on a single propeller. Nevertheless a successful day for us!

The **Nouvelle Société Provencale de Remorquage** is the other operator at Marseilles. The company dates from around 1900 and was established for the purpose of executing shiphandling services at Marseilles. By 1982 it had



DRAGUE No. 7 - a bucket dredger at work in the Gironde River. The dump barges are handled by R-6 and R-8

photo: Job van Eijk

become a subsidiary of Progemar, the parent group that also included Les Abeilles. In 1982 Provencale operated eight tugs at Marseilles. The oldest was *Phoceen* (1959 – 1.600 bhp) - a conventional shiphandling tug that doubled as a salvage and coastal tug. The Voith Tractors *Provençal 1* (1972 – 2.700 bhp) and *Provençal 4* (1973 – 2.700 bhp) likewise doubled as shiphandling and coastal towing tugs. The conventional shiphandling tugs at the port were *Provençal 6* (1965 – 925 bhp), *Provençal 9* (1960 – 1.200 bhp), *Provençal 11* (1963 – 1.200 bhp) and *Provençal 7* (1960 – 1.200 bhp).

The Voith Tractor *Provençal 2* (1971 – 2.600 bhp) was also homeported at Marseilles but almost exclusively used for distance towing. These distance

tows were carried out under the Abeille International banner, another Progemar subsidiary.

Three Chambon tugs were found at **Port-de-Bouc**: the Voith Tractor *Marseillais 16*, (1972 – 2.500 bhp) and the conventional *Marseillais 7* (1967 – 1.500 bhp) and *Marseillais 3* (1961 – 2.360 bhp). The latter – constructed by Ateliers et Chantiers de Sud-Ouest at Bordeaux – was the first French tug with joy-stick control. The 29-metre tug was fitted with a bow thruster as well. Her sister was *Provençal 5*, completed for account of Société Provencale. In addition we also located Provencale's *Provençal 3* (1977 – 2.250 bhp).

At **Fos** we noted *Provençal 15* (1964 – 1.600 bhp) and *Provençal 5* (1981 – 2.360 bhp). The Provencale tugs rotated through ports as and when required.

At the other end of de Golfe de Fos is **Port St. Louis-du-Rhône**. The port was serviced by three shiphandling tugs owned by the **Société d'Armement et de Pêche** (ArPec). These were *Goeland II* (1961 – 710 bhp), *Arpec V* (1967 – 1.060 bhp) and *Jean-Jacques Serris* (1972 – 1.400 bhp). As the port is located at the entrance to the River Rhône it also sees a lot of inland-waters traffic.

On 9 May we left the south coast for the long drive to Saintes, about 100 km north of Bordeaux. En route we paid a visit to the last relatively big port in Mediterranean France. **Sète** is located near the French / Spanish border. The port was serviced by Chambon with



The tug R-6 is one of three sisters involved in dredging operations

photo: Job van Eijk



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the shiphandling sisters *Marseillais 10*, *Marseillais 11* and *Marseillais 14*. The trio was built in respectively 1964, 1962 and 1964. All three have an output of 1.000 bhp. Furthermore we also discovered a local tug, a big launch tug named *Gregau* and the tug *Cap Gros*, owned by **Entreprises Dodin** – a (marine) construction company established in 1865

We departed the port for the crossing to the **Atlantic side** of France. It being a Sunday we had not counted on the restaurants along this highway being closed so our meals that day were scarce – even that being an understatement.

Due to time constraints we had to give **Bayonne** a miss. This is the first port on the Atlantic side of France close to the Spanish border. With little commercial traffic a single shiphandling tug was stationed there -the U.R.O tug *Cauderan* (1958 – 1.000 bhp).

In 1982 the **south-west ports of France** were the domain of the **Union des Remorqueurs de l'Océan** – generally known as U.R.O. The company was founded in 1939 through a merger of Cie. Nazairienne de Remorquage et Sauvetage and the Entreprise General de Travaux Maritimes. The 'Nazairienne' in fact was



URO's GROIX was one of the tugs assigned to the oil terminal at Le Verdon

photo: coll. Job van Eijk

the successor of the towing services provided by the Union Maritime Francaise founded in 1922 by Henri Cangardel.

After World War II the company rapidly built a presence in the French African ports with subsidiaries in Dakar (1947), Abidjan (1950), Douala (1957), Port Gentil (1962) and Cotonou (1965). By 1982

the company operated some 50 ships including a number of crewboats for the offshore industry. Tugs were operated – apart from Africa already mentioned - at Bayonne, Bordeaux, La Rochelle / Pallice, St. Nazaire and Brest.

On **10 May** we set course for the port of Bordeaux. The port of **Bordeaux**



St. GILES (left) and TALMONT in May, 1982 at La Rochelle

photo: Job van Eijk





The Abeille tugboat station at Nantes in May, 1982

photo: Job van Eijk

at the time consisted of nine more or less separate areas. On the left bank of the Garonne river liner services were handled. At Queries it was project cargo and timber, at the Docks timber and general cargo. Bassens Amont was mainly bulk, timber and shiprepair while Bassens Aval was specialised in refrigerated cargo and cereals. At Ambes it was oil, at Blaye cereals, at Pauillac oil and at Le Verdon ro/ro, containers and oil.

