



Photo: China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Weihai)

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Large-size ro-pax ferries orderbook expected to only marginally grow

The orderbook for ro-pax ferries in the large-size segment, i.e. exceeding 30,000gt, on 30 September stood at 17 ships, 11 of which were on order or under construction in China with the remaining six ships spread between European and Japanese shipyards. With the imminent delivery of SAINT-MALO and GNV POLARIS, the orderbook will further shrink. Excluding the few newbuild projects that are in the pipeline and Grimaldi Group's planned nine-ship order, AXSRoRo doesn't expect a double-digit ro-pax order boom in the short to medium term due to newbuild prices having gone through the roof as especially container ship orderbooks have swelled exponentially of late. The Chinese shipyards building ro-pax ferries are also active in the PCTC segment, putting further pressure on prices and slots.

For decades, European ferry operators traditionally built (large-scale) ro-pax ferries in Europe, a trend which changed in the late 1990s when a few of them were attracted by the lower prices quoted by South Korean shipyards. As South Korean shipyards are extremely production-focused, they tend to be less flexible when it comes to implementing design adjustments, an attitude which is not always appreciated by e.g. tonnage providers who typically prefer to have a free hand to adjust tonnage to client requirements.

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Cover Story

What is a large-size ro-pax ferry?

Although there is no consensus as to what exactly the definition is of a large-size ro-pax ferry, AXSRoRo defines it as any ferry exceeding 29,999gt, i.e. $\geq 30,000\text{gt}$.

Size bracket	Category
$\geq 30,000\text{gt}$	Large-size
$\geq 20,000\text{gt}$ but $< 30,000\text{gt}$	Large mid-size
$\geq 15,000\text{gt}$ but $< 20,000\text{gt}$	Medium mid-size
$\geq 10,000\text{gt}$ but $< 15,000\text{gt}$	Small mid-size
$< 10,000\text{gt}$	Small-size



Photo: Philippe Holthof

Rederi AB Gotland was the first European ferry owner to build in China. Happy with the 2003-built pair, it built two more LNG-powered ro-pax ferries at GSI.



Photo: Philippe Holthof

Stena RoRo's E-Flexer has been a success story with ten E-Flexers already delivered and at least five more to follow.

Shortly after South Korean shipyards had signed their first contracts with European ferry operators, China's Guangzhou Shipyard International (GSI) clinched a deal with Rederi AB Gotland for the construction of two large-size ro-pax ferries, representing the very first ro-pax ferries built in China for foreign interests. Unsurprisingly, price was 'the' decisive factor for Rederi AB Gotland to order in China, this also being the very reason why it had ordered a freight-oriented ro-pax in Indonesia in the early 1990s, construction of which took over five years.

Eleven years elapsed between the 2003 delivery of Rederi AB Gotland's ro-pax pair from GSI and a follow-up order from the same shipowner-cum-tonnage provider. This was only a prelude to the shape of things to come. In April 2016, Stena RoRo ordered its first E-Flexers at then AVIC Weihai Shipyard – now China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Weihai) – and has remained loyal to the yard since with the E-Flexer platform presently standing at 15 units, plus two NewMax-class methanol dual-fuel hybrid ro-ros.

Stena RoRo had carefully canvassed the Chinese shipbuilding market and although it held long discussions with Huanghai Shipbuilding – China's then most-prolific ro-pax builder, notably of domestic tonnage – it rather opted for AVIC Weihai Shipyard. At the time of the contract signing, AVIC Weihai Shipyard hadn't built a single ro-pax ship. It had just entered the ro-ro segment through an order for a 2,430-lanemetre ro-ro from Italy's Giovanni Visentini and a 33,165gt ro-pax for Jiaodong Shipping. The shipyard's skills, international mentality and contacts, together with Stena RoRo's nose for good deals has proven them right.

Swedes set the tone

Stena RoRo's E-Flexer was initially designed with Stena Line service in mind, but the 'flexibility' of the 'one-size-fits-all' platform quickly attracted interest from other ferry operators. Stena Line operates five E-Flexers, including two lengthened or Stena E-Flexer Mk II versions, with E-Flexers meanwhile being long-term bareboat chartered (with purchase options) by Brittany Ferries, DFDS, and Marine Atlantic. More E-Flexers are to follow with three more E-Flexers added to the tally this year alone: one for Corsica Linea and two for Attica Group, Greece's leading ferry group which holds an option for another two E-Flexers as Stena RoRo continues its negotiations with potential charterers.

A company like Brittany Ferries typically built 'one off' ro-pax ferries at different yards in Europe. This was a very expensive affair as each new-build project had to be started from scratch. With Brittany Ferries' fleet renewal programme in the hands of Stena RoRo (Brittany Ferries will operate no fewer than five E-Flexers as from mid-April next year), European shipyards' hopes to build for them ended up going down the drain – something which also holds true for other operators favouring the Stena E-Flexer.

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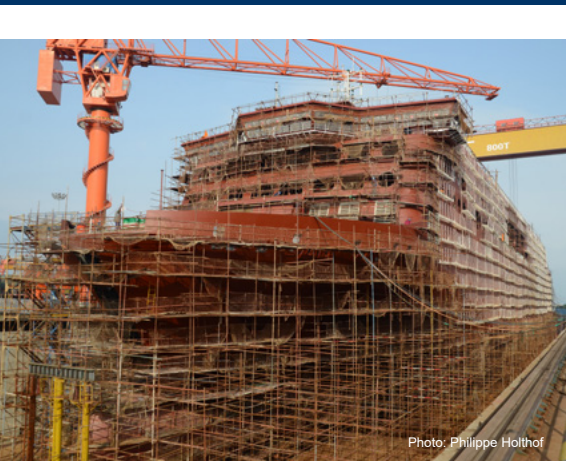


Photo: Philippe Holthof

Stena E-Flexer production at China Merchants Jinling (Weihai) Shipyard.



Photo: GSI

The GSI-built GNV POLARIS is one of four SDA-RI-designed ro-pax ferries for Italy's Grandi Navi Veloci (GNV).



Illustration: Unity Line

Polskie Promy ordered three 47,626gt ro-pax ferries at Remontowa Shipbuilding, two of which will operate for Unity Line with the third one to join Polferries.

While the large-size ro-pax ferry orderbook was rather flat in the aftermath of the 2008 credit crunch and ahead of the 2015 introduction of the 0.1% SECAs, this all changed during the second half of the previous decade as Chinese yards started to take in orders from operators that had hitherto built in either Europe, South Korea, or in the case of P&O Ferries, even Japan. GSI celebrated the 2018 Lunar New Year with a double order from DFDS, which marked the start of a ro-pax newbuilding spree in China.

Chinese yards win hands down

Just eight years after the first four Stena E-Flexers were ordered, Chinese yards can claim the lion's share of the large-size ro-pax orderbook. Based on number of ships and estimated gross tonnage, China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Weihai) has seven ro-pax ferries on order for an aggregated 281,307 gross tonnage. They will also remain in the lead once the Stena E-Flexer-class SAINT-MALO is handed over to Stena RoRo, to be immediately taken on charter by Brittany Ferries any time soon.

Second place GSI currently has four ro-pax ferries in the 30,000-plus gross tonnage size bracket on order. All four vessels are built for MSC Group subsidiary Grandi Navi Veloci with the last three in the series to have a cabin block added towards the stern, atop of what is an open deck on lead ship GNV POLARIS, delivery of which is expected this month. On account of the extra volume taken by the added cabin block, the three modified sister ships will have a gross tonnage that well exceeds GNV POLARIS' 46,403gt. As no exact gross tonnage figures are available yet, AXSRoRo estimates that the aggregated gross tonnage for the four GNVs is close to 200,000gt.

The combined orderbooks of China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Weihai) and GSI represent 65% of the global large-size ro-pax orderbook both in terms of number of ships and estimated aggregated gross tonnage. In Europe, Remontowa Shipbuilding has three 47,626gt ro-pax ferries on order for Polskie Promy, the first two of which will be chartered by Unity Line (Polska Żegluga Morska – PZM or Polsteam) with the third one to be chartered by Polferries (Polska Żegluga Bałtycka – PZB). Although Poland has a rich shipbuilding tradition, it hasn't built large-size ferries during the past few decades. With both PZM and PZB being state-controlled, the Polskie Promy order was politically motivated and it is unlikely that it will lead to orders for similarly sized ro-pax ferries from abroad.

Even so, with its three-ship, 142,878gt orderbook, Remontowa Shipbuilding can claim 18% of the world's large-size ro-pax orderbook, equivalent to 19.5% of the aggregated gross tonnage. While Mitsubishi Shipbuilding is Japan's number one shipbuilder of large-size ro-pax tonnage, it is Naikai Zosen that is currently the sole Japanese shipyard with large-size ro-pax ferries on order, notably MOL Sunflower's freight-oriented ro-paxes SUNFLOWER KAMUY and SUNFLOWER PIRKA. Japanese tonnage rules typically apply for domestic ferries and the ships' 15,600grt will probably translate to about 34,650gt as per AXSRoRo's estimations.

Cover Story



Photo: Mitsui O.S.K. Lines

MOL Sunflower will introduce the Naikai Zosen-built SUNFLOWER KAMUY and sister ship SUNFLOWER PIRKA in 2025.



Photo: Rauma Marine Constructions

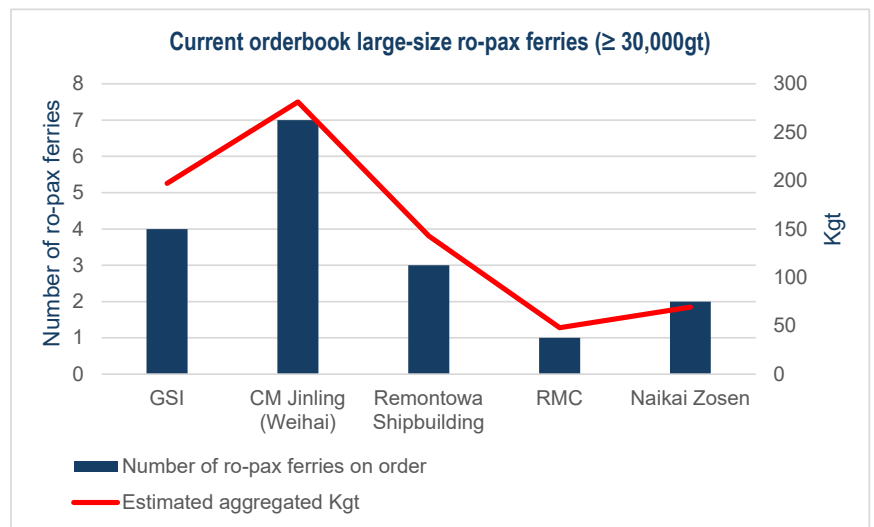
For several decades Finnish shipyards were leading the way in ferry building but today only RMC has large-size ro-pax tonnage on order for TT-Line Company.



Photo: NAOS Ship and Boat Design

Cantiere Navale Visentini is Europe's most prolific builder of ro-pax ferries in the combined large mid-size and large-size segments.

Having recently delivered the 47,994gt SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV to TT-Line Company, Finland's Rauma Marine Constructions (RMC) is the fifth and last shipyard that currently boasts large-size ro-pax tonnage in its orderbook. SPIRIT OF TASMANIA V, a sister ship of SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV, is the only large-size ro-pax ferry left in RMC's orderbook with no new ro-pax orders on the horizon. Under its different ownerships, RMC has been one of Europe's most successful builders of ro-pax tonnage during the last quarter of a century. The yard succumbed under the ownership of STX in 2013 with RMC subsequently rising from its ashes. After a few difficult years, the shipyard was back in the game with the delivery of Bornholm's 18,009gt HAMMERSHUS which was followed by ro-paxes for Wasaline and Tallink, culminating in the double order from TT-Line Company.



Top three shipbuilders of large-size ro-pax ferries

Although the current orderbook clearly demonstrates that Chinese shipbuilders are in the lead, it doesn't paint the full picture. For instance, the number one ro-pax ferry builder in Europe is not Remontowa Shipbuilding, neither is it Naikai Zosen in Japan. Based on the aggregated gross tonnage delivered and on order during the period between 1 January 2018 and 30 September 2024 it is rather RMC and Mitsubishi Shipbuilding, respectively.

With the 47,994gt SPIRIT OF TASMANIA V to be delivered next spring, together with the recently delivered SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV and the 2022-built MYSTAR, RMC reaches a 146,617 aggregated gross tonnage. But Cantiere Navale Visentini comes very close with a 145,322 aggregated gross tonnage. In 2018-2024, both RMC and Visentini also built ro-pax ferries that fell below the 30,000gt threshold. If the 28,658gt sister ships HYPATIA DE ALEJANDRIA and MARIE CURIE are added, then Cantiere Navale Visentini takes the first position in Europe with a total of six ro-pax ferries, equivalent to a 202,638 aggregated gross tonnage. This compares to RMC with five ro-paxes or 188,674 aggregated gross tonnage.

