



Hitchhikers guide to yacht transport

Photo: Onne van der Wal

DESPITE A BILL THAT COULD RUN WELL IN TO SIX FIGURES, USING A YACHT TRANSPORTER TO MOVE YOUR PRIZED POSSESSION COULD PAY DIVIDENDS IN THE LONG RUN

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HOWORTH REPORT**

The desire of yacht owners to avoid damage to their yachts while moving them across the Atlantic in winter time was the initial impetus 30 or so years ago for lifting sailboats onto the decks of outbound cargo ships sailing to the West Indies. When the ships arrived safely into the Caribbean harbours, they discharged the yachts which then sailed off to explore the island waters, before returning loaded with cargoes of bananas. A new industry had been born. As yachts grew larger and larger, so the opportunities increased and there now exists a thriving trade in shipping superyachts around the world on board specialist cargo ships.

The Advantages

Aside from the need to transport a yacht due to her inability to physically make the passage, because of insufficient fuel capacity for example, there are many other advantages of transporting a yacht aboard another vessel. One of the most important plus points that yacht transportation offers is the reduced wear and tear. A long ocean passage especially in adverse weather conditions is hard on any vessel and can easily result in damage. That in turn can impact on an owner's time or charter use at the destination port whilst repairs are made or spares sourced.

Another advantage — especially for charter yachts working a Mediterranean and a Caribbean season back to back — is the ➔

opportunity to give most or even all the crew a holiday while the yacht is out of commission, without affecting owner and guest use of the yacht. Depending on the ship used to carry the yacht, speed can be another plus factor. Ships can sail from Port Everglades to Genoa in just 14 days and from Palma de Mallorca to Australia in 45 days.

Although this varies from ship to ship, it can be arranged for crew to travel with their yacht to undertake maintenance — even anti-fouling. Frequently yachts are insured only to sail in sheltered waters or within an area no greater than 200 miles off shore. Sailing a yacht trans-Atlantic therefore would increase that premium considerably. Last but

Each company is very different in style and approach and a friendly rivalry unites them all.

Dockwise Yacht Transport

A wholly owned subsidiary of Dockwise Shipping, Dockwise Yacht Transport has been transporting yachts since 1989. They own and operate four dedicated semi-submersible float on/float off yacht carriers and transported more than 1,300 yachts in 2008 on scheduled services covering the Mediterranean, north west Europe, the US, Central America, the Caribbean and South Pacific. Its float on/float off concept of loading yachts up to 61m (200ft) is both fascinating to watch and relatively safe. One of its biggest selling points is its

In November 2008, the company formed a cooperative partnership with Global Boat Shipping (GBS) allowing it to expand and serve the northwest shores of continental Europe as well as the increasingly popular cruising grounds off South America, the South Coast of the UK, the Baltic Sea, and the UAE. Expansion did not stop there, in recent months a deal said to be worth US\$12 million has been concluded merging the company with Yacht Path International, a company that specialises in lift-on/lift-off yacht transportation with a capacity to transport yachts up to 250 tonnes aboard ocean-going cargo and container ships. In 2008, Yacht Path transported around 600 yachts worldwide with annual revenues reaching approximately US\$27million.

The main market, and the company's most profitable route, is the trans-Atlantic service starting in Florida, Rhode Island or the Caribbean and moving across to the Mediterranean. This route peaks in April, May and September, October. Its second biggest market is the Pacific West Coasts of North and Central America. The islands of the South Pacific are third while the fourth in importance is the Caribbean/New England shuttle from Newport, Rhode Island to St. Thomas, USVI, and a service that peaks in spring and autumn each year.

A new target market is from Freeport, in the Bahamas on a route that will supplement its Caribbean routes for yachts seeking to go south for the winter. Freeport will become a direct destination from Newport, Rhode Island, making it convenient to get to Florida and the Bahamas for the winter. Additionally they will begin to offer voyages from the Bahamas to the Pacific West Coast of USA. ➔

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no means least in these times of heightened security awareness, is the much-reduced risk of pirate attack in the more dangerous parts of the world.

The Disadvantages

The financial cost of transporting a yacht aboard a ship appears very high, but the money saved by avoiding a self-reliant ocean passage, especially in terms of fuel, can easily make up for this.

For a sailing yacht, the ripping of one high value sail that will need replacing can certainly wipe out any cost advantage of sailing across an ocean. Despite the best endeavours of everyone, minor damage can occur even in shipping. The better shipping agents all use their own people or carefully vetted agents, together with surveyors where appropriate, to supervise loading and discharging to minimise any problems. Of course not every passage by ship is fast and smooth and it is quite possible for unforeseen delays to occur such as bad weather, delays in the Suez Canal, strike action in a port, or — where there is only one yacht aboard a ship that does not ply a regular route — a diversion for other cargo. For sailing yachts, it may be necessary to un-step and then re-step the mast, both exercises adding time and cost.

By Sea

Three companies dominate the specialist field of yacht transportation by sea. In alphabetic order, they are: Dockwise Yacht Transport, Peters & May, and Sevenstar Yacht Transport.

willingness to accept ‘riders’ aboard yachts larger than 25m (82ft) that are loaded onto their float on and off ships. Riders are members of the yacht's legitimate crew who are granted the freedom to perform any work they like aboard the yacht while she is high and dry on the mother ship. Work done this way including antifouling and light maintenance, can save a huge amount of time and expense. The service has a loyal following, with one yacht, the 36m (118ft) Baglietto *Adler*, having crossed the Atlantic 40 times with the carrier.