The first tug encountered – albeit in the distance – was *Abeille No. 14* which was spotted off Ambes heading out to sea. We also discovered a dredging operation in progress. The bucket dredger *Drague No. 7* was supported by two tugs handling the dump barges. Homeported at Le Verdon *R 6* and *R 8* have some resemblance to the well-known (former) Ulrich Harms 'Argus' design tugs. The tugs were equipped for handling the barges on the hip with coupling winches forward and aft. A third sister – *R 7* – was later spotted at Bordeaux.

The tugs operating at Bordeaux were *Bayard* (1964 – 1.600 bhp), *Ouessant* (1968 – 2.000 hp), *Lacanau* (1960 – 1.250 bhp), *Pornichet* (1960 – 1.250 bhp), *St. Esteph* (1959 – 1.250 bhp) and *Vallières* (1973 – 1.800 bhp). Three tugs were usually moored in the city centre with the others scattered through the port areas. Due to the nature of Le Verdon the tug *Groix* (1971 – 2.200 bhp) was

there on permanent stand-by. When traffic for Le Verdon was expected two or three tugs from Bordeaux were dispatched to assist *Groix*.

Pornichet was classed as a harbour / coastal tug. The 22 ttp tug was fitted with a Kort nozzle rudder to facilitate manoeuvring. The 32 ttp *Ouessant* was fitted with firefighting gear – her primary operational area also was Le Verdon.

On 10 May we visited **La Rochelle / Pallice** three U.R.O. tugs were stationed: *St. Gilles* (1958 – 1.000 bhp), *Guerande* (1958 – 1.000 bhp) and *Talmont* (1963 – 920 bhp). The

latter is a former 'Lady' tug acquired from J.H. Pigott in the U.K. We also spotted the Navy tug *Pivert* (1962 – 250 bhp).

A visit to the U.R.O. dispatch office resulted in an invitation to board the tug *Talmont*. After the Master had shown us around the tug the tug set course for the outer port where she had to assist in the departure – jointly with *Guerande* – of the Dutch Nievelt Goudriaan freighter *Aldabi*. This was followed by the departure of *Marie Gorthon* from the inner port which we assisted as the stern tug.

Talmont's Master explained that the tugs those days only occasionally were required for sea work. In such a case the crew – which normally consisted of Master, Chief Engineer, Second Engineer and two deckhands – was doubled and with a cook added. That, however, required hot-bunking as the crew accommodation only allowed a five-man crew. When on harbour duty the manning was on board week on / week off.

On 12 May we did a second run to Bordeaux after which we departed for St. Nazaire. The port of **St. Nazaire** is situated at the entrance to the River Loire. During World War II this was an important German U-boat base. The submarine base was still there though no longer used as such. The port itself consisted of a non-tidal inner harbour with the outer harbour situated on the river bank. The Chantiers de l'Atlantique was a well-known shipyard with capacity to build ships up to 800.000 dwt.



MORBIHAN was one of two sister Voiths working at Lorient

photo: coll. Job van Eijk



La Pallice



En route to our first job: the Dutch freighter ALDABI

photo: Job van Eijk



Backing to pick up the line

photo: Job van Eijk



*The Master at the controls -
as is usual on tugs: looking
aft*

photo: Job van Eijk



All under control

photo: Job van Eijk



Fleetmate GUERANDE assisted as the stern tug seen here returning to base

photo: Job van Eijk



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The offshore tug MARGARITA seen at Le Havre, May 1982

photo: Job van Eijk



ABEILLE 31 and sister 32 were designed and built especially for the oil terminal at Antifer, north of Le Havre. These tugs were fully equipped for fire-fighting including a real fire ladder

photo: Job van Eijk

At the port seven U.R.O. tugs were active. *Duguay Trouin* (1965 – 2.400 bhp – 30 ttp) was one of two U.R.O.'s deepsea / salvage tugs – the other one being the 24 ttp *Jacques Cartier*. With deepsea work decreasing *Duguay Trouin* by 1982 doubled as a shiphandling tug. Representative of the older generation of harbour / coastal shiphandling tug was the 1956-built *Pontailiac* (1.000 bhp). The 1965-built *Oleron* (1.320 bhp – 22 ttp) was the first French tug with an unmanned engine room. Her sister at the port was the 1964-built *Noirmoutier*. The latest addition to the fleet at the time was the 1979-built *Hoëdic*. The Voith Tractor was fitted with extensive firefighting gear. The other tugs in the fleet were the 1972-built 2.200 bhp *Brehat* and the 1975-built *Pornic* (2.200 bhp).

On our first visit to the tugboat station the entire fleet seemed deserted. This was later explained to us to be due

to a curious watch system. The tugs – manned 24/7 – each had two crews in a rota of week on / week off. The crew was allowed ashore but the dispatch office had to be informed about their whereabouts. They also were obliged to contact the office twice a day.

The dispatch office told us that the first 'manoeuvre' was expected for 14 May with a vessel running trials while on 15 May an LNG tanker was expected. This allowed us to check out the extensive port area where we found the tug / supply vessel **Crystal Fish** in the final stages of construction.

As the assist for the trial vessel was cancelled we took the opportunity to visit Nantes. The local dispatch office alerted us to an assist scheduled for the afternoon. This gave us the opportunity to see three of the local **Abeille** tugs on the move. At Nantes

the **Cie. Nantaise** de Remorquage et de Sauvetage – another Progema subsidiary – operated four tugs to assist *Abeille* ships in and out of port: *Abeille No. 1* (1959 – 500 bhp), *Abeille No. 2* (1959 – 500 bhp), *Abeille No. 3* (1960 – 500 bhp) and *Abeille No. 21* (1961 – 500 bhp).