Cover Story

Re-enter the ro-pax segment for European cruise ship builders?

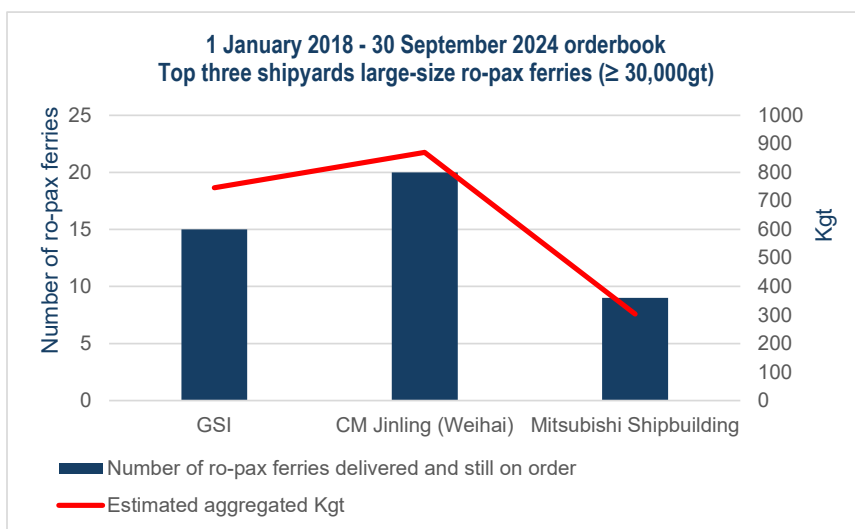
As ro-pax ferries and cruise ships typically require a great deal of interior outfitting, the traditional European ferry builders have also specialised in cruise ship building to such an extent that ferry construction has almost been jettisoned. Especially pre-COVID-19, the ‘big three’ cruise ship builders, i.e. Fincantieri, Chantiers de l’Atlantique, and Meyer Group, were not interested in building ro-pax ferries as cruise ship orders piled up.

But it’s not all peaches and cream. Meyer Werft recently had to be taken on tow by both the German federal government and the Federal State of Lower Saxony through a capital injection. Meyer Werft delivered its last ro-pax ferry, Brittany Ferries’ PONT-AVEN, 20 years ago with the second last being the 1993-built SILJA EUROPA. The colleagues at Meyer Turku have been more active in the ferry segment, completing Tallink’s MEGASTAR in 2017, four years after the delivery of VIKING GRACE. Tallink Grupp is one of the few European operators that supports European shipbuilding and earlier said it would also keep doing so in the future.

Chantiers de l’Atlantique’s last ro-pax project was the 2005-built Calais-Dover ro-pax SEAFRANCE BERLIOZ, today’s CÔTE DES FLANDRES of DFDS. Fincantieri was a major ro-pax ferry builder in the early and mid-2000s but its last ferry project was the 2015-built medium mid-size ro-pax F.-A.-GAUTHIER for Canada’s Société des traversiers du Québec (STQ). Fincantieri’s Palermo shipyard has a 14,500gt ro-pax on order for the Sicily Region but it is fair to say that the ‘big three’ cruise ship builders will probably not re-enter the large-size ro-pax segment in the short to medium term. Even if they were interested, the Chinese shipyards have meanwhile made such inroads into ro-pax shipbuilding that a resurgence of European ferry builders is almost impossible unless the EU, for example, imposes a ‘made in Europe’ obligation for ro-pax ferries servicing inter-EU routes.

Many traditional European ferry builders not active in cruise ship building are out of business. Spanish shipyards, favoured by many ferry operators in the mid-1990s, have all gone or diversified into other segments of shipping. The heyday of Norway’s Fosen Yard is long over while successful ro-pax ferry builders such as Van der Giessen-de Noord have closed shop. In more recent years, Flensburg Schiffbau-Gesellschaft was a quite active builder of ro-pax tonnage but today the yard struggles to survive building ro-ros.

Mitsubishi Shipbuilding has been the most prolific Japanese builder of large-size ro-pax ferries with its Shimonoseki shipyard being the most productive. As the shipyard’s slipways have a 200m length restriction, ferries longer than 200m are typically built at the group’s Nagasaki shipyard. Japanese ferry operators follow a more consistent fleet renewal programme than their peers in Europe. Unlike European ferry operators, Japanese ferry operators have also remained loyal to the domestic shipbuilding cluster. This explains the third position of Mitsubishi Shipbuilding with nine ≥ 30,000gt ro-pax ferries built and on order in 2018-2024 for 303,384 aggregated gross tonnage.



What orders can we expect?

Grimaldi Group’s Emanuele Grimaldi has made no secret of the group’s brave ambition to renew its ro-pax fleet by up to nine ro-pax ferries. The group is building 17 PCTCs in China and last year, China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Weihai) delivered the 5,190-lanemetre and 1,100-passenger capacity FINNSIRIUS and FINNCANOPUS. The pair operates on the twice daily Naantali-Långnäs-Kapellskär route. Advanced plans are on the table to replace the three Fincantieri-built Star-class ro-pax ferries on the Helsinki-Travemünde route with three Superstar Mk II-class ro-pax ferries which are more tailored for the longer distance Finland-Germany route. To reduce speed and fuel consumption/emissions, Finnlines will most likely further shorten port turnarounds, while the Superstar Mk IIs will have a higher passenger capacity than the 2006/7-built Star-class.

Grimaldi Group also controls Minoan Lines, the Greek subsidiary which will equally benefit from the group’s fleet renewal plans. Two new ferries are expected to be ordered for the Piraeus-Heraklion route, replacing the current mainstays KNOSSOS PALACE and FESTOS PALACE, built by Fincantieri in 2001 and 2002, respectively. Last but not least, as part of the nine-ship order, four ro-pax ferries will be earmarked for Grimaldi Lines, most likely for its Italy domestic lines such as Livorno-Olbia.

Cover Story



Illustration: Knud E. Hansen - photo: Jan Philip Eckmann

Early impression of Grimaldi Lines' next-generation ro-pax ferries to be built in China.



Photo: Stena RoRo

Last month marked the first steel cutting of the 13th Stena E-Flexer. To be named CAPU ROSSU, the ro-pax will be taken on long-term charter by Corsica Linea.



Illustration: La Meridionale

CMA CGM-controlled La Meridionale last year ordered two ro-pax ferries at China Merchants Jining (Weihai) Shipyard for delivery in 2027.

Tenders have been sent out to at least four Chinese shipyards, understood to be GSI, China Merchants Jining Shipyard (Weihai), Yantai CIMC Raffles Shipyard, and Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding (SWS), the yard that is building seven PCTCs for Grimaldi Group but, more importantly, it also successfully delivered ADORA MAGIC CITY, the first large cruise ship built in China. Emanuele Grimaldi earlier said he expected to sign the first contracts in late 2024 but 2025 seems more realistic with the orders possibly to be split.

Large-size ro-pax orderbook on 30 September 2024				
Builder	Ship Name	Operator	GT	Year
CM Jinling (Weihai)	SAINT-MALO	Brittany Ferries	30,000 (est.)	2024
CM Jinling (Weihai)	GUILLAUME DE NORMANDIE	Brittany Ferries	38,500 (est.)	2025
CM Jinling (Weihai)	CAPU ROSSU	Corsica Linea	37,807 (est.)	2026
CM Jinling (Weihai)	La Méridionale I TBN	La Méridionale	41,000 (est.)	2027
CM Jinling (Weihai)	La Méridionale II TBN	La Méridionale	41,000 (est.)	2027
CM Jinling (Weihai)	Attica Stena E-Flexer I TBN	Superfast Ferries	46,500 (est.)	2027
CM Jinling (Weihai)	Attica Stena E-Flexer II TBN	Superfast Ferries	46,500 (est.)	2027
GSI	GNV POLARIS	GNV	46,403	2024
GSI	GNV ORION	GNV	50,250 (est.)	2025
GSI	GNV VIRGO	GNV	50,250 (est.)	2026
GSI	GNV IV TBN	GNV	50,250 (est.)	2026
Naikai Zosen	SUNFLOWER KAMUY	MOL Sunflower	34,650 (est.)	2025
Naikai Zosen	SUNFLOWER PIRKA	MOL Sunflower	34,650 (est.)	2025
Remontowa Shipbuilding	Polskie Promy I TBN	Unity Line	47,626 (est.)	2025
Remontowa Shipbuilding	Polskie Promy II TBN	Unity Line	47,626 (est.)	2026
Remontowa Shipbuilding	Polskie Promy III TBN	Polferries	47,626 (est.)	2027
RMC	SPIRIT OF TASMANIA V	Spirit of Tasmania	47,994	2025

Viking Line, the Åland-headquartered cruise ferry operator, had its VIKING GLORY built by Xiamen Shipbuilding Industry in 2021. Both VIKING GLORY and VIKING GRACE, built in 2013 by STX Finland (now Meyer Turku), operate on the Turku-Åland-Stockholm route but its two ro-pax cruise ferries on the Helsinki-Mariehamn-Stockholm route have an average age of 33.5 years. So, not surprisingly, Viking Line has plans to replace at least one of its Helsinki-Mariehamn-Stockholm ro-pax cruise

Cover Story



Photo: Marko Stampel

The Superstar-class has been a success with Grimaldi Group meanwhile having advanced plans to order Superstar Mk IIs for the Helsinki-Travemünde route.



Photo: Philippe Holthof

As DFDS will order battery-electric ro-pax ferries for the Channel, it will undoubtedly carefully study P&O Ferries' GSI-built hybrid diesel-electric Fusion-class.

ferries by a newbuild. VIKING GLORY would serve as the reference ship, but the new ferry for the Helsinki service would have a lower vehicle intake with the separate 640-car lanemetre CEU deck in the aft end of Deck 5 likely to be sacrificed for extra cabin accommodation.

Germany's TT-Line took delivery of the LNG dual-fuel NILS HOLGERSSON and PETER PAN in 2022. The only ro-pax ferries built by the Yizheng facility of China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Nanjing), China's leading builder of short-sea ro-ro tonnage, TT-Line is understood to have approached the shipyard again for a follow-up order of a near-identical multi-fuel pair. Baleària equally has a further fleet renewal programme on the table as either an adapted, more freight-oriented Visentini Mk II or E-Flexer platform stand a good chance. DFDS recently announced to replace its Dover-Calais and Dover-Dunkerque fleet of six ro-pax ferries by a new generation of battery-electric ro-pax ferries. With the first two battery-electric ferries to be in operation by 2030 and four more ships to follow before 2035, an order will most likely only be announced earliest 2026.

In Europe, the ro-pax ferry fleet in the large-size segment is ageing fast but one needs deep pockets to order anew. This, together with future fuel uncertainty, make ro-pax ferries operators hesitate to push the button. For this reason, a double-digit ro-pax order boom from European operators seems unlikely going forward with the ferry powerhouses being the most likely candidates to order a series of ro-pax platforms.

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Ro-Pax Ferry News



Photo: Jan Philip Eckmann

SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV was delivered on 12 September but will only leave in October.



Photo: Jan Philip Eckmann

One of SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV's public spaces, fitted out in the typical Figura style.

Fjord1 sells AUKRA for recycling

Norway's Fjord1 has sold the 1978-built double-ended ferry AUKRA for recycling to Fosen Gjenvinning. Initially operating for Møre og Romsdal Fylkesbåtar (MRF), the 813gt AUKRA had a capacity of 245 passengers and 36 CEUs. It joined Fjord1 in 2005 and acted as a spare and summer support vessel for the past 13 years, lately on the Brattvåg-Dryna route.

This Month's News

RMC hands over SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV to TT-Line Company

On 12 September, Finland's Rauma Marine Constructions (RMC) handed over the 47,994gt SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV to Tasmania's TT-Line Company, the sole cross-Bass Strait ro-pax ferry operator, connecting Geelong with Devonport under the Spirit of Tasmania banner.

The 212m long and 31m beam SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV, to be followed by sister ship SPIRIT OF TASMANIA V in April or May next year, will leave Finland for the Bass Strait at the latest in October, but as the vessel will also require final outfitting once in Australia, it risks missing a good part of the southern hemisphere's summer season.

The first newbuilds ever built for TT-Line Company, SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV and V represent a paradigm shift in terms of capacity and amenities compared to the ro-pax ferries they will replace – the 1998-built 'Super-fast-class' SPIRIT OF TASMANIA I and II.

