

Behind the scenes at Sevenstar Yacht Transport

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Why is shipping yachts such a specialised service?

Amsterdam, 21 December 2020. We are talking to John Kamp and Max Stepanov of Sevenstar Yacht Transport's Operations Department about the challenges of shipping pleasure yachts around the world and how this is influenced by trends in yacht design and construction.

Sevenstar is a member of the Spliethoff Group, one of the largest shipping companies in The Netherlands, operating a modern fleet of more than 100 multipurpose cargo vessels for specialized services like dry cargo, breakbulk & project cargo (Spliethoff), project & heavy lifts (BigLift Shipping), container & Ro-Ro cargo and door-to-door services (Transfennica & Transfennica Logistics), shortsea (Wijnne Barends), tonnage provider (Bore), and last but not least: yacht transport (Sevenstar Yacht Transport and DYT Yacht Transport).



▲ John Kamp

"Yachts are one of the most difficult cargo types to handle", says John Kamp, Manager Operations. John, a former Spliethoff captain, is overlooking Sevenstar's thirty-odd staff in the operational team, consisting of technical and logistics experts both at Amsterdam Headquarters as well as in global offices, including a full crew of dedicated Loadmasters.

The team manages around 730 global port calls on a yearly basis. This means that on average, every single day of the year two cargo vessels are calling into a port somewhere in the world to load or discharge one or more yachts. All technical issues, logistics and paperwork need to be in place to make things happen.

What is involved in operations?

"Operations involves a lot more than most people are aware of", says John, "We need to get the right ship, the right people (Sevenstar Loadmasters, external agents and yacht owners or -captains), the yachts, lifting and stowage materials and all related paperwork in place at the right time at the right place."

"A multitude of tasks needs to be performed", adds Max Stepanov, Operations Officer and also an ex-Spliethoff captain. The Operations team prepares lifting, stowage, cradle and lashing plans for each yacht and even sometimes travels to the yacht for on-site inspection. They assess cargo vessels' load conditions, stability and deck strength



▲ Max Stepanov



▲ MV Dijkgracht loading yachts

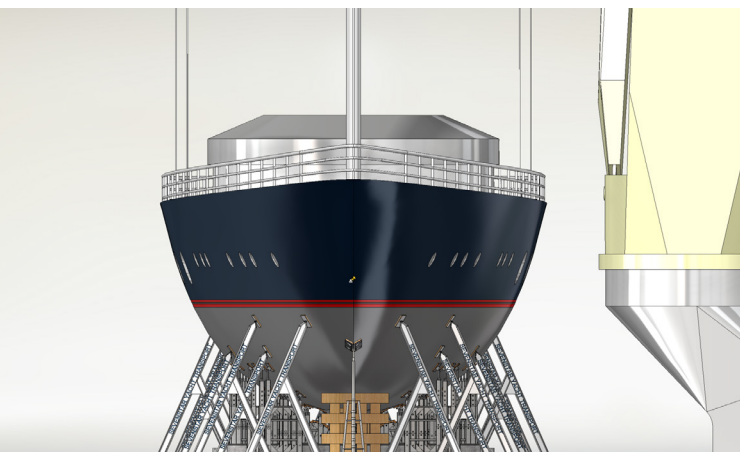
and provide technical information and give advice on cargo handling restrictions. Cargo operations are prepared in conjunction with Loadmasters, port agencies, stevedores and other parties involved. The team provides voyage - and Loadmaster instructions and oversees port operations. Max: "Sevenstar uses its own lifting and cradling materials that need to be engineered, manufactured and warehoused. The shear logistics of these items is already a job apart".

Additionally, the team coordinates all paperwork and instructions for port- and customs agents, contracts, insurance documents, cargo receipts and many other documents. Often local sub-contractors are appointed, for instance for fumigating yachts for quarantine or local manufacturing of solutions. The department handles cargo claims as well in case of damages. Max comments: "Next to day-to-day operations, the team develops improved techniques and procedures for cargo handling, stowage and care. We need to constantly improve on efficiency, time spent in port, damage prevention and overall cost-reduction. Costs of operations have a direct impact on the company's bottom line."

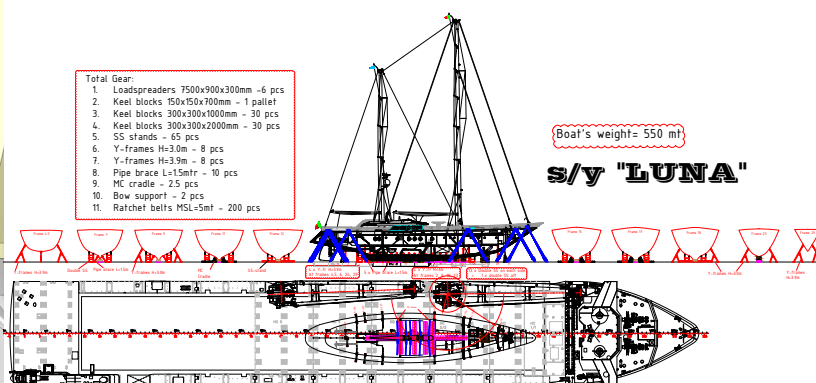
Why is shipping yachts such a speciality?