Upon return to St. Nazaire we ran into another Dutchman – a former tug master currently working for a marine construction company as project manager. He had been living in France for already some 10 years and was just home in between projects. We were invited for an evening at his home where we swapped stories. It transpired he had also worked at Hook of Holland on the construction of Europort and we found we had mutual acquaintances from that period.

On 15 May we were once again at the tugboat station to watch the assist of the trial vessel – a large ro/ro ferry. This was to be carried out by *Brehat*, *Pornic* and *Pontailiac*. While we were setting up the cameras we had a chat with what appeared to be the Master of the tug *Oleron*. His tug was to assist the announced gas carrier. Upon hearing our marketing talk and after receiving some magazines he invited us on board and offered to leave immediately to watch the trial vessels assist at sea. That completed the gas carrier *Edouard L.D.* was already approaching. *Oleron* hooked up at the bow with two other tugs alongside and a stern tug. These were *Duguay Trouin*, *Hoëdic* and *Noirmoutier*.

Once the vessel was safely moored the Chief engineer took us all over the tug explaining. The tour ended up in the ship's bar where we discussed French and Dutch towing with the crew. Here we learned that the officers and most of the crew upon entering the company were required to start their career with U.R.O. in their African operations. This apparently because it was difficult to contract seafarers for just the African jobs. Housing was no problem as U.R.O. had built shore accommodations suitable for the climate at their operating ports.

The ports of St. Nazaire and Nantes were managed by the **Port Autonome de Nantes**. They operated a fleet of workboats for port and fairway maintenance. One of their tugs – that



St Nazaire



URO tugboat station at St. Nazaire. Nearest camera DUGUAY TROUIN and HOEDIC. Behind are OLERON and NOIRMOUTIER. In the distance BREHAT photo: Job van Eijk



BREHAT en route to the job

photo: Job van Eijk



PONTAILLAC was to assist an incoming ferry running trials photo: Job van Eijk



NOIRMOUTIER and PONTAILLAC as stern tugs

photo: Job van Eijk



NOIRMOUTIER controlling the stern to swing the ferry

photo: Job van Eijk



BREHAT hooked up at the bow of the ferry

photo: Joop Smeins



OLERON keeping the carrier in position against the current, the other tugs pushing her towards jetty

photo: Job van Eijk



DUGUAY TROUIN pushing

photo: Job van Eijk



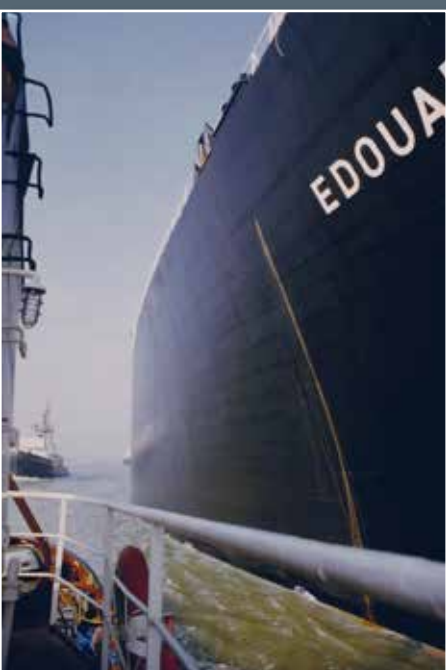
DUGUAY TROUIN running alongside OLERON

photo: Job van Eijk



Following the carrier to its berth

photo: Job van Eijk



About to hook up on the bow of EDOUARD L.D.

photo: Job van Eijk



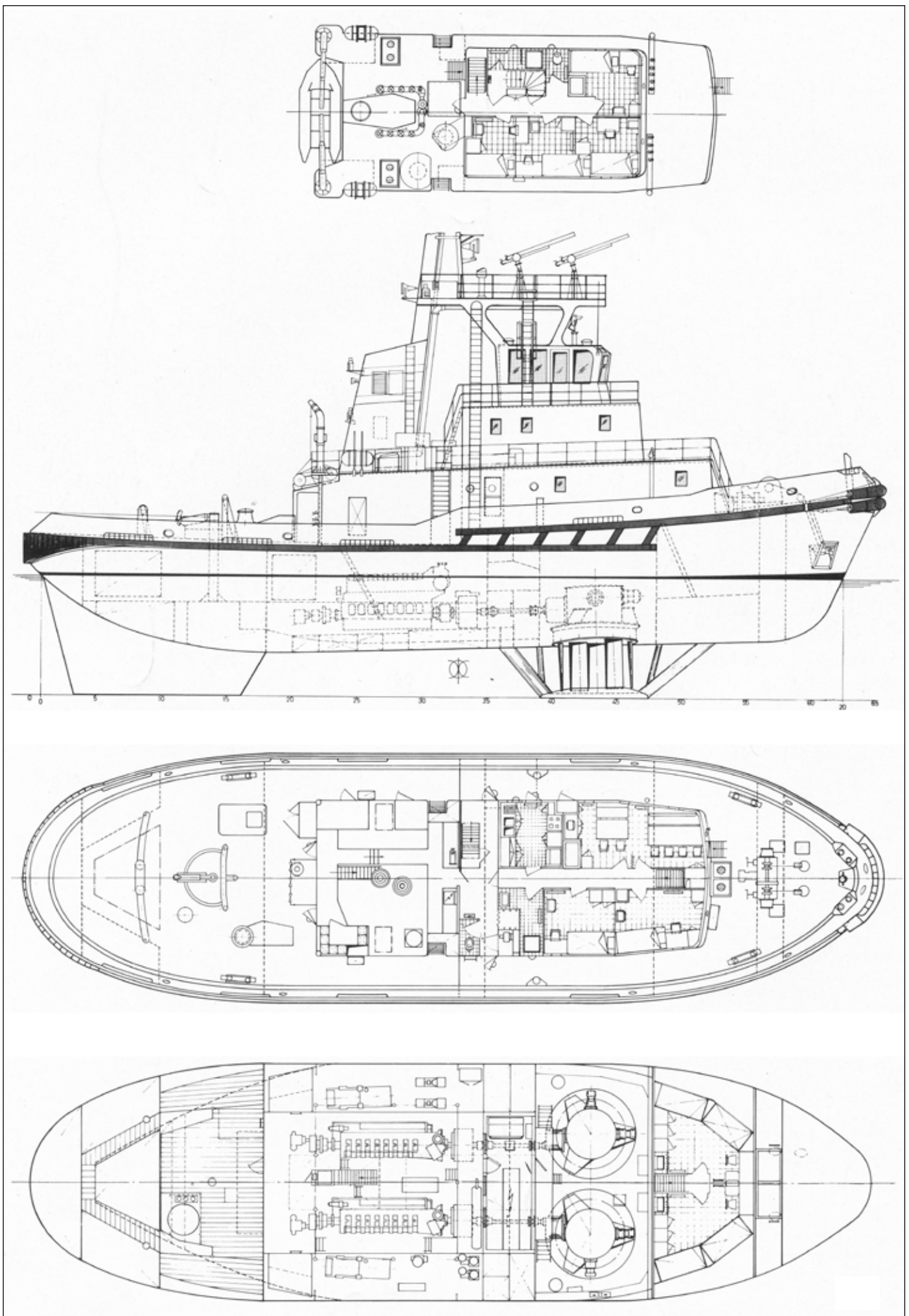
Capt. Yves le Cossec of OLERON checking Lekko International