The new Spirits have a capacity of 1,800 passengers with a total of 301 cabins, supplemented by 165 reclining seats, 47 of which are business recliners. The two main freight decks, Deck 3 and Deck 5, have an intake of approximately 2,500 freight lanemetres, being supplemented by a dedicated car deck on Deck 7. This separate car deck can be directly accessed at bow and stern by linkspans, but as these facilities are still lacking in Tasmania's Devonport, SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV will unlikely be able to do 'doubles' during the summer season, i.e. performing a daily roundtrip at fixed departure times. There is even speculation that SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV and V will only see commercial service once the Devonport berth has been adapted as the newbuilds might meanwhile be laid up.

The 26-knot service speed also offered by SPIRIT OF TASMANIA I and II will remain unchanged and the rationale for introducing three-level linkspans and an auto-mooring system is to reduce port turnarounds from about three hours to just 90 minutes. Thanks to short port turnarounds, Spirit of Tasmania can fit a return sailing in a 24-hour period on the one hand, while offering fixed departure and arrival times on the other.

Wärtsilä has been instrumental in the power package of the new Spirits, having supplied the main engines, auxiliaries and fuel storage, supply, and control systems – Wärtsilä LNGPac. The twin Type C LNG tanks have a capacity of 370m³ and although there is LNG supply in Tasmania from a Westbury plant, it is not big enough to sustain all of the operators on the Bass Strait which means SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV will not be using LNG as its sole fuel. The four Wärtsilä 9L46DF dual-fuel main engines have a total output of 41,220 kW with the three dual-fuel auxiliaries being of Wärtsilä's 20DF type. Earlier responsible for the makeover of SPIRIT OF TASMANIA I and II, Fig-

Ro-Pax Ferry News

Closed loop scrubber upgrade for Color Line ro-paxes

Color Line has selected Wärtsilä to upgrade its scrubbers installed on COLOR FANTASY, COLOR MAGIC, and SUPERSPEED 1 and 2 from open loop to closed loop. Wärtsilä was also responsible for the ships' initial scrubber retrofits ahead of the 1 January 2015 implementation of a 0.1% Baltic and North Sea SECA.

The decision to upgrade its scrubbers from open loop to closed loop comes at a time when the EU is considering prohibiting discharge of scrubber water within 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zones (EEZs) as there is growing scientific evidence of the harmful impact of exhaust gas cleaning system (EGCS) discharge water on the marine environment.

By virtue of many of the scrubber retrofits being open loop rather than closed loop or hybrid scrubbers, global ferry industry association Interferry has called for open loop scrubbers to be grandfathered in, which means that ships with open loop scrubbers already installed shouldn't be penalised by new discharge criteria.

Color Line's fifth ro-pax, the 2019-built COLOR HYBRID, has no scrubber fitted as its hybrid solution sees it using batteries and ultra-low sulphur diesel fuel.



Photo: Condor Ferries

Brittany Ferries meanwhile controls 51% of Channel Islands lifeline ferry operator, holding an option to gain full control.

ura's Richard Nilsson was also the interior architect of choice for the new-builds. The Swede has been working closely with Stena Line for the past 37 years, so unsurprisingly the interior design of SPIRIT OF TASMANIA IV is something of a blend between Stena Line's latest generation, the Stena E-Flexer, and the interior design of the refurbished Spirits, although the décor reflects the look and feel of Tasmania.

Finland's Foreship was responsible for the concept design and also acted as owner's consultants once the two-ship contract had been signed in April 2021. Basic design was in the hands of RMC whose orderbook extends to 2028. Once part of STX Finland, RMC celebrates its tenth anniversary and has delivered four ro-pax ferries during the past six years alone with SPIRIT OF TASMANIA V being the last ro-pax in the current orderbook.

Brittany Ferries becomes majority shareholder in Condor Ferries as it raises capital

Jersey's competition watchdog, Jersey Competition Regulatory Authority (JCRA), has given Brittany Ferries the nod to become Condor Ferries' majority shareholder as the Breton ferry operator has increased its stake in the Channel Islands ferry operator to 51%. London-based Columbia Threadneedle European Sustainable Infrastructure Fund (ESIF), with whom Brittany Ferries partnered to take over Condor Ferries from Macquarie Infrastructure and Real Assets (MIRA) in 2019, has become a minority shareholder with Brittany Ferries holding an option to gain full control of the lifeline ferry operator.

Following the change in ownership, Brittany Ferries has assumed operational responsibility for Condor Ferries with immediate effect while Brittany Ferries CEO Christophe Mathieu also remains at the helm of Condor Ferries, a responsibility he assumed in February this year after Condor Ferries CEO John Napton stepped down. Condor Ferries and Brittany Ferries are still awaiting the outcome of the Channel Islands tender which is expected to be announced later this month with the 15-year ferry contract becoming effective from April 2025.

Although freight revenues have reached close to 20% of Brittany Ferries' total revenues during the past 12 months, the company somehow remains heavily passenger-focused. So, not surprisingly, the Roscoff-headquartered ferry operator didn't come out of the COVID-19 crisis and Brexit unscathed as compatriot CMA CGM threw a lifeline in 2021 with the loan converted into a 12% stake in 2023. Breton cooperatives still control 75% of Brittany Ferries, but of late the company's equity increased to approximately EUR 40 million as eight new shareholders from Brittany have entered the business.

Maintaining strong ties with the regions of Brittany and Normandy, Brittany Ferries is also committed to reimburse the respective regions' aid schemes granted to Brittany Ferries during the pandemic: EUR 30 million

Ro-Pax Ferry News

Ageing freight-oriented Baltic ro-pax ferries sold?

Although the Polish monthly magazine 'Polska na Morzu' recently reported that Polferries' (PZB) BALTIVIA had been sold to Georgian interests, citing Polferries CEO Piotr Redmerski, the 1981-built freight-oriented ro-pax hasn't moved from its berth at Gdynia's Shiprepair Yard Nauta since withdrawn from service following the late July introduction of the Visentini Mk II-class VARSOVIA.

Both BALTIVIA and CRACOVIA became surplus to requirements and were put on the market, with the latter having recently left Poland to take up its charter with Nouris Elbahr Ferries (see separate news p. 15). AXS-RoRo's request to have the news of the sale of the 1,408-lanemetre and 244-passenger capacity BALTIVIA re-confirmed by Redmerski remained unanswered.

In other news, the 1,598-lanemetre and 186-passenger capacity STENA GOTHICA has been sold too with the 1982-built ro-pax, re-named GOTHICA, devoid of Stena Line branding and its twin red funnels painted blue. The colour of the funnels together with the flag change to Panama may indicate that Ukrferry is the new owner, something Stena neither confirmed nor denied.



Photo: Stena Line

The future of STENA VISION in the Stena Line fleet remains uncertain as the 1987-built ro-pax will be withdrawn from the Rosslare-Cherbourg route soon.

will be paid back to the Brittany Region this month while the Normandy Region will get EUR 35 million back in November.

Last year, Brittany Ferries carried 2,026,876 passengers and 155,592 freight units as the company is implementing a fleet renewal programme whereby Stena E-Flexer class tonnage forms the backbone of its operations. Three long-term bareboat chartered Stena E-Flexers that primarily operate on the company's routes from the UK and Ireland to Sapin will be joined by two modified, 'Ouireham-max' versions in February and April 2025, respectively. The passenger-oriented SAINT-MALO underwent sea trials in mid-September and will be introduced on the Saint-Malo-Portsmouth service on 12 February 2025, replacing the almost iconic 1989-built BRETAGNE. On 18 April 2025, GUILLAUME DE NORMANDIE will take over from the 1992-built NORMANDIE on Brittany Ferries' Ouistreham (Caen)-Portsmouth flagship service, joining the 2002-built MONT ST MICHEL.



Photo: Brittany Ferries

Stena Line back to one ship on Rosslare-Cherbourg route

Stena Line will withdraw STENA VISION from the direct Rosslare-Cherbourg 'Brexit bypass' route on 27 October, bringing the number of weekly departures in either direction back from six to three.

After having become surplus to requirements on the Karlskrona-Gdynia route following the 2022/23 introduction of its lengthened E-Flexers STENA ESTELLE and STENA EBBA, the 1987-built STENA VISION was adapted for the Rosslare-Cherbourg route with a hoistable internal ramp installed and its clam-type bow doors welded shut.

Replacing the chartered 1,830-lanemetre freighter SEATRUCK PANORAMA (the current SANTA RITA of Transportación Marítima de California) in late June 2023, the 1,300-passenger and 2,214-lanemetre capacity STENA VISION represented a significant passenger capacity boost as the ro-pax,

Ro-Pax Ferry News

Brittany Ferries starts to bunker bio-LNG

Global multi-energy company Repsol and Brittany Ferries are further strengthening their collaboration in Spain, where the French ferry operator has access to fixed Repsol-operated LNG bunker stations as part of its Santander and Bilbao terminals.

Repsol has started supplying liquefied biomethane (bio-LNG) to Brittany Ferries' LNG-fuelled Stena E-Flexer-class SALAMANCA and SANTOÑA at its LNG bunkering station in Santander with a first test consisting of three truckloads totalling 60 tonnes of bio-LNG.

Generated from agri-food industry, agriculture, and household waste, as well as sewage plant sludge, Repsol's bio-LNG is produced at a facility in As Somozas, some 400 km west of Santander.

unlike the Visentini-class mainstay STENA HORIZON, also offered cruise ferry-like standards.

Despite a successful first summer season with the number of passengers and cars almost doubling compared to the summer of 2022, the number of weekly Rosslare-Cherbourg roundtrips was temporarily reduced from six to three during the winter season when STENA HORIZON was used for drydock cover on the North Sea, followed by a mid-February 'stopgap' debut on Stena Line's then newly opened Birkenhead-Dublin route.

Following a strategic route review, Stena Line has decided to permanently withdraw STENA VISION from the Rosslare-Cherbourg route on 27 October, reducing the number of weekly sailings from six to three in either direction, operated by the 2,244-lanemetre, plus 170-car and 970-passenger capacity STENA HORIZON. However, Stena Line announced it would selectively deploy additional support tonnage for STENA HORIZON during periods of peak demands.

Stena Line hasn't communicated what's next for STENA VISION but it is understood that potential buyers have already shown interest as its sister ship, the 1988-built STENA SPIRIT, continues to operate alongside STENA ESTELLE and STENA EBBA on the Karlskrona-Gdynia route.

The Rosslare-Cherbourg service has been in the hands of Stena Line for the past ten years after the pan-European ferry operator took over the route and its single ship, CELTIC HORIZON – the current STENA HORIZON, from Celtic Link Ferries. Under Stena Line stewardship, STENA HORIZON remained on time charter from Visentini-affiliated Visemar di Navigazione, yet it is understood that Stena Line might purchase the ro-pax from its Italian owners.

Newbuilding spree for Torghatten Nord continues

Torghatten Nord, part of Nordic Ferry Infrastructure-controlled Torghatten, is further expanding its newbuilding orderbook as the Norwegian fjord ferry operator has added four more double-enders to its tally, bringing the total number of newbuilds currently on order to 11.

Türkiye's Özata Shipyard will build a pair of 76.85m long electric double-enders with a battery capacity of 1.96 MWh each. Naval architecture consultancy The Norwegian Ship Design Company is responsible for the design of the 202-passenger and 60-CEU capacity zero-emission ferries that will sail on the 10-minute Festvåg-Misten shuttle service which Torghatten Nord will take over from Fjord1 on 1 January 2025 as it won the 10-year concession for the route earlier this year.

Two smaller electric double-enders will be built by Norway's Oma Baatbyggeri. The catamaran-type all-aluminium newbuilds will have a capacity of 95 passengers and 28 CEUs or a combination of 18 CEUs and a single truck. The 49m long and 13m beam ferries represent a further



Illustration: The Norwegian Ship Design Company

Özata Shipyard will build two 1.96 MWh double-enders for Torghatten Nord.



Illustration: Oma Baatbyggeri

Oma Baatbyggeri will build two small all-aluminium double-enders.

Ro-Pax Ferry News



Photo: Meine Fähre

The GS Yards-built MEINE FÄHRE 1 connects Norddeich with Norderney.

Construction of Stena E-Flexer #13 starts, to be named CAPU ROSSU

On 11 September, China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Weihai) started to cut the first steel of Stena RoRo's 13th 'one-size-fits-all' E-Flexer. To be named CAPU ROSSU, China Merchants Jinling's (Weihai) hull number W0283 will be delivered in March 2026. The 202.90m long and 27.8m beam Stena E-Flexer will be long-term bareboat chartered by Corsica Linea, the Corsica-headquartered ferry operator that took delivery of the Visentini Mk II-class A GALEOTTA in December 2022.