"First of all, yachts are delicate and expensive and not one single yacht is the same. We are always dealing with a unique piece of cargo", says John. There are many kinds of hull shapes and yachts are constructed from different kind of materials such as steel, GRP, aluminium, modern composites or a mix of those. There are motoryachts with stabilizer fins and sailing yachts are transported mast-up, some of the larger yachts have masts of over 45 meters above deck."

"The second challenge is the overall lack of technical information that we need to prepare the lifts, cradling and stowage. For many older yachts, drawings are completely missing and even for production boats, when we do have access to drawings, in practice things are never the same."



▲ Model of a sailing yacht on cradles



▲ Cradle plan of the sailing yacht

For instance, the location of the tanks and how much fuel or water is still onboard, it all influences the the actual lift. It even happens that we need to help clients with calculating the weight of their yacht. Then, the lift is often from the water onto an anchored vessel. Both yacht and vessel are moving objects, influenced by weather, tide and waves. For instance: a seemingly small swell can make the hook swing over deck from side to side. Also, the yacht is in the water when we position lifting belts and we use divers to check for underwater protrusions."

John concludes: "On the commercial and customer-service side, in the yachting world we are dealing with high-end clients who are not used to shipping and who often have little understanding of the technical and logistical aspects involved. This requires a lot of explaining, building trust and 'managing expectations' from the start, as so many influencing factors make shipping very different from booking 'a train ticket to get from A to B'."

About yacht design, construction & technology

Max: "The majority of yachts was never designed for shipping in the first place. There is no comparison with project cargo like windmill blades, where shipping is a given from the start." Max continues: "A yacht is designed with in-water forces, hydrodynamics and esthetics in mind first and foremost. This is luckily changing to some extent: we recently worked together with a shipyard client on transport requirements during the design and engineering stage and sometimes yards are selling dedicated shipping cradles with the yacht."

"As specialists, we need to constantly keep innovating. We are shipping much larger yachts than we used to and a big trend in our industry is the demand for greener and lighter yachts, resulting in the use of lighter materials and constructions. Additionally, the application of modern materials allows for yachts to be designed with ever more 'refined' esthetics and design features. Large glass windows, moving hull parts, specialised coatings are just a few examples. We now get requirements of lifting belts not touching any part of the hull above the waterline."

"It means that we need to keep innovating our lifting approach and materials, applying engineering-based technology. 'Cowboy-style' yacht shipping certainly does not work anymore, and not only for the larger or more vulnerable yachts. We frequently develop custom-made transport solutions for a specific yacht or model. 3D modelling brings

new opportunities as well. Although technical experts are perfectly capable of working with 2D drawings, our clients do not always find these easy to interpret. For the larger and more complex yachts we develop 3D simulations of the lift for clients to see will how their yacht is handled.", adds Max. "With yards producing 3D drawings and software tools getting more powerful and efficient, I can see that we will be using this more often in the future"

Loadmasters: very specialised Cargo Super Intendants...

Sevenstar Loadmasters both work on lift, stowage, cradle and sea fastening plans as well as supervise loading and discharge operations on the vessel on site. They play a major role in operations as specialized Cargo Super Intendants, with ample training and experience in handling yachts as complex cargo.

John says: "Because of this experience, on location, Loadmasters add their 'Fingerspitzengefühl' to carefully prepared technical preparations and procedures. They understand local conditions for loading and discharge and supervise port operations to run as smoothly as possible with an emphasis on safety on board. Loadmasters have local knowledge about weather, waters and tide and together with Sevenstar's extensive network of offices and local agents, they are quick to react to changing conditions. As Sevenstar we have a big additional advantage over competitors. With our access to the large fleet of Spliethoff vessels, we were able to train the crew on board of these ships in the handling of yachts. This year with all the challenges of COVID-19 that has proven a big pro: we have been able to keep providing shipping options to clients working with reliable and skilled crews on board of the vessels, while sometimes monitoring and controlling operations remotely in real time."

What do you enjoy most about your job at Sevenstar Operations?

John starts: "The main challenge is that there are always new situations or problems to find solutions for: this year COVID-19, a new yacht model, a new loading situation... even after 12 years in this job there is never a dull moment. I guess this is also what I most enjoy: to encourage the team to come up with new solutions all the time, as we don't like to say things can't be done!" Max agrees: "Most job satisfaction comes from being able to constantly push and shift boundaries and do things that have never been done before, focusing on real, solid incremental steps keeping up with developments in the yachting world and staying ahead of the game and the competition."