photo: Job van Eijk



Clearing the deck after a job well done

photo: Job van Eijk



exclusively served the Port Autonome's vessels – was the 1967-built *Petrel*.

On 16 May we left for Brest. En route we passed **Lorient**. Harbour towage was carried out by the **Chambre de Commerce**. Two small Voith Tractors were active: *Morbihan* and *Keroman* (both 1974 – 730 bhp). We also noticed the naval (harbour) tug *Grille* in apparent lay-up. At Chantiers de la Perrière a big conventional tug was under construction. As it was a Sunday, no-one was around that could answer questions.

We also had a peep at the port of **Douarnenez** which in the old days had been home to several Dutch tugs on salvage station. Otherwise it was just a small fishing port.

Brest was the most northern port served by U.R.O. Two powerful harbour / coastal tugs were stationed here: *Kerhuon* (1980 – 2.800 bhp – 40 ttp) and *Roscanvel* (1981 – 3.100 bhp – 45 ttp). Brest is an important Navy base with many tugs attached to the base.

When entering Brest from the south we passed the local shipyard. A number of Saipem vessels were moored here apparently for maintenance work: *Saipem Ragno* (a former Wilhelmsen diving support vessel), *Saipem Delfino Due* (ocean tug), *Saipem Otto* (pipe lay / crane vessel, former *Berge Worker*), *Saipem Castoro* (pipe layer) with her accompanying support vessel *Winsertor* / OSA 804 and the offshore tug *Margarita* (Ugland).

17 May was spend at Brest photographing the naval tugs from a



An unfortunate end to our 1982 trip caused by a drunk Frenchman ramming three cars photo: Job van Eijk

vantage point near the old castle: *BN / Bonite*, *CT / Chataignier*, *MB / Marabout*, *SC / Sarcelle*, *A-688*, *HE / Hetre*, *Elan* (a diving support vessel), *NY / Noyer*, *Maronnier*, *Alouette*, *OL / Oliver*, *Ara*, *RG / Rouget*, *EB / Ebene*, *Lannion*, *La Prudente* (boom defence vessel) and the ocean tug *Tenace* / A-669). We also spot the tugs *Canari* and *Lezaro* belonging to the construction company ETPSM Henry Bugny.

The next day we leave for Le Havre via **St. Malo**. The local Chambre de Commerce operated the tugs *Cote d'Emeraude* and *Grand-Bé*.

19 May – which later turned out to be our last day in France – we visited the Abeille dispatch office to obtain times of arrivals and departures. We were also told that Abeille 26 and Abeille 28 were in laid-up pending. In between



ABEILLE 31 showing fire equipment

photo: Job van Eijk

we cruised the port area searching for tugs. We noted Abeille no. 32, Abeille nr. 9, Abeille no. 11, Abeille no. 31, Abeille no. 7 and Abeille no. 10. Furthermore we located ST 8, *Georges Piat*, *Romulus* and *Le Caux* (all belonging to the Port Autonome de Havre), *Koudia* (Frabeltra) and Abeille No. 4 (in the colours of **Frabeltra**).

We had been planning to move to Dunkirk the next day but this was thwarted by a drunk Frenchman that – in the middle of the night – lost control and rammed three parked cars. As ours was the middle one it was shortened a bit forward and aft. As it was driveable we decided to cut short our trip and to move back home for repairs. Total distance covered this trip was 6.800 km.

Postscript

In the years gone by since 1982 the French towage industry underwent many changes. Well-known names disappeared, new players came and went. Some survived. Progemar was an established player in 1982, as was Chambon.