Rather than ordering a sister ship of A GALEOTTA, Corsica Linea opted for Stena's E-Flexer platform, the 2,505-lanemetre and 1,035-passenger intake of which comes close to A GALEOTTA's 2,559 freight lanemetres and 1,000 passengers. The construction timeline of the 234-passenger-cabin CAPU ROSSU is quite challenging with just 26 months between contract signing and delivery.

When introduced in June 2026, the 23-knot twin-engine LNG multi-fuel Stena E-Flexer for Corsica Linea will operate between Marseille and Corsica (Bastia and Ajaccio). It will also have a 'battery-ready' class notation from DNV. Corsica Linea already has A NEPITA, ex-STENA SUPERFAST X, on long-term bareboat charter from Stena RoRo.

evolution of the hybrid-electric KINSARVIK which Oma Baatbyggeri delivered to Boreal Sjø in 2019.

The pair is slated for delivery during Q4 2025 and will be introduced on the Korsfjord-Nyvoll and Klockarøy-Kjerringholmen routes in Finnmark, northern Norway, in January 2026. Unlike other Norwegian shipyards, construction of the hull will not be subcontracted to a Turkish shipyard with Oma Baatbyggeri calling on the Norwegian suppliers' cluster, including Bergen-located BOS Power that will be responsible for the integration of the electric/hybrid propulsion system and ships' monitoring systems.

New East Frisian Islands ferry operator kicks off

Founded and backed by Norderney-based hotelier families together with A. und E. Korus-Stiftung (a Norderney foundation), Meine Fähre has broken the monopoly of incumbent Norddeich-Norderney ferry operator AG Reederei Norden-Frisia or Frisia for short.

Although it's like a David versus Goliath story, Meine Fähre introduced the brand-new MEINE FÄHRE 1 between the German mainland port of Norddeich and Norderney on 18 September. Operating from its own 'terminals', the shape of the underwater hull on MEINE FÄHRE 1's Norderney end is reminiscent of a ro-ro landing craft with the ramp landing on the beach.

As the Dutch builders of the 50.0m long and 13.2m beam MEINE FÄHRE 1, Groningen-based GS Yards, went bust, Meine Fähre missed the summer season but the company has high hopes that it can compete with Frisia, which has been operating between Norddeich and Norderney for over 150 years.

The Wadden Sea with its tidal mud flats requires a flat bottom with the 898gt MEINE FÄHRE having a 1.6m draft. It is also equipped with a set of spud poles, allowing for the hull to be raised out of the water. With a capacity of 90 passengers and 27 CEUs or a combination of 18 CEUs and five 12-tonne trucks, MEINE FÄHRE 1 carries vehicle passengers only as foot passengers will be transported by the dedicated 45-passenger ferry MEINE FÄHRE 2 once this 2005-built passenger-only ferry comes into service.

MEINE FÄHRE 1 makes four return crossings per day, increasing to five during peak periods. This compares to up to 13 daily return sailings operated by Frisia.

CMAL further optimises design of NorthLink's 'Freight Plus' pair

While Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL) is first and foremost known for the Clyde and Hebrides Islands ferries leased to CalMac Ferries, it equally owns five Northern Isles ferries that operate lifeline

Ro-Pax Ferry News



Illustration: Leadship

Leadship's concept design of the so-called 'Freight Plus' freight-oriented ro-pax ferries meant to replace HELLIAR and HILDASAY.

Aldo Grimaldi heirs each take an Apuania-class ro-pax

The heirs of Aldo Grimaldi, the legendary Genoese shipowner who passed away in December 2018 aged 96, have reorganised Grimaldi Holding. Giovanni Grimaldi and his two sisters, Isabella and Alessandra, have divided the company's assets, including the three Apuania-class ro-pax ferries that are fixed on long-term bareboat charters.

Giovanni Grimaldi's Griffin now owns the 2010-built REGINA SEAWAYS. On charter to DFDS and currently in service between Karlshamn and Klaipeda, REGINA SEAWAYS was valued at EUR 37 million. Isabella Grimaldi's Grimaldi Investments took control of TENACIA. The 2008-built ro-pax, valued at EUR 31.6 million, operates under the GNV banner between the Spanish mainland and the Balearics. Equally on charter to GNV is Alessandra Grimaldi's Grimaldi Capital-owned and 2010-built FORZA, valued at EUR 36.9 million.

Aldo Grimaldi was one of the four brothers of the late Guido Grimaldi, the founding father of today's Grimaldi Group, the Neapolitan group that is co-managed by his sons Gianluca and Emanuele. After a careful analysis of the business, Aldo – the uncle of Gianluca and Emanuele – amicably split with the Neapolitans in late 1994, going his own way to ultimately create Grimaldi Holding.

ferry services on behalf of Serco NorthLink Ferries, a contract that runs to 2028.

In addition to the ro-pax vessels HJALTLAND and HROSSEY, NorthLink operates the dedicated ro-ro freighters HELLIAR and HILDASAY on services from Aberdeen to Kirkwall (Orkney) and Lerwick (Shetland). Completed in 1997 and 1999, respectively, these 1,057-lanemetre ro-ros are due for replacement by two 'Freight Plus' freight-oriented ro-pax ferries that can operate in both passenger and freight-only mode, guaranteeing the necessary flexibility to better cope with passenger demand during peak periods.

With the final conceptual design work for the two 1,400-lanemetre and 200-passenger capacity 'Freight Plus' ro-pax ferries expected to be ready by mid-December, CMAL is poised to send out an invitation to tender early next year, subject to funding. CMAL hopes to have the newbuilds in service by 2029.

Weather and sea conditions on the Northern Isles route can be extremely challenging. By virtue of NorthLink operating lifeline services, reliability is key which is why Leadship, the naval architects behind the 'Freight Plus' design, have further optimised modelling of the 140m long and 23.4m beam platform with the windage area in the latest design being reduced by about 15% to make sure the vessels can also leave and enter Aberdeen in the most extreme weather conditions.

The initial design called for dual-fuel engines but as supply of LNG in this part of the UK can be problematic, it is very likely that the 20-knot newbuilds will bunker MGO rather than LNG.

Caronte & Tourist disposes of LAMPEDUSA

Following the purchase of the 1993-built LAS PALMAS DE GRAN CANARIA from Armas Tramediterranea Group earlier this year, Italy's Caronte & Tourist has reportedly sold its 1974-built, 9,183gt LAMPEDUSA with its place on the Trapani-Pantelleria temporarily taken by PIETRO NOVELLI.

In November last year, Caronte & Tourist took delivery of NEREA from Sefine Shipyard. Operating under the Siremar brand, NEREA was specifically designed for the so-called Isole Minori, linking Sicilian mainland ports with the minor island chains serving the 93-nautical-mile Trapani-Pantelleria route on the one hand and the shorter Milazzo-Aeolian Islands route on the other.

Rather than building a sister ship of NEREA, Caronte & Tourist expanded its fleet through the acquisition of LAS PALMAS DE GRAN CANARIA which will ultimately replace the 50-year-old LAMPEDUSA, the future of which is likely a recycling facility.

Ro-Pax Ferry News



Photo: Stefan Verberckmoes

The 1978-built MOBY CORSE is one of three ro-pax ferries that left the Moby fleet in September.



Photo: Philippe Holthof

Although still in pristine condition, the 55-year-old MOBY ALE has been sold for recycling.

ASTERION II back on Crete route

Withdrawn from the Patras-Igoumenitsa-Venice route earlier this year and spending the best part of the summer on the Piraeus-Samos/Dodecanese trade, ASTERION II is now back on ANEK Lines' Piraeus-Heraklion overnight service, replacing the Superfast Ferries-branded ARIADNE which has been re-introduced on the Adriatic, initially as drydock cover for the Patras-Igoumenitsa-Bari ro-pax SUPERFAST II. KISSAMOS, recently purchased by Attica Group, remains the second ro-pax on the Piraeus-Heraklion route.

Moby Group offloads three stalwarts

After having sold the 1974-built MOBY VINCENT for recycling earlier this year, Moby Group is bidding farewell to another three of its smaller veteran ro-pax ferries. MOBY CORSE, completed by Aalborg Værft as DFDS's DANA ANGLIA in 1978, already played second fiddle with winter layups, also being chartered out to MSC Group subsidiary SNAV during the 2021 and 2022 summer seasons.

Acquired from Brittany Ferries in late 2009, MOBY CORSE primarily spent its last summer season on the Genoa-Olbia and Genoa-Bastia routes, making its last crossing from Bastia to Genoa on 15 September after which the 19,589gt ro-pax was laid up prior to being handed over to its new owner, understood to be Italy's Ferry Med. Vado Ligure-headquartered Ferry Med, controlled by Rihard Stergulc, reportedly paid in the region of EUR 8 million for MOBY CORSE. It is believed that Stergulc is the same person who was in his former life MD of Transeuropa Shipping Lines (TSL). TSL controlled TransEuropa Ferries, the Oostende-Ramsgate ro-pax ferry operator that went bust in 2013.

Hot on the heels of the news that MOBY CORSE would be leaving the Moby fleet, it was announced that also the 1969 Aalborg Værft-built MOBY ALE would be withdrawn from service at the end of September. MOBY ALE – named after Vincenzo Onorato's second son, Alessandro – was acquired by Moby in 1996. Both Achille and Alessandro Onorato were still young boys when their father bought the ship and during a family lunch, they came up with the idea to designate 30% of MOBY ALE's accommodation to children which was also why the vessel obtained an eye-catching hull artwork by Ettore Sottsass Jr.

MOBY ALE has been one of the mainstays on the Piombino-Portoferraio (Elba) route for the past 27.5 years and although still in pristine condition, the 55-year-old classic ferry has been sold for recycling in Turkey.

Yet another 'old lady' servicing both Cavo and Portoferraio from Piombino but also the Strait of Bonifacio, the 1974-built BASTIA, had its Moby insignia painted out in mid-September, signalling the end under Moby Group ownership was near. Rather than ending on the beach, the 650-passenger and 100-CEU capacity ferry – Moby's first ever newbuild – has been sold to the Sorrento-based Gulf of Naples operator Alilauro Gru.so.n.

Sale of Zante Ferries pair to Fast Ferries not a done deal yet

Zante Ferries' 22 September extraordinary general meeting didn't give its nod for the sale of DIONISIOS SOLOMOS and ADAMANTIOS KORAIIS to Panagiotakis-controlled Fast Ferries with the decision initially deferred to yet another extraordinary general meeting.

Ro-Pax Ferry News

CRACOVIA joins Nouris Elbahr Ferries

Nouris Elbahr Ferries, the newly formed Algerian ferry operator that earlier promised to start an Algeria-France ferry line in direct competition with state-owned Algérie Ferries (ENTMV), is making all necessary preparations to introduce Polferries' chartered CRACOVIA any time soon.

The 650-passenger and 2,196-lanemetre capacity CRACOVIA finally left Swinoujscie for Algiers on 24 September. Nouris Elbahr Ferries hasn't communicated yet when exactly CRACOVIA will make its commercial maiden voyage but in addition to Béjaïa-Marseille, the privately owned Algerian ferry operator announced it would also operate on three other routes: Algiers-Alicante, Oran-Alicante, and Algiers-Marseille.

Over 2.8 million passengers crossed the Gibraltar Strait during OPE

This year's Operación Paso del Estrecho (OPE) or Operation Marhaba, whereby Moroccans residing in Europe cross the Gibraltar Strait to spend their summer holidays in their native country, saw a throughput of over 2.8 million passengers and 662,000 cars between 5 June and 5 September, an increase of 5.5% and 17%, respectively, compared to the same period in 2023.

Tangier Med remained the main gateway with a throughput of 1.62 million passengers and 427,000 cars, followed by Tanger Ville with a throughput of 639,000 passengers and 101,000 cars. The port of Nador handled 531,000 passengers and 125,000 cars while the port of Al Hoceima counted 46,000 passengers and 10,000 cars. Passenger and car movements peaked on 3 and 4 August when some 80,000 passengers and 20,000 cars entered Morocco.

Zante Ferries' shareholders were not on the same page as George Theodosis-controlled Levante Ferries from Zakynthos had meanwhile come with an offer that well exceeded that of Panagiotakis with whom a preliminary sales agreement had already been signed.

A minority of the shareholders didn't await the outcome of the new extraordinary general meeting and submitted a deferral request as the two ferries should rather be sold to the new highest bidder. The 29 September extraordinary general meeting has put the sale of DIONISIOS SOLOMOS and ADAMANTIOS KORAIIS on hold.

La Méridionale discontinues Toulon-L'Île-Rousse route

As expected, La Méridionale has pulled the plug on its new Toulon-L'Île-Rousse route which was extended to Livorno during the summer season. KALLISTE performed its last sailing on the mainland France-Corsica route on 30 September and has meanwhile been cascaded to La Méridionale's Marseille-Tangier Med route, taking over from the Visentini Mk I-class PELAGOS on 3 October.

La Méridionale had agreed with the trade unions to not accept freight on the Toulon- L'Île-Rousse service as the unions were of the opinion that it would jeopardise Corsica Linea's and La Méridionale's public service contract routes from Marseille to Corsica. Clearly, the trade unions shot themselves in the foot but now call a strike over La Méridionale's logical decision to discontinue the Toulon-L'Île-Rousse service.

Sicilian Region seeks funding to build second ro-pax at Fincantieri Palermo

In October last year, the Sicilian Region finally pushed the button to build a 14,500gt 'made in Sicily' ro-pax ferry to serve the remote islands of Lampedusa, Linosa, and Pantelleria from mainland Sicily. Due to be delivered by the Palermo site of Fincantieri during H2 2026, the 19-knot dual-fuel hybrid ro-pax will have a capacity of 1,000 passengers and 200 CEUs.

An option for a sister ship was attached to the near EUR 120 million contract and the Sicilian Region is poised to exercise this option as it seeks EUR 140 million in funding. The second newbuild would equally serve lifeline services to smaller islands belonging to Sicily.

Naikai Zosen launches SUNFLOWER PIRKA

Set to become the fourth LNG dual-fuel ro-pax in the MOL Sunflower fleet, SUNFLOWER PIRKA was launched by Naikai Zosen on 4 September. The second vessel in an innovative two-ship series, SUNFLOWER PIRKA will be

Ro-Pax Ferry News



Photo: Naikai Zosen

SUNFLOWER PIRKA takes to the water at Naikai Zosen.

VOLCAN DE TABURIENTE heads for Greece

The 17 September takeover of Armas Transmediterránea Group's 2006-built VOLCAN DE TABURIENTE by Stefanou brothers-controlled Golden Star Ferries was delayed as the 2006-built, 1,500-passenger and 305-CEU capacity ro-pax reportedly didn't meet the contractual specifications. With the takeover issues settled, VOLCAN DE TABURIENTE was renamed ANDROS KING on 27 September, provisionally reflagged to St. Kitts and Nevis.

Once rebuilt and adapted for Greek domestic service, the 130.45m x 21.60m ANDROS KING will bring the number of conventional ferries on Golden Star Ferries' Rafina-East Cyclades route to three, matching the number of conventional ferries operated by direct competitor Fast Ferries.

delivered in April 2025 after which it will be introduced between Oarai and Tomakomai.

MOL Sunflower currently operates four ferries on the 754-nautical-mile Oarai-Tomakomai route: the 2017, Japan Marine United (JMU)-built sister ships SUNFLOWER FURANO and SUNFLOWER SAPPORO as well as the 2001, Mitsubishi Shipbuilding's Shimonoseki-built SUNFLOWER DAISETSU and SUNFLOWER SHIRETOKO.

With a capacity of 157 passengers, 155 13m trucks plus 50 cars, the freight-oriented SUNFLOWER PIRKA and sister ship SUNFLOWER KAMUY, to be introduced in January 2025, will replace the latter pair, the 154-passenger, 161-truck and 62-car capacity of which is on a par with the newbuilds.

The 199.4m long and 28.6m beam SUNFLOWER PIRKA and KAMUY represent a radical change in ro-pax ferry design, resulting in a 35% lower fuel consumption compared to the vessels they will replace with the so-called ISHIN hull shape using oblique headwinds as propulsion. The windshield-like design of the bow also reduces wind resistance.

SUNFLOWER PIRKA is equipped with a single dual fuel MAN B&W 12S50ME-C8.5-GI main engine with an output of 21,240 kW. It drives a single controllable pitch propeller, achieving a 24-knot service speed.

MERCANDIA VIII to leave the Øresund for the Ionian Sea?

Sources close to Kerkyra Lines report that the Greek ferry operator has acquired the 383-passenger and 110-CEU capacity MERCANDIA VIII from Öresundslinjen, a Molslinjen subsidiary. Laid up in Landskrona, the 95.8m long and 15.0m double-ender acted as a reserve and freight support ship but also had a few charter spells when surplus to requirements.

Dating from 1987, MERCANDIA VIII is part of the 15-ship UK-built Superflex series, two of which already operate for Kerkyra Lines, CORFU SPIRIT and NIKOLAOS. Öresundslinjen also still operates the 1989-built MERCANDIA IV which boasts far superior accommodation to MERCANDIA VIII.

BC Ferries enters next phase in procurement process of New Major Vessels

Having earlier issued a Request for Supplier Qualification (RFSQ) to identify and shortlist shipyards to build its next-generation of double-enders, Canadian west coast ferry operator BC Ferries has come yet another step closer in the procurement process of its first five double-enders to be introduced on its busiest routes between Vancouver Island and the lower mainland, offering increased capacity.

Ro-Pax Ferry News



Illustration: BC Ferries

Rendering of BC Ferries' New Major Vessels, the concept design of which was in the hands of LMG Marin.



Photo: Philippe Holthof

End of the line for WSF's retired 1968-built ELWHA.

Pre-qualified shipyards are eligible to participate in the Request for Proposals (RFP) process with contracts for the 2,100-passenger and 360-CEU capacity double-ended ro-paxes expected to be awarded in spring 2025, subject to approval from BC Ferries Commissioner Eva Hage. The first newbuild is expected to be introduced in 2029, with all five in service by 2031.

Norway's LMG Marin has been instrumental in the conceptual design of the new vessel class which will ultimately replace up to six existing major vessels, including three 1976-built C-class or Cowichan-class double-enders although BC Ferries noted that the 1981-built C-class QUEEN OF SURREY and QUEEN OF OAK BAY would undergo a life extension programme to keep pace with increased customer demand.

BC Ferries' so-called New Major Vessels (NMV) programme represents the company's largest capital investment ever, with the first five ships to be followed by two more by 2037, allowing for BC Ferries to refine the last two vessels based on insights and operational performance from the first five NMVs.

The hybrid vessels are designed with energy efficiency at the forefront, utilising bio/renewable fuels and battery technologies. The vessel class will also be futureproofed to operate fully electric as port infrastructure evolves.

Standardisation has been the name of the game since the introduction of the Salish- and Island-class double-enders and this will be no exception for the new generation of major vessels, creating efficiencies in crew training and allowing for easier vessel redeployment during maintenance.

Despite a successful summer season with over 8,040,000 passengers and 3,150,000 vehicles carried during July and August alone, BC Ferries recently came in for criticism after the 1964-built QUEEN OF NEW WESTMINSTER lost a propeller, keeping the ship out of service for approximately six months.

Sale of decommissioned WSF ferries falls through

Citing "multiple failures to meet contractual obligations and deadlines", the sale of Washington State Ferries' (WSF) ELWHA and KLAHOWYA is void. The double-ended ferries, retired in April 2020 and July 2017, respectively, had been sold for scrap for USD 100,000 each. Both decommissioned ships had been certified free of hazardous materials and were supposed to be towed to a clean, green steel mill facility in Ecuador by the buyer, Nelson Armas.

Following a malfunction of towing equipment used by the buyer, ELWHA and KLAHOWYA were not removed by the deadline mandated in the purchase and sales agreements. Under the default terms of the contracts, the buyer also forfeited the USD 100,000 paid for each ship as damages. Besides malfunctioning tug equipment, there were also concerns about

Ro-Pax Ferry News

ELIO starts to bunker LNG at last

Almost six years after being introduced on the Messina Strait, Caronte & Tourist's Sefine Shipyard-built LNG dual-fuel double-ender ELIO will start bunkering LNG on 4 October. The supply of LNG in this part of Italy has been problematic, not to mention red tape. Despite Caronte & Tourist's relentless efforts to use LNG as an alternative fuel, the 1,500-passenger, 610-lanemetre plus 104-CEU capacity ELIO has burned marine diesel oil for the past six years.

New ferries for Trans-Caspian International Transport Route?

Although Uzbekistan has no sea ports, plans are underway for Turkmenistan to build a new Caspian Sea port that would serve as the gateway to and from Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan also recently joined forces with Azerbaijan to construct ferries for the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route or so-called Middle Corridor that starts from Southeast Asia and China, runs through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia and further to Europe.

The newbuild project is worth USD 150 million and Azerbaijan Caspian Shipping Company's (ASCO) 2021/22-built AZERBAIJAN and ZARIFA ALIYEVA are understood to serve as the reference ships for the new joint initiative. Completed by Baku Shipyard, the 154.50m long and 17.50m beam rail-enabled ro-pax ferries have a capacity of 900 freight lanemetres and 100 passengers.

the poor living conditions of the tug boat crew who were allegedly also intimidated by Armas, further giving rise to reevaluate the sale.

The 144-CEU Super-class ELWHA and 1958-built Evergreen State-class KLAKHOWYA are back on the market with potential buyers already having shown interest. The sale of a third retired WSF double-ender, the 1967-commissioned Super-class HYAK, is pending.

In other news from WSF, only three US-based shipbuilders have submitted prequalification documents to build WSF's five next-generation hybrid-electric double-ended ferries with a capacity of 160 CEUs and 1,500 passengers. Only one potential builder is from Washington State, Nichols Brothers Boat Builders. The other two are Eastern Shipbuilding Group from Panama City, Florida, and Philly Shipyard in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

US ferries operations to benefit from USD 300 million grants

The US Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has announced over USD 299 million in grants to expand and modernise the country's ferry systems. The funding is part of President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Under the 2024 FTA Ferry Grant Program, the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities is one of the main beneficiaries, obtaining USD 177.5 million, USD 106.5 of which is meant to replace Alaska Marine Highway System's 1964-built, 4,529gt TUSTUMENA. The new diesel-electric ferry will serve rural southwest Alaska, improving service, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and preserving a vital transit lifeline.

Last year, the FTA announced USD 131.3 million in grants for rural ferries in Alaska with USD 92.8 million meant for the replacement of TUSTUMENA. With the latest FTA grants, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has brought nearly USD 895 million to support projects to revitalise the Alaska Marine Highway System. To comply with the Jones Act, the replacement ferry for TUSTUMENA shall be domestically built, making it a slow and very expensive process indeed.



Photo: Alaska Marine Highway System

Short-Sea Ro-Ro News



Photo: Christian Costa

The three GG5G-class FINNECOs now make a southbound Sheerness call but stopped calling at Travemünde.

Samskip partners with TECO 2030 for hydrogen retrofit

Having earlier obtained NOK 500,000 or EUR 44,000 funding from Norway's government agency Enova, Samskip has taken the next step to retrofit the 2015-built LNG dual-fuel multipurpose ro-lo SAMSKIP KVITNOS to hydrogen propulsion.

Clean tech manufacturer and hydrogen fuel cell provider TECO 2030 was already a partner in the feasibility study of SAMSKIP KVITNOS's hydrogen retrofit and has been selected to supply the zero-emission marine fuel cell system.

To be completed in 2025, the hydrogen retrofit is part of the HyEkoTank project, the world's largest ongoing fuel cell retrofit effort that is also supported by the EU's Horizon Europe programme. Post fuel cell and tank retrofit, SAMSKIP KVITNOS will be able to transit in certain Norwegian fjords only emitting water vapour.

Samskip equally has two remotely controlled and autonomous-ready hydrogen-powered container ships under construction at India's Cochin Shipyard.

Finnlines adds Sheerness to Baltic Sea-North Sea-Biscay rotation, no longer calling at Travemünde

On 23 September, Finnlines returned to the River Thames with a direct call at Sheerness as part of its weekly Baltic Sea-North Sea-Biscay Motorway of the Sea (MoS) service, operated by its three 5,800-lanemetre capacity GG5G-class FINNECOs.

Following the 2022 introduction of FINNECO I, II, and III, the Grimaldi Group subsidiary dropped its direct Tilbury call as the 34.0m beam hybrid mega ro-ros were too wide to enter the lock connecting the River Thames with Tilbury's inner docks.

Sheerness, marketed as London Medway by Peel Ports Group, is served southbound only with the FINNECOs sailing directly from Helsinki and Kotka to Sheerness. To guarantee a 21-day loop, the GG5Gs southbound Travemünde calls have been dropped in favour of Sheerness while Finnlines keeps serving the German port with other services of its Baltic ro-pax and ro-ro network. Although Lübecker Hafen-Gesellschaft invested in adapting berthing infrastructure for the GG5Gs, the decision to skip Travemünde doesn't come as a total surprise as manoeuvring conditions on the River Trave sometimes proved challenging due to the GG5Gs sheer size.