By the early 1970s the company through acquisitions, mergers and establishment of subsidiaries was under the banner of Progemar. Abeille International, Paris, handled ocean towage. The Société de Remorquage et de Sauvetage Les Abeilles



GRAND-BÉ seen here in May 1982 at the Chambre de Commerce quay at St. Malo

photo: Job van Eijk





INGENIEUR MAXIME HESSE was built for Auxport, Caen. This operation was later bought by Les Abeilles and the tug renamed ABEILLE IROISE

photo: Steven Lang



The Le Havre tugboat station in May, 1982. From l to r ABEILLE No. 28 or 26, ABEILLE No. 12, ABEILLE No. 8 and ABEILLE No. 18

photo: Job van Eijk

handled harbour towage at Le Havre. Cie. Nantaise de Remorquage et Sauvetage performed shiphandling at Nantes. The Nouvelle Société Provençale de Remorquage performed harbour towage at Marseilles while the Société Cherifienne de Remorquage et d'Assistance was a joint venture operating towage and salvage at Casablanca. The Group also operated two shipyards: Chantiers Navals Varois Les Abeilles at La Seyne and Société Nouvelle des Ateliers et Chantiers Maritimes d'Honfleur. At La Seyne the Société Leonard et Cie. was involved in engineering and construction. In 1974 the Société Dunkerquoise de Remorquage et Sauvetage (Dunkirk, established 1887) was acquired.



BLANC MISSERON in May, 1982. This is a former Abeille tug

photo: Job van Eijk

It was **Les Abeilles** that saw most of the changes. The roots of the company went back to 1864. By 1982 Progemar was still a partly family owned group. In **1988** however, the **Compagnie Francaise d'Investissements et de Transportes** (CFIT for short) – itself a 40% shareholding of Elysées Investissement - acquired a 25% former Blohorn-family stake in Progemar, coupled to 17% it had already acquired in the open market. Next – in 1990 – a power struggle amongst directors ended with the acquisition by the **G7 Group** of 60% of the value of CFIT held by Elysées.

However, of the CFIT companies the G7 Group was only interested in Progemar and a warehousing company. Dismantling of CFIT took some time and in the summer of . 1990 led to the creation of a new holding company with 3 areas of activity: that of Taxis G7, warehousing and towing, the latter after the grouping of the companies Progemar and URO under a single business unit.

The name Progemar disappeared and all tug operating companies attached to G7 were renamed '**G7-Les Abeilles de**' followed by the port where they operated. Due to a downturn in the economy and a number of port strikes combined with the necessary fleet renewal the group faced some difficult years.

On the other hand, during these years, the Group, after the acquisition in 1992 of **Sarl Auxport**, which provided port services for the ports of **Caen** and **Cherbourg**, was able to **boast a virtual monopoly on French towing** since,





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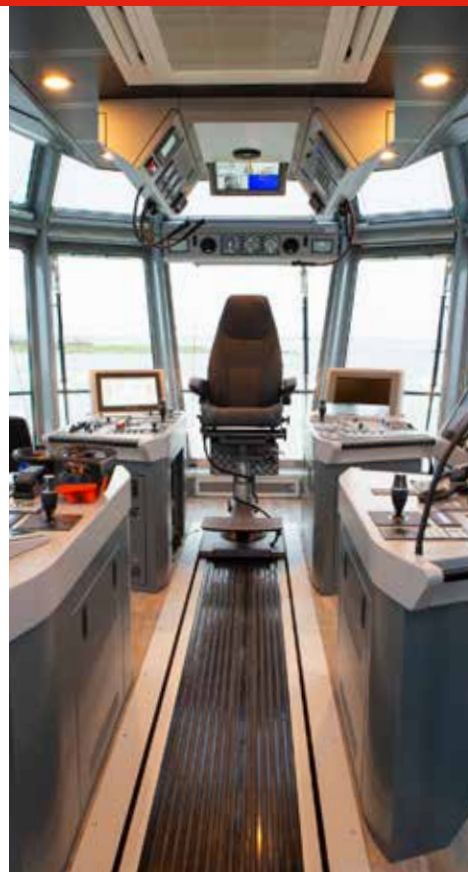
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TSM HONFLEUR was delivered to Thomas Services Maritime of Rouen. The 80 ttp - 2021-built Damen RSD TUG 2513 design - seen here in The Netherlands during trials - works mainly at the river terminals in the River Seine west of Rouen

photo: Nico Giltay

apart from the CCIs of **St Malo** and **Lorient**, which operated their own tugs, SORMAR, which operated in **Rouen**, and Cie Chambon, which operated in **Sete** and partly in **Marseille**, all the other ports were served by Abeille tugs.

The next chapter in the history of French towing began with an outsider from the French island of La Réunion. Mr Jacques de Chateaufieux, president of what was known as Sucreries de Bourbon. It was established in 1948 by the wealthiest families on La Reunion

wishing to control the production and processing of cane sugar themselves. The Bourbon sugar refineries were the leading landowners at La Reunion island and they had diversified over the years into international trade, real estate, financial management, distribution and fishing. In 1989, Cchambon, finding itself in a difficult financial situation, had to entrust its management to SOGIMED. The new manager adjusted the Group's aims by refocusing it on its original business and opted for 'entrepreneurial spirit'. This led to Bourbon which quickly



Thomas in the past years has diversified to include offshore construction and windfarm support etc. TSM KERMOR is a tug / workboat (Eurtug 3210 design) - seen here 31 march, 2024, in the Oude Maas River
photo Nico Giltay

became the main shareholder of this new Marseille-Reunion group (and 50% owner of Chambon).

Mr de Chateaufieux in 1992 announced his continued commitment to invest in niche operations in the sphere of maritime services. It was by the end of 1995 that rumours appeared of Bourbon negotiating the acquisition of Les Abeilles. In early 1996 this was confirmed when G7 announced that it wanted to return to its original businesses and that it considered **Groupe Bourbon** the best option as it would unite Les Abeilles and Chambon. Henceforth Groupe Bourbon subsidiaries were harbour towage (Les Abeilles / Chambon), marine services (Chambon subsidiary SURF), tourist transport, fishery and bulk transport by sea (Setaf-Saget). Fleet replacement was begun.

In 2004 the Bourbon maritime division was reorganised into four divisions: Salvage (Abeilles International – 4 salvage tugs plus two under construction), Towing (Les Abeilles including Chambon – 70 tugs operating in France, West Africa and at La Reunion and Mayotte), Offshore (former SURF – 134 units with 29 under construction) and Transport (Setaf-Saget – 4 bulkers with two under construction and 15 on long-term charter as well as a number of spot charters to fulfil smaller contracts).

By focussing on offshore the sale of Les Abeilles (without Abeille International) became a necessity. In 2007 a client was found in the Spanish **Grupo Boluda**. Offshore was a big attraction for Bourbon and an ambitious newbuilding programme was started in 2010. For this investment other non-core businesses



CHAMBON SUROIT seen 26 June, 2024, at Calais

photo: Hans Hoffmann



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were sold. Vessels were ordered by the dozens – at one time vessels were delivered one every 11 days - and all went well. The company soon became one of the top suppliers of offshore support (in numbers of vessels).

When the offshore crisis set in the large Bourbon newbuild fleet became a burden. The term charter prices and day rates fell through the bottom but the banks had to be repaid as contracted. Vessels were laid-up at an alarming rate. By 2019 the banks no longer accepted half measures and in fact acquired Bourbon Offshore which was placed under control of a new majority shareholder which owned 75% of Bourbon's debt and 100% of its assets, including the brand names. The company was further downsized and restructured.

In 2020 Bourbon sold **Abeille International** to the **Econocom Group**. Econocom set out to acquire two new vessels to be used as ETV tugs. They succeeded where earlier tenders had not

resulted in success and purchased two powerful offshore tug / supply vessels. These were reconstructed in a German yard to optimise them for the ETV service. Once delivered the iconic *Abeille Flandre* and *Abeille Languedoc* were finally sold for scrap after having been in service as ETV's for some 43 years. A propeller and part of the stern of *Abeille Flandre* were saved by Econocom and offered to the city of Brest as a memento for her services. Their location is on the Quay Malbert, her lifelong home. Econocom also acquired extra tonnage for use as back-up as well as for distance towing jobs.

Having completed the delivery of the new ETV's and that of putting the company on a better financial footing Econocom in 2024 sold Abeille International to **Grupo Boluda**.

Meanwhile **Compagnie Maritime Chambon** had been created in late 2002 through the acquisition of subsidiaries of Les Abeilles from Groupe Bourbon.

It was a restart of Chambon on its own feet. A number of subsidiaries were set up: Cie Calaisienne de Remorquage et de Sauvetage operating at Calais and Boulogne Sur Mer, Cie Cherbourgeoise de Remorquage et de Sauvetage operating at Cherbourg, Cie Maritime Chambon Toulon, Monaco Remorquage Maritime and two outside of France, in New Caledonia and Mayotte: SORA Société Océanienne de Remorquage et d'Assistance and SORECAL Société des Remorqueurs Calédoniens.

Conclusion must be that the result has been that the major part of French Towing is now in the hands of a Spanish operator that according to the latest counts operates some 570 tugs worldwide either owned or via joint-ventures. Also that two of the 'old' companies are still active – both family-owned: Chambon and – in the north - Louis Thomas – although that company has diversified its operations and now also supports construction and windfarm operations.



Nantes tugboat station during the transformation from steam to motor. From l to r ABEILLE No. 9, ABEILLE No. 31 and ABEILLE No. 5

postcard: coll. Job van Eijk





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Tug News – New Tugs

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PORTOSALVO - a newbuilding for Rimorchiatori Napoletani

photo: courtesy Sanmar

Rimorchiatori Napoletani

has taken delivery of the tug *Portosalvo*, which rolled down the stocks at Sanmar as *Bogacay LXXVIII*. With a history dating back to 1917, Rimorchiatori Napoletani currently carries out towing services in the ports of Naples, Taranto, Bari and Gaeta. This delivery is the first of a series of four sisterships, two already

confirmed and two under option to be delivered in 2025 and 2026. It is the eighth tugboat that Sanmar has delivered to this owners over the course of a long-standing and successful partnership between the two companies.

Portosalvo is based on the Sanmar RAmports 2400SX MK-II design from

naval architects Robert Allan Ltd, which provides optimal efficiency in ship-handling duties for sea-going ships. With an overall length of 24,4 m, moulded beam of 12 m, least moulded depth of 4,5 m and navigational draft of approximately 5,45 m, the tug can achieve a bollard pull over the stern of 70 tonnes and a free running speed of 12,5 knots.