The Monday Sheerness call is followed by Antwerp and Zeebrugge, Finnlines' main North Sea ro-ro hub, after which the vessels head for Bilbao and Vigo. Being real nodes in the Grimaldi Group network, both Zeebrugge and Antwerp are also served northbound, connecting Biscay with Hanko, Helsinki, and Kotka.

Peel Port's Sheerness ro-ro terminal is equipped to handle a wide range of commodities, including automotive, steel, wood, forestry products, and project cargo. Last year, FINNECO II already made a maiden call in Sheerness to discharge cars.

In addition to ro-ro and forest products, Finnlines carries significant volumes of containerised cargo on the Baltic Sea-North Sea-Biscay route with transshipment connections from Zeebrugge to Rosslare (Finnlines), Tilbury and Teesport (P&O Ferries) as well as Gothenburg and Fredrikstad (DFDS) remaining unchanged.

Finnlines bows out of Hull

With the 1,853-lanemetre FINNHAWK about to join sister ship BENTAYGA CARGO (ex-FINNRAFT) in Fred. Olsen Express' inter-Canaries network, Finnlines has stopped its weekly Helsinki (Vuosaari)-Hull route. FINNHAWK made its last call at the Humber port on 20-23 September and arrived in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on 30 September.

Short-Sea Ro-Ro News

Visentini floats out hull number 236 for Mann Lines charter

Following the recent delivery of the ro-pax VARSOVIA, Cantiere Navale Visentini in Porto Viro has two ro-ro freighters in the pipeline, the first one of which was floated out on 21 September. After final outfitting and sea trials, the 13,300dwt ro-ro will be taken on long-term time charter by Mann Lines during H1 2025, replacing ML FREYJA on a nine-day Harwich-Cuxhaven-Paldiski-Turku-Bremerhaven-Rotterdam-Harwich rotation.

In essence, Visentini's hull number 236 is a 12m lengthened near sister ship of the 2017-built ML FREYJA with both vessels owned by the yard's shipowning arm, Visemar di Navigazione. The 203.4m long and 26.2m beam 13,300dwt ro-ro has a 3,004-lanemetre plus 196-CEU intake on three decks and two dedicated car decks with the 1,266-lanemetre weather deck offering 552 TEU slots.

The scrubber-equipped, 1A ice class ro-ro will be delivered with RINA's methanol-ready class notation. Hull number 236 will be followed by a slightly modified sister ship, after which Visentini will build a more freight-oriented ro-pax in which a Mediterranean ferry operator has already shown interest.

Holmen extends time charter of BALTIC BRIGHT

Swedish forestry company Holmen has extended the time charter of Godby Shipping's 1,068-lanemetre BALTIC BRIGHT which performs a 14-day roundtrip between the Holmen Paper factory in Hallstavik, the Holmen Timber-cum-Paper facility in Norrköping and Sheerness in the UK.

The 134.40m long and 20.0m long BALTIC BRIGHT has been on charter to Holmen since January 2022 with the charter extended until end 2025. When acquired by Godby Shipping in July 2021, the 1996-built BALTIC BRIGHT initially continued its charter to UPM.

The permanent closure of the Helsinki-Hull route coincided with the new southbound Sheerness call of the FINNECOs (*see above*). ABP's Port of Hull has only a single river berth that is exclusively used by P&O Ferries with the single lock dictating the dimensions of the ships that can be handled in the inner docks. With no 'Hull-max' ships left in its fleet and the volumes not warranting an expensive charter or purchase, Finnlines' decision didn't come as a surprise.

CLdN further diversifies into lo-lo, orders six 1,100-TEU ships at HD Hyundai Mipo Dockyard with options for up to four more

Carrying significant container volumes on its short-sea ro-ros, CLdN re-introduced a Rotterdam-Ireland lo-lo service in March 2024. As reported in last month's AXSRoRo newsletter, the chartered 974-TEU capacity lo-los PAVO J. and ANDROMEDA J. make three weekly roundtrips from CLdN's Distriport terminal in Rotterdam to Dublin with the weekly Rotterdam-Cork lo-lo service run in conjunction with BF Freight Line through a slot agreement.

With lo-lo activities part of its long-term strategy, CLdN now takes a major next step in the containerisation of its operations through a six-plus-four order at HD Hyundai Mipo Dockyard, a long-term shipbuilding partner of the Belgian-Luxembourg short-sea operator. The six initial 1,100-TEU capacity open-top cargo hold lo-los, costing USD 50 million apiece, will have outstanding fuel efficiency, CLdN said in a statement. While the operator has already walked down the LNG path, the multi-fuel lo-los could potentially be methanol-powered, a decision to be taken before the end of this year. The first lo-lo is due for delivery in January 2027.

HD Hyundai Mipo Dockyard currently has two G9e-class ro-ros under construction for CLdN. Capacity-wise, these are sister ships of the 2017/18-built G9s, yet their CO₂ emission intensity will be reduced by 40%. The yard also built six H5-class ro-ros, the last two of which, FAUSTINE and SERAPHINE, are LNG dual-fuel.

Two Finnlines Breeze-class ro-ros join Grimaldi Group's Mediterranean network as EUROCARGO SAVONA exits the fleet

Due to the recent introduction of the 7,800-lanemetre GG5G-class ECO MEDITERRANEA and ECO MALTA on a new Trieste-Ambarli MoS, together with the recent withdrawal of EUROCARGO SAVONA from the Salerno-Catania route, Grimaldi Group has moved two 4,192-lanemetre Finnlines Breeze-class ro-ros to its Mediterranean network.

Purchased by Grimaldi Group subsidiary Malta Motorways of the Sea

Short-Sea Ro-Ro News



Photo: Philippe Holthof

The Breeze-class sister ships FINNSUN and FINNSKY have joined Grimaldi Group's MoS network in the Med with the latter renamed EUROCARGO TRIESTE.

and renamed EUROCARGO TRIESTE, the ex-FINNSKY has taken up service between Ravenna, Brindisi, and Catania. As recently as 21 January this year, FINNSKY started a weekly Zeebrugge-Bilbao-Vigo triangular service, supplementing the weekly Zeebrugge-Bilbao-Vigo rotation operated as part of Finnlines' Baltic Sea-North Sea-Biscay MoS. With the Zeebrugge-Bilbao-Vigo service now back to once weekly operated by the 5,800-lanemetre FINNECOs, FINNSKY became surplus to requirements, joining the group's Mediterranean MoS.

To adjust capacity to demand, sister ship FINNSUN already left Finnlines' fleet in late May 2023, being chartered by Grimaldi Lines for its Euromed network. FINNSUN has now joined Grimaldi Lines' Mediterranean short-sea network, replacing EUROCARGO CAGLIARI on the Salerno-Cagliari-Sagunto MoS. It is expected that ownership of FINNSUN will be transferred to another Grimaldi Group subsidiary any time soon.

In other news from Grimaldi Group, EUROCARGO SAVONA has been sold to Mexico's Baja Ferries. The 3,654-lanemetre EUROCARGO SAVONA is a sister ship of the ex-EUROCARGO SICILIA which Baja Ferries purchased from Grimaldi Group in 2022. EUROCARGO SICILIA re-emerged as CALIFORNIA STAR following a conversion from ro-ro to ro-pax at the Palumbo Group-controlled Victor Lenac Shipyard in Rijeka.

The upgrade saw CALIFORNIA STAR's capacity increase from 12 to 399 passengers, while the freight intake was reduced to 2,750 lanemetres. Having earlier converted the Stena 4-Runner-class STENA CARRIER from ro-ro to ro-pax, it is expected that Baja Ferries will equally convert EUROCARGO SAVONA to freight-oriented ro-pax mode.

Armas Trasmediterránea Group introduces AL ANDALUS EXPRESS on Las Palmas de Gran Canaria-Santa Cruz de Tenerife route

Armas Trasmediterránea Group is increasing its 'cargo footprint' on the so-called capital-to-capital inter-Canaries route between Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Starting on 1 October, the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria-Puerto del Rosario (Fuerteventura) freight-oriented ro-pax ferry AL ANDALUS EXPRESS makes a daily Las Palmas de Gran Canaria-Santa Cruz de Tenerife roundtrip Mondays-Fridays.

The 1,275-lanemetre and 215-passenger AL ANDALUS EXPRESS supplements the Incat 111m wave piercing catamaran sister ships VOLCAN DE TAGORO and VOLCAN DE TAIDIA which each have a capacity of 1,184 passengers and 401 CEUs or a combination of 219 CEUs and 595 freight lanemetres.

The high-speed catamarans offer up to six departures in either direction, yet thanks to a dedicated freight sailing, Armas Trasmediterránea Group meets freight customer demand, also offering slots for hazardous goods.



Photo: Philippe Holthof

The 1,275-lanemetre AL ANDALUS EXPRESS has been introduced between Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

Short-Sea Ro-Ro News

P&O Ferries shuffles North Sea fleet

Following the introduction of the 4,076-lanemetre LONGSTONE, long-term time chartered from Siem Group, P&O Ferries has rejigged its North Sea fleet. Supplementing LONGSTONE on the Zeebrugge-Tilbury route is the 2,630-lanemetre NORSKY with sister NORSTREAM now the mainstay on the thrice weekly Zeebrugge-Teesport service.

Although still fluid, P&O Ferries plans to increase capacity on its six times weekly Europort (Rotterdam)-Tilbury route with the 2,040-lanemetre freight-oriented NORBANK to be replaced by NORSTREAM in early October. NORBANK, which opened the Europort (Rotterdam)-Tilbury route in March, would then replace NORSTREAM on Zeebrugge-Teesport. NORBANK's sister ship, NORBAY, remains laid up in Zeebrugge after having completed summer drydock cover.



Photo: CLdN

The first G9e-class under construction at HD Hyundai Mipo Dockyard. The G9es will further reduce CO₂ emission intensity by 40% compared to the G9s.

AL ANDALUS EXPRESS has been operating in Spanish waters for the past eight years. Completed as the rail-enabled NORD PAS-DE-CALAIS for Sealink SNCF, it was the very last ship to be built by Dunkerque's Chantiers du Nord et de la Méditerranée (NORMED) in 1987, remaining active on the Dover Strait until MyFerryLink folded in 2015.

Armas Trasmediterránea Group has also applied to operate from Agaete (Puerto de las Nieves) from 1 January 2025, supplementing its existing Las Palmas de Gran Canaria-Santa Cruz de Tenerife route. Competitor Fred. Olsen Express already connects Agaete with Santa Cruz de Tenerife, a distance which is shorter than from the capital city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria as it is located on the northwest coast. The question is whether Armas Trasmediterránea Group can effectively operate from Agaete which has only a single ro-ro berth, the linkspan of which has been specifically adapted to Fred. Olsen Express's requirements.

CLdN further improves CO₂ efficiency

Leading North Sea short-sea ro-ro operator CLdN recently published its 2023 fleet emission data, revealing that its weighted average fleet emissions were 39g CO₂/tonne-km. According to CLdN, this figure is 19% better than that of its next-best performing short-sea competitor, DFDS.

CLdN stated that this result was also twice as efficient as road transport as CLdN customers and the supply chains they serve could reduce their scope 3 emissions.

During the past ten years alone, CLdN has invested close to EUR 750 million in fuel efficient newbuilds with an intake ranging from 4,949 to 7,970 lanemetres. It has also jumboized three of its Flensburger-built ro-ros through the addition of a fourth deck while also implementing eco upgrades to other existing ro-ros as the G9-class DELPHINE had two Norsepower Flettner rotor sails retrofitted in early 2023.

During H1 2025, CLdN will take delivery of two G9e-class LNG dual-fuel mega ro-ros from HD Hyundai Mipo Dockyard. These near sister ships of the G9-class CELINE and DELPHINE will further reduce CO₂ emission intensity by 40% compared to the 2017/18-built G9s.

AB Maritime mulls further fleet expansion

Without specifying any particular ship name, Gulf of Aqaba ro-ro and ropax ferry operator Arab Bridge Maritime (AB Maritime) has announced that it will add yet another ro-ro freighter to its tally which is scheduled for takeover "within the next four months".

As recently as August last year, CLdN's 2009-built SEATRUCK PENNANT was purchased by AB Maritime. Renamed UR, the 1,830-lanemetre ro-ro was introduced on the Aqaba, Jordan-Nuweiba, Egypt route.

Short-Sea Ro-Ro News



Photo: Philippe Holthof

The 1999-built EUROCARGO VALENCIA has already been renamed RSC CARIBE prior to leaving the Med for the Caribbean.



Photo: Philippe Holthof

Acquired by Wallenius Lines, both THULELAND and TAVASTLAND remain on charter to Wallenius SOL but are currently sub-chartered out.

Founded in 1985, AB Bridge operates a mix of high-speed, ro-pax, and ro-ro tonnage. In addition to a ro-ro ship, two passenger craft will join AB Maritime later this year. During the first eight months of the year, the company carried 180,000 passengers (+20%), 54,000 trucks (+57%) and 6,404 cars (+22%) on its two Gulf of Aqaba routes.

EUROCARGO VALENCIA joins Caribbean ro-ro operator

With two more 7,800-lanemetre GG5G-class to be introduced in Grimaldi Group's Mediterranean MoS network, the Neapolitan shipowner keeps disposing of smaller and older tonnage. Besides the 3,654-lanemetre EUROCARGO SAVONA, sold to Baja Ferries, Grimaldi Group has handed over the 2,433-lanemetre and 477-CEU capacity freight ro-ro EUROCARGO VALENCIA to Uruguay-headquartered RoRo Shipping Company (RSC).

Renamed RSC CARIBE and flying the flag of Panama, the 25-year-old Visentini-built ro-ro will join the 900-lanemetre plus 58-CEU INDIGO I – an early-generation Visentini completed as MAIOR – and INTEGRADOR, the ex-AUTORUNNER of UECC. RoRo Shipping Company was founded as recently as 2022, covering all the Caribbean islands, using Cristóbal (Panama) and Cartagena (Colombia) as mainland hub ports. Currently, the frequency is fortnightly.

Wallenius Lines acquires 2,774-lanemetre ro-ro pair

Already owning TAVASTLAND, Wallenius Lines has also acquired its two sister ships THULELAND and TUNDRALAND. Built in 2006 and 2007, respectively, the 2,774-lanemetre pair was owned by Baltic Container Shipping.

The ro-ros remain on long-term charter to Wallenius SOL, jointly owned by Wallenius Lines and Swedish Orient Line, with Wallenius Marine in charge of ship management.

THULELAND and TAVASTLAND more or less became surplus to requirements following the 2022 introduction of the 6,442-lanemetre sister ships BOTNIA ENABLER and BALTIC ENABLER. While TAVASTLAND has been on sub-charter to CLdN since mid-January 2023, also performing a weekly Zeebrugge-Tilbury feeder service on behalf of Wallenius SOL, THULELAND has been on sub-charter in the Mediterranean since early January this year.

LIDER EXPRESS back in the Black Sea

Georgia's E60 Shipping Line has chartered the 1,600-lanemetre and 150-passenger capacity LIDER EXPRESS from Turkey's Samsun Shipping. The 1992-built freight-oriented ro-pax replaced CenK RORO's Stena

Short-Sea Ro-Ro News

Fujian Mawei cuts steel of Neptune Lines' first 'Genesis'

Five September marked the start of the steel cutting for the first of four 4,200-CEU capacity PCTCs Fujian Mawei Shipbuilding will build for Neptune Lines. Due to be delivered in 2026, the dual-fuel newbuild, part of Neptune Lines' 'Project Genesis', will also boast a hybrid element, including a battery pack, shaft generator, and shore connection to guarantee zero emissions at berth.

Designed by Deltamarin, the 177.8m long and 33.4m beam mid-size PCTCs will have 12 decks, two of which are liftable, with the uppermost three decks designed for new energy vehicles.



Photo: UECC

The 2006-built AUTO WAY is the former HÖEGH CHIBA which Wallenius Lines acquired from Höegh Autoliners for USD 61 million earlier this year.

Searunner-class CENK T on the Poti, Georgia-Constanta, Romania service.

LIDER EXPRESS operates three to four times monthly on this 'E60' east-west Black Sea Motorway of the Sea, being supplemented by the rail/ro-ro freighter AIA.

Polish media reported on the sale of the 1,408-lanemetre and 244-passenger capacity BALTIVIA to Georgian interests which is understood to be E60 Shipping Line.

AML charters Ukrferry's KAUNAS

Having operated between Algeciras and Tangier Med on behalf of Intershipping earlier this year, Ukrferry's 1,539-lanemetre and 250-passenger capacity KAUNAS is back on the Strait of Gibraltar, being time chartered by Africa Morocco Link (AML) to supplement MOROCCO STAR, MOROCCO SUN, and STENA EUROPE.

Introduced on 16 September, KAUNAS operates a daily roundtrip in direct competition with sister ship VILNIUS, on charter to what remains of Intershipping, understood to be its Moroccan agent.

UECC charters its largest PCTC for North-South route

United European Car Carriers (UECC), jointly owned by Wallenius Lines and NYK Line, will add a fifth ship to its North-South route, increasing the frequency on the one hand while adding two more ports on the other.

Earlier this year, Wallenius Lines purchased the 6,000-CEU capacity HÖEGH CHIBA for USD 61 million from Höegh Autoliners. Completed in 2006 as MAERSK WELKIN, HÖEGH CHIBA and two of its sister ships were lengthened by 19.2m in 2012, increasing the length to 199.10m.

Renamed AUTO WAY for its long-term charter, the 14th ship in the UECC fleet will be introduced in the North-South trade in late October as the ports of Cuxhaven and Efesan, Türkiye will be added to the rotation with calls at Bremerhaven, Zeebrugge, Portbury, Vigo, Sagunto, Livorno, Piraeus, and Autoport (Gölcük, Türkiye).

UECC plans to add a fifteenth ship to its fleet of owned and chartered PCTCs later this year.

Deep-Sea Ro-Ro News



Photo: GSI

GAN JIANG KOU is one of four SDARI-designed 7,000-CEU sister ships delivered by GSI during the past month.

Emanuele Grimaldi further increases stake in Höegh Autoliners

Described as a personal investment on the back of a hot PCTC market, Emanuele Grimaldi through his personal investing companies EG Holding and Caprim, has upped his stake in Oslo-listed Höegh Autoliners from 5.12% to 10.01% or 19,096,484 shares, thereby remaining the second largest shareholder after the Höegh family holding company, Leif Höegh & Co.

Emanuele Grimaldi has refuted speculation about a potential takeover bid as the investment is outside of the Grimaldi Group which he co-manages with Gianluca Grimaldi, his elder brother who's in charge of the Neapolitan group's deep-sea division, including Atlantic Container Line (ACL).

However, Emanuele Grimaldi earlier admitted that Grimaldi Group considered buying stock from A.P. Møller – Maersk when the Danes, who at one point controlled approximately 26.4% of Höegh Autoliners equity, bowed out through a phased divestment between March and December 2023.

GSI delivers four standard 7,000-CEU PCTCs in a row

CSSC's Guangzhou Shipyard International (GSI), one of China's leading PCTC builders, delivered no fewer than four LNG dual-fuel PCTCs in a 22-day timespan. Built to a standard SDARI 7,000-CEU design, the four PCTCs are operated by different carriers.

Delivered to CITIC Financial Leasing on 5 September, about six months ahead of schedule, the 199.9m long and 38.0m beam PEONY LEADER embarked on its maiden voyage from Shanghai to Europe on 13 September. Notwithstanding the 'Leader' suffix in its name, together with NYK Line funnel markings, the 12-deck PEONY LEADER has reportedly been chartered by Guangzhou Yuanhai Automobile Shipping, a JV between COSCO Shipping Specialized Carriers, Shanghai International Port Group Logistics (SIPG Logistics), and SAIC AnJi Logistics.

GAN JIANG KOU, a sister ship of PEONY LEADER, was handed over to SPDB Financial Leasing on 19 September. Taken on charter by COSCO Shipping Specialized Carriers, the vessel was delivered seven months early, a further proof of the builder's optimised production process. Like its sister ships, GAN JIANG KOU boasts 12 decks, four of which are strengthened for high & heavy, with decks 11 and 12 fitted out to transport new energy vehicles.

South Korean tonnage provider H-LINE Shipping took delivery of its third PCTC from GSI on 24 September. A sister ship of GLOVIS SOLAR and GLOVIS SUNSHINE, GLOVIS SELENE has been taken on long-term charter by Hyundai Glovis with one more sister ship to follow while H-LINE Shipping also has three 8,600-CEU capacity PCTCs on order at GSI.

On 27 September, two months earlier than planned, HUANG HE KOU was named and handed over to SPDB Financial Leasing with the vessel taken on charter by COSCO Shipping Specialized Carriers/COSCO Shipping Carriers.

Wallenius Wilhelmsen to increase capacity of four Shaper-class PCTCs by over 25%

Wallenius Wilhelmsen will significantly increase the CEU intake of its last four Shaper-class mega PCTCs due for delivery from China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Jiangsu) from late 2027 through to 2028. Designed by Deltamarin, the 12-deck Shaper-class PCTCs are 228m long and 38m wide. Adding two decks as well as about 6m in length and 2m width will increase the CEU capacity by over 25%, from 9,300 to approximately 11,700 CEUs, some 900 CEUs more than the current world's largest PCTC platform on order for Hyundai Glovis.

The dual fuel Shaper-class will be capable to operate on methanol upon delivery but will also be ready for a later conversion to ammonia. The

Höegh Autoliners to retrofit ten PCTCs with Promas Lite propulsion system

To further reduce fuel consumption and its CO₂ footprint, Höegh Autoliners will upgrade ten of its PCTCs to Kongsberg Maritime's Promas Lite propulsion system which integrates the fixed pitch propeller, hub cap, bulb, and rudder into a single propulsive unit.

Detailed hydrodynamic studies conducted at Kongsberg Maritime's Hydrodynamic Research Centre have demonstrated that fuel savings of at least 6.5% can be achieved, something also validated by full-scale measurements taken from two vessels with a Promas Lite propulsion system retrofitted.



Photo: Neptune Marine

CANOPÉE boasts 363m² of sails.

four upsized or Mk II Shaper-class will share the DNA of the Mk Is with improved ramp strength, significant high & heavy capacity on four decks and a focus on energy efficiency, safety, and crew welfare.

In July, Eukor – 80% owned by Wallenius Wilhelmsen – announced it would take six Shaper-class which means that only two non-upsized Shaper-class will operate for Wallenius Wilhelmsen although it still holds an option for four more Shaper-class PCTCs.

CANOPÉE's four OceanWings sails pay off

Delivered by Neptune Marine in late 2022, the Ariane 6 rocket component ro-lo transporter CANOPÉE got its four 37m high and 363m² sails from OceanWings – the French designer and manufacturer of wingsail solutions formerly known as AYRO – installed in the summer of 2023.

Having meanwhile performed six transatlantic legs, OceanWings recently revealed that the four sails had reduced fuel consumption of the 121m long and 22m beam ro-lo by 35% for transatlantic crossings alone.

Presenting the results at SMM in Hamburg in early September, OceanWings COO, Romain Gondsart, said: "After one year in operation on board CANOPÉE, the data analysed by OceanWings on the basis of measurements made by the shipowner, show consistent savings. Operational measurements over 24-hour periods yield a fuel consumption reduction between 25% and 50%, depending on the vessel speed and wind conditions."

Grimaldi Group beefs up deep-sea network

Having recently launched a direct Shanghai-Lagos connection, using Lagos' Tin Can Island Port as a transshipment hub for new Chinese-made vehicles (see AXSRoRo September issue, p. 17), Grimaldi Group last month also started a direct monthly China-Persian Gulf connection, calling at Shanghai, Al Jubayl, and Jebel Ali. Depending on customer demand, ad hoc calls are made at Yantai and Dammam among other ports.

Grimaldi Group arrived relatively late to the party of Asian-cum-Chinese vehicle exports but is poised to further increase its footprint in this part of the world, having opened Grimaldi Shipping Agency Shanghai last year. Besides representing the Italian group in China, it keeps close contact with the Chinese automobile manufacturers and automotive cluster.

Grimaldi Group has also further expanded its network in South America, having added Cartagena (Colombia) to its South America-North America service which has been operational since 2022. The monthly Cartagena call is part of its twice monthly Paranaguá, Santos, Suape, Veracruz, Altamira, Freeport, Jacksonville, and Baltimore rotation. The service primarily concentrates on the transport of cars and high & heavy vehicles, connecting key markets across the continent.

Capacity share agreement between Hyundai Glovis and BYD

South Korea's Hyundai Glovis and Chinese BEV manufacturer BYD have signed an MoU to share vehicle space on each other's PCTCs. The global logistics arm of Hyundai Motor Group, Hyundai Glovis owes about 60% of its revenues from shipping Hyundai Motor Group vehicles, including Kias. Following the partnership with BYD, Hyundai Glovis considers shipping BYDs going forward.