Svitzer

has taken delivery of its first all-electric tug at a ceremony held at Sanmar's Altinova shipyard in Turkey, attended by top level executives from both companies. The Sanmar ElectRA 2500SX is a Robert Allan Ltd design adapted to Sanmar's requirements. Speaking at the event, Corporate Strategy Director of Sanmar İpek Gürün said: "Our partnership with Svitzer dates back almost two decades. With the delivery of the new e-tug, we proudly mark the 30th tugboat we have built for Svitzer. This is more than a number - it is a testament to a long-standing relationship built on trust, transparency, and a shared commitment to innovation. Today, we are not only celebrating the delivery of a new tugboat; we are also honouring the strength of our collaboration and reaffirming our shared goals for the future of sustainable maritime solutions."

The ceremony was attended by Svitzer Group COO Kasper Karlsen and COO Svitzer Europe Philip Pattenden, along with the company's site managers Jens Rasmussen and Lara Eichler and tug master Martin Kristiansen. Senior Sanmar executives joining Chairman Cem Seven at the event, which was held on June 26, were Vice Chairman & CEO Ali Gürün and Corporate Strategy Director İpek Gürün, along with board members and employees. The event was also attended by guests from Elkon, AKT, ABS and Schottel.

The new tug has an overall length of 25,4 m, with a 12,86 m beam and 5,40 m



All-electric tug delivered to Svitzer

photo: courtesy Sanmar





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draft. It has a battery capacity of 1,808 kWh, Fi-Fi1 fire-fighting capability, and can achieve a bollard pull of 70 tonnes.

ElectRA Series tugs are the first of a new generation of eco-friendly tugs from Sanmar and are available in a range of sizes (19-28 m) and power outputs (40-85 tpb). They are the result of Sanmar's ongoing collaboration with **Robert Allan Ltd** and **Corvus Energy** to build low and no-emission tugs utilising alternative fuels and innovative technological advances. Anmar has successfully completed the construction of 9 fully electric tugboats to date, with 6 more currently under construction.

Marin Tug

recently also received a Bogacay class lass tugboat. Marin and Sanmar have enjoyed a successful commercial relationship for almost two decades, starting in 2006 when Sanmar delivered two 45-tbp twin screw tugs to Marin Tug (*Marin Tug I* and *Marin Tug 2* – ex *Dogancay XI* resp *Dogancay XII* – 2x 1.245 kW / total 3.386 bhp – 'Dogancay' design).

Inceburin is much more powerful – she is a 70-tbp Bogaçay Mk-II design based on the RAmports 2400SX-MK II design. Dimensions are 24.4 m(oa) x 12 (mld) x 4,5 m. Draught is 5,45m. The tugs is equipped to FiFi-I standard for firefighting.

Established in 1998 and headquartered in Istanbul, Turkiye, Marin Tug operates out of several Turkish ports offering offshore towage, salvage and emergency response, services, along with harbour towage and pilotage.

Other tugs acquired from Sanmar by Marin included *Sanmar XXII* (2008 – twin screw 30 tpb, later *Hisaronu*), *Sanmar XXV I Gulf III* (2008 – twin screw 1.640 kW total – 30 tpb), *Bogacay XV I Marintug IV* (2015 – azimuthing stern drive – 3.530 kW – 60 tpb), *Bogacay XVIII* (2015 – azimuthing stern drive – 3.530 kW – 60 tpb), *Bogacay XXXVI* (2018 – azimuthing stern drive – 4.200 kW – 70 tpb). *Sirapinar IX* (2019 – 3.000 kW total – 52,2 tpb), *Sanmar Terminal XXXI* (2019 – azimuthing stern drive – 5.050 kW total – 80,6 tpb), *Yenicay XI I Kaptan Bora Eksi* (2020 – azimuthing stern drive – 1.940 kW total – 32 tpb) and *Sirapinar XVII I Kaptan Metin Leblebicioglu* – 2020 – azimuthing stern drive – 3.000 kW total – 52,6 tpb).



INCEBURUN for Marin

photo: courtesy Sanmar

SAAM Towage

has added two further Bogaçay-design tugs to its fleet: *Bogacay LV* (now *SAAM Charran*) and *Bogacay LXVIII* (now *SAAM Petrel*). A third acquisition is *Trapananda* – a Sanmar ElectRA design - the eighth ElectRA tug Sanmar has delivered, with six more under construction.

The two Bogaçay-class RAmports 2400SX MK-II type tugs are optimised for shiphandling and minimal environmental impact. The 80-tbp tugs are equipped to FiFi-1 standard. Dimensions are 24,4 (oa) x 12 m (mld) with a navigational draught of 5,45 m.

Accommodation is provided for a crew of six. The tugs comply with the latest IMO Tier III emission standards.

The all-electric *Trapananda* has a battery capacity is 3.616 kWh. Bollard pull 70 tonnes, speed 12,5 knots max. Accommodation is s available for a crew of up to seven. The tug was transported to Chile by ship for a delivery voyage that started on 25 May, 2025, at Tuzla running via Las Palmas and the Magellan Strait to Puerto Montt, where she was officially named prior to entering service. It is the first all-electric tug to operate in Latin America while it is



TRAPANANDA - all-electric for SAAM

photo: courtesy Sanmar





SAAM PETREL ex BOGACAY LXVIII

photo: courtesy Sanmar

the third all-electric tug that Sanmar delivered to SAAM. The tug will operate in one of the southernmost terminals in the world-**Puerto Chacabuco**, in the Aysén Region, where she will be serving the ENAP (Empresa Nacional del Petróleo) operations. The tug was named *Trapananda* in honour of the ancient name of Chilean Patagonia, a remote, untamed land covered with dense jungles that represented an unexplored and challenging territory for the first Spanish explorers.