Second Aurora-class PCTC introduced

On 11 September, Höegh Autoliners took delivery of its second innovative Aurora-class PCTC with ten more to follow as the Norwegian PCTC operator holds an option for four more Auroras, possibly bringing the total number to 16.

The Deltamarin-designed HÖEGH BOREALIS follows lead ship HÖEGH AURORA with HÖEGH AUSTRALIS next in line to be delivered from China Merchants Heavy Industry (Jiangsu). The 199.90m long and 37.60m multi-fuel series has a capacity of 9,100 CEUs, equivalent to 75,120m².

The Aurora-class PCTCs temporarily hold the title of world's largest PCTC by intake. BEVs can be stowed on all 14 decks, four of which are strengthened for high & heavy and five being hoistable.

The vessel class has DNV's ammonia-ready and methanol-ready notations with the first in the series to be powered by green ammonia in 2027. Unlike reported in our last month's Cover Story, the Aurora-class does have a bulbous integrated into its vertical stem.

Shin Kurushima Dockyard delivers CELESTE ACE

Mitsui O.S.K. Lines has taken delivery of yet another PCTC in its next-generation 'BLUE series'. The 7,050-CEU capacity CELESTE ACE is a sister ship of CERULEAN ACE, delivered by Shin Kurushima Dockyard's Onishi Shipyard in March. Near sister ship TURQUOISE ACE, built by Imabari's Tadotsu Shipyard, was delivered in July.

The LNG dual-fuel PCTC series has a length of 199.9m and 38.0m beam with its beveled top at the bow reducing wind resistance by about 20%. The vessels also boast cameras and an AI system developed by Captain's Eye. Enabling faster smoke detection, the AI-based system sends an alert to crew members and the onshore management when detecting abnormal pictures captured by the cameras.

HD Hyundai Samho hands over first of four PCTCs for Ray Car Carriers

South Korean shipbuilders are equally benefiting from the red hot PCTC market with both HD Hyundai Samho and sister shipyard HD Hyundai Mipo Dockyard building a series of PCTCs for leading PCTC tonnage provider Ray Car Carriers.

The first of four 7,500-CEU capacity LNG dual-fuel PCTCs built by HD Hyundai Samho, the 75,929gt ARGUS RAY, has meanwhile been chartered out to an unspecified operator, believed to be Hyundai Glovis. The next



Photo: Mitsui O.S.K. Lines

CELESTE ACE is part of Mitsui O.S.K. Lines' next-generation 'BLUE series'.

SWS starts with the construction of yet another Grimaldi Group PCTC

On 14 September, less than two months after the first steel for the 9,000-CEU GRAND TIANJIN was cut, Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding (SWS) started with the steel cutting of hull number H1604, the second ship in the seven-ship series which SWS is building for Grimaldi Group.

The 199.90m long and 38.0m beam PCTC has been designed by SDARI with its MAN B&W 7S60MEC10.6-HPSCR main engine guaranteeing a 19-knot service speed. The platform will have RINA's ammonia-ready class notation, being part of a USD 1.6 billion 17-PCTC order.

In addition to the seven ships to be built by SWS, Grimaldi Group ordered ten 9,000-CEU capacity PCTCs at China Merchants Heavy Industry (Jiangsu). Designed by Knud E. Hansen, the keel of lead ship GRANDE SHANGHAI was laid on 6 September. Delivery starts in 2025 through to 2027.

199.97m x 38.0m PCTC to be delivered by HD Hyundai Samho is NESTOR RAY.

HD Hyundai Mipo Dockyard is building six PCTCs for Ray Car Carriers, four of which with a 7,700-CEU capacity while the last two in the series have a 7,500-CEU intake.

Höegh Autoliners sells 19-year-old PCTC at high price

Through its Höegh Autoliners Shipping subsidiary, Höegh Autoliners has sold its 2005-built 6,500-CEU DSME-class HÖEGH NEW YORK as the Norwegian PCTC operator is introducing its 9,100-CEU Aurora-Class with two ships in the 12-ship series already delivered.

Due to the hot PCTC market, HÖEGH NEW YORK was sold for a high price of USD 60.6 million with the handover to the unspecified buyer happening during Q1 2025. During the past year, Höegh Autoliners sold two PCTCs to Chinese interests. The 2006-built 6,000-CEU HÖEGH KOBE was sold for USD 59 million and currently operates as JIUYANG BONANZA for Changjiu Logistics. The 2007-built 6,500-CEU HÖEGH BANGKOK was sold for USD 63 million. Renamed JIUYANG BLOSSOM, it equally operates for Changjiu Logistics.

The third PCTC, the 2006-built 6,000-CEU HÖEGH CHIBA was sold for USD 61 million to Wallenius Lines and has been taken on charter by UECC as AUTO WAY.

COSCO Shipping Car Carriers to start new monthly China-Latin America route

Transit times between China and Peru will be reduced by 10 days when a new direct 25-day Shanghai-Chancay service will be started by COSCO Shipping Car Carriers in November. The start of the new monthly deep-sea ro-ro service will coincide with the commissioning of COSCO's new multipurpose port facility at Chancay, capable to handle an annual throughput of 1.5 million TEUs and 160,000 CEUs.

The new monthly China-South America West Coast service will also call at San Antonio, Chile with ad hoc calls at ports in Colombia, Ecuador and other countries in the region to be added as per market demand.

Lightweight Ro-Pax News



Photo: FRS Baltic

It's over and out for FRS Baltic's seasonal Sassnitz-Trelleborg route.



Photo: Philippe Holthof

Fast Ferries will no longer operate fast ferries following the sale of high-speed craft THUNDER to Attica Holdings.

Superstructure of future CHINA ZORRILLA complete

Incat reached a milestone in the building process of its Hull 096 when the final passenger deck module was lowered into position. With the superstructure now complete, internal outfitting of the 2,100-passenger and 225-CEU capacity wave piercing catamaran has started. When delivered and introduced by Buquebus in late 2025, CHINA ZORRILLA will be the world's largest battery-electric ferry with 40 MWh of battery modules.

FRS Baltic axes seasonal Sassnitz-Trelleborg route

Blaming soaring operational costs, not in the least fuel costs and EU ETS, Förde Reederei Seetouristik (FRS) subsidiary FRS Baltic has pulled the plug on its seasonal Sassnitz-Trelleborg route operated by Incat 91m wave piercing catamaran SKÅNE JET. The last crossing of the season was rostered for 3 November, but SKÅNE JET performed its last sailing on the so-called 'Königslinie' on 30 September.

The historic Sassnitz-Trelleborg route was one of two loss-making services in the Stena Line network to be permanently closed in the wake of COVID-19 with FRS jumping in after purchasing Fjord Line's FJORD CAT. Renamed SKÅNE JET, the 676-passenger and 210-CEU capacity high-speed craft was introduced on the 2.5-hour Sassnitz-Ystad route in mid-September 2020.

As the new Sassnitz-Ystad service didn't meet expectations, Ystad was dropped in favour of Trelleborg in April 2023 with crossing times unchanged. The 2023 season ended prematurely due to problems with spare parts for SKÅNE JET while the 2024 season started with more bad luck as SKÅNE JET allided with the quay in Trelleborg, being withdrawn from service for ten days. Rumour already had it that the writing was on the wall if the 2024 summer season wouldn't prove successful.

Fast Ferries sells THUNDER ahead of possible takeover of Zante Ferries tonnage

Attica Holdings, through one of its subsidiaries, has purchased Fast Ferries' Auto Express 86m catamaran THUNDER, built in 1998 as İstanbul Deniz Otobüsleri's (IDO) TURGUT ÖZAL. Purchased by Fast Ferries in 2019 and introduced in 2021 following a major refurbishment, the 1,068-passenger and 215-CEU capacity high-speed catamaran was sold for EUR 17.15 million, giving Fast Ferries the necessary cash to take over Zante Ferries' DIONISIOS SOLOMOS and ADAMANTIOS KORAIIS.

THUNDER operated between Piraeus and Santorini with intermediate calls at Mykonos, Paros, and Ios but it is expected that Attica Group will introduce the 42-knot craft between Piraeus and Heraklion.

The acquisition makes perfect sense for both parties. Attica Group subsidiary Hellenic Seaways has favoured Austal rather than Incat tonnage since the 2000 introduction of HIGHSPEED 2. At one stage, Hellenic Seaways controlled a fleet of four Austal high-speed craft, but this was eventually trimmed to a single vessel, HIGHSPEED 4 which is now about to be joined by THUNDER.

Ro-Ro Port News



Photo: Scandlines

Installation of new upper level ramp for heavy road haulage vehicles in the port of Puttgarden.

Autoterminal Khalifa Port increased ro-ro footprint during H1 2024

During H1 2024, Abu Dhabi-located Autoterminal Khalifa Port, a JV between Autoterminal Barcelona and AD Ports Group-controlled Abu Dhabi Ports, recorded a 30% surge in vehicle volumes. To meet a rise in the automotive trade it also further expanded its terminal capacity by 90,000m².

Puttgarden further prepares for the arrival of FUTURA

When Scandlines' freight-oriented 10MWh hybrid ro-pax ferry FUTURA will be delivered from Cemre Shipyard, it will be the first double-ender in Scandlines' Fehmarnbelt fleet to carry freight vehicles on two decks as the four double-ended ro-pax ferries carry CEUs and light vehicles only on the upper deck.

Shore infrastructure had to be adapted to allow for double-level loading of heavy road haulage vehicles. The port of Rødby already had its new upper-level ramp installed and Puttgarden's Berth Number One is currently being adapted to handle the 1,200-lanemetre FUTURA with the upper car ramp removed and to be replaced by a new seven-section ramp system.

Grimaldi Group acquires majority stake in Heraklion Port Authority

Having earlier obtained a 67% majority stake of Igoumenitsa Port Authority S.A. (IPA S.A.) for EUR 84.17 million, Grimaldi Group, through Holding of Heraklion Port S.A., has completed the acquisition of 67% of Heraklion Port Authority S.A. (HPA S.A.) as Greece continues to privatise ports and other public assets.

Holding of Heraklion Port S.A. is a consortium formed by Grimaldi Group's subsidiaries Grimaldi Euromed and Minoan Lines. It paid EUR 80 million for its 67% stake while the minority 33% of the share capital remains in the hands of Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF).

Grimaldi Group's successful bid followed a tender conducted by HRADF, a member company of the government-controlled Growthfund, the National Fund of Greece that manages the privatisation programme of the country's ports and public assets. Grimaldi Group is a key client of the port of Heraklion as Minoan Lines operates daily services from the port to Piraeus.

Termini Imerese in new hands

Ems-Fohn-Group-controlled Italian Shipping & Logistics Agency (ISLA) has taken over compatriot Europea Servizi Terminalistici (EST) for EUR 5.25 million. The latter stevedore operated six ports in Sicily, including the ro-ro facility at Termini Imerese. EST will continue to operate independently, also retaining its brand name. Earlier this year, EST was awarded a 25-year concession to operate a new container terminal in Augusta.

Financial Results

Expenses related to the integration of ANEK Lines affected Attica Group's H1 2024 results

With Crete's ANEK Lines now fully integrated into Attica Group it's the first time that the group's consolidated financial results also cover those of ANEK Lines. During H1 2024, Attica Group's revenues increased across both geographic areas, i.e. Greek domestic and international routes. Compared to the same period last year, consolidated revenue rose by 29.9%, reaching EUR 317.2 million, up from EUR 244.3 million.

Consolidated EBITDA dropped from EUR 47.5 million in H1 2023 to EUR 19.5 million in H1 2024 with consolidated losses after taxes amounting to EUR 4.5 million versus EUR 3.3 million in the same period last year. Attica Group underlined that the non-recurring expenses related to the merger and operation integration of ANEK Lines affected the H1 results and would also do so during H2. The integration was expected to be completed before 2025.

Both a 9% increase in the average fuel price compared to H1 2023 and EU ETS-related costs for its international services affected the group's operating cost. In the period, Attica Group sold its 49% stake in Africa Morocco Link to Stena Line Holding BV with the EUR 22.8 million gain including the sale of the ro-pax MOROCCO STAR. The agreement with Stena also included the sale of the Austal Auto Express 72m MOROCCO EXPRESS 1, ex-HIGHSPEED 3, which was only completed in July.

In early September, Attica Group operated a total of 28 conventional ro-pax ferries, 12 high-speed craft, and two freight ro-ros with all but two ro-paxes being fully owned. During H1 2024, the ferries of Attica Group's respective brands carried 2.8 million passengers (+16.7%), 462,000 private cars (+26.6%), and 266,000 freight units (+27.3%).



Photo: Philippe Holthof