The two other all-electric tugs in the SAAM fleet are *SAAM Volta* and *Chief Dan George* are working in Canada. With the two electric tugs added to the Canadian fleet and several emissions reduction initiatives elsewhere, the fleet is said

to have reduced – in 2024 - its CO₂ emissions by 5.000 metric tonnes .

Hans Schramm

took advantage of the TugTechnology 2025 event to order from Sanmar an azimuthing tractor tug specifically designed for harbour ship-handling, escort, and towing operations. H. Schramm Towage, a family-owned company, primarily operates in the region where the Elbe River meets the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Kiel Canal. The new tug will be a Sanmar **Delçay** design vessel. This is based on the exclusive TRaktor-Z 2500-SX design developed by Canadian naval architects Robert Allan Ltd. This latest order marks the third tug of this specific design and the seventh Sanmar-built tug overall to be delivered to H. Schramm Towage.


Dimensions of the tug are 25,3 m x 12 m with a draught of 6,2 m. The tug will be fitted to FiFi-1 standard. The vessel will comply with IMO Tier III emission standards. Propulsion will be provided by Caterpillar 'E' series main engines




H.J. Schramm orders new tug photo: courtesy Sanmar

ElectRA 2300

for SAAM Towage





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driving **Kongsberg** thrusters, enabling the vessel to achieve an impressive bollard pull of 80 tonnes.

Sanmar has previously delivered six tugboats to H. Schramm Towage. The first was *Corvin* (2005 – 45 tbp - twin screw). In 2007 *Corvin* (2) arrived followed by *Max* in 2007. *Max* (2) was delivered in 2009,. *Torsten* - flattop Navtug-design - was acquired in 2012. In 2020, Sanmar delivered *Sönke*, a 71-tbp ATD tug based on the TRaktor-Z 2500SX design. Most recently, *Bo*, another TRaktor-Z 2500SX model, joined the fleet in 2024.



BOSS for BoB

photo: courtesy Sanmar



Wheelhouse BOSS with IBS controls and rotating helmsman's chair

photo: courtesy Sanmar

Nico Andritter-Witt, Managing Director of H.Schramm Towage, commented: "With the new Deliçay Class tug, we are further strengthening our capabilities in harbour and escort operations—

ensuring the highest levels of safety and efficiency."

Buksér og Berging

received the former *Bogacay* LXV from

the builders Sanmar. *Boss* as she was named by the owners has a bollard pull of 75 tonnes. A new feature in the Bogacay class is introduced with this tug: Sanmar's first **Integrated Bridge System (IBS)**. This architecture consolidates all navigation, communication, and control systems into a unified, streamlined interface, providing captains and chief engineers with enhanced situational awareness and unparalleled operational command. Complementing the IBS, *Boss* is fitted with additional bridge features designed to enhance operational performance, including a 180-degree rotating operator chair, optimizing visibility and control during both ahead and astern manoeuvres.

Boss fully complies with the latest IMO Tier III emissions standards. Further enhancing its operational versatility and safety, the tug is equipped with high-performance towing and tugger winches, tow pins, a stern roller, and a deck crane, ensuring efficient and secure towing operations across a wide range of demanding tasks.

photo back page:

The Dutch shipyard of P. De Vries Lentsch at Alphen a/d Rijn in the 1950s / 1960s delivered a string of harbour tugs to Les Abeilles. ABEILLE No. 1 seen here at the hand-over after trials was completed by the yard in 1959. Dimensions were 23,38 x 6,44 m. She was fitted with a 500 hp main engine driving a propeller rotating in a Kort nozzle. The engine was pneumatically controlled from the bridge. The tugs of this class were designed with an open wheelhouse. Initially ABEILLE No. 1 was working at Le Havre but at the end of 1973 she changed port of registry to Nantes. By the end of the 1970s the open bridge had been reconstructed as an enclosed wheelhouse. In 1986 she was sold to Greece as HIOS. The insert shows sister ABEILLE No. 2 about to be launched, showing her beautiful underwater hull lines – **photo's** resp. P. de Vries Lentsch (Hein de Bouter) and coll. Job van Eijk. The second photo shows her as reconstructed with enclosed wheelhouse in May, 1982, at Nantes (**photo** Job van Eijk)

Sisters were ABEILLE No. 3 (1956), ABEILLE No. 5 (1958), ABEILLE No. 6 (1958 – renamed ABEILLE No. 13 in 1976), ABEILLE No. 2 (1960 – 1985 sold to Bugny, Brest. 1986 as ASTAN to Collinet, Brest. 1991 or 1999 sold to SODARCO, Paimpol. Later to West Africa Maritime in Guinée). ALOUETTE (1960 – 1968 renamed ABEILLE No. 4), ABEILLE No. 9 (1961 – 1974 renamed ABEILLE No. 3. 1978 re-engined 1.200 hp. 1997 sold to Somatram, Pointe à Pitre. 2002 sold by auction while at St. Nazaire), ABEILLE No. 21 (1961 - 1991 sold as HEPHAISTOS to French owners. 1998 live-aboard at Suresnes). No. 5 and 6 were slightly smaller (20 x 5,73 m) and ALOUETTE was delivered with an enclosed wheelhouse and fitted with radio-telephone – she also did some coastal tows as far away as Casablanca). All were 500 hp (650 ihp) with 11 tbp (no. 5 and 6: 550 ihp – 8 tbp).