A 37m (121ft) Sunseeker being lowered into a cradle

Photo: Peters & May



Photo: Onne van der Wal

Sailing conditions permitting crossings can provide the perfect opportunity to carry out light yacht maintenance and repairs

Headquartered in Fort Lauderdale with operational offices around the world, the group saw a 20 per cent fall in sales in the first quarter of 2009 but, over recent months, it has received an increasing number of enquiries and business is reported as being more steady.

Peters & May

UK based Peters & May have more than 30 years experience in yacht delivery by sea, air and road, with a worldwide network of offices and agents. Unlike the other two companies in the big three, they do not own ships, instead they act as cargo agents placing the yacht aboard whatever ship they think is most appropriate at the time to provide the best service for its customers, whether the priority is cost, speed, unusual destination — or any other factor.

The company entered the market when it was contracted to provide race logistics to the growing number of global yachting events such as the Whitbread Round The World Race and the America's Cup. It expanded to work with UK yacht builders Fairline, Princess, Sealine and Sunseeker, whose own businesses were expanding into Europe and needed experienced shipping

agents to undertake yacht transportation.

In July 2007, it took a majority stake in the US company Air & Ocean Shipping Inc which it subsequently renamed Peters & May USA Inc and in May 2009, the company — seeing an opportunity to strengthen its offerings again — acquired the assets of Complete Freight, whose staff and founding directors were fully integrated into the company's global operation.

Currently employing 82 people worldwide, the company has a turnover of £57 million. In the past, the company has arranged through its various agencies, the transportation for the 66m (217ft) *Rosenkavalier* (now *Haida G*) and the 61m (200ft) *Mylin IV*. It has also shipped *Whirlaway* from the Vitters yard in Holland to San Diego to meet her new mast because without it she wasn't structurally stiff enough for a sea voyage under her own power. Over the last year, the expanded company shipped 8,000 vessels of all sizes through more than 150 ports in over 60 countries.

To ensure that all the yachts are handled safely, the company supervises the fabrication of each yacht's cradle. It has now developed a range of custom cradles capable of carrying yachts up to 40m (131ft). The company sends its own team of cargo supervisors and

in-house surveyors to oversee lifts working closely with the ports to ensure the best possible handling of these precious cargoes.

Sevenstar Yacht Transport

Sevenstar Yacht Transport is part of the Dutch Spliethoff group of companies and has been in the business of transporting yachts since 1984. Around 95 per cent of the yachts it carries are placed aboard one of its own 80 heavy-lift vessels utilising the company's own loading masters, specially developed lifting gear, and yacht carrying cradles. Over recent years developments in the methods of lifting, cradling and lashing have made it possible to consider more complex lifts.

Biglift, a sister company, has several ships capable of lifting up to 40m (131ft) and 800 tonnes.

Together, Sevenstar and Biglift can undertake to ship any type of yacht or floating cargo. Typically, this can include dredgers, patrols boats and workboats, but the majority of its trade is in yachts. The smallest transported is a range from 6m (19.7ft) boats shipped from various manufacturers in the USA together with RIBs and tenders. The majority of the yachts shipped are in the 20m-30m (66ft-98ft) bracket but some 200 ➤

were over 25m (82ft) last year with between 30 and 40 of those over 35m (115ft). The largest so far was a 50m (164ft) motoryacht weighing in at 450 tonnes, a job that required a total of 24 slings to manage the lift. The heaviest transported was a 550 tonne dredger, while the deepest draught was a racing sailing yacht with an 8m (26ft) keel.

The company ships to destinations worldwide and has sailing schedules timed to cover various events such as the international boat shows in Fort Lauderdale and Monaco. Yacht crew can, depending on the ship and space availability, be carried as one of the carrying ship's passengers and, as long as sea conditions permit, are allowed to work aboard their yacht either inside her or polishing the exterior.

Others in the Field

There are a few smaller niche companies offering yacht transport including Project Yacht Transportation. Seeing the growing number of yacht builders and construction companies in Turkey it saw an opportunity to offer safe, experienced, flexible solutions providing service to local companies using break bulk and container ships to carry yachts as deck cargo.

Premier Shipping and Packing — better known as PSP and title sponsor of this year's Southampton Boat Show — has a marine division, which specialises in the movement of yachts and motorboats of all types and sizes transporting personal pleasure craft and commercial vessels such as hovercraft and patrol boats. With a UK market share of around 10 per cent and expanding, they run specially chartered vessels with its German partners. Routes include Northern Europe / UK to Southern Europe and Atlantic crossings to serve the Caribbean market. The company is

the official logistics provider for the Powerboat P1 series and the Clipper Round the World Race and has a joint venture with Ondeck in Antigua to provide a complete package of marine services in the Caribbean.

By road

Generally speaking, road transport does not play an important role in the transportation of superyachts. For obvious reasons of size a long journey on the back of a road trailer is seldom practical. Frequently, however, the hull or the

would be approximately US\$175,000 with attractive pre-payment discounts at the same time, pointing out that the similar voyage during off season would be more cost effective.

PSP gave figures to ship an unspecified 35m yacht from Fort Lauderdale to Toulon quoting US\$89,000 for a water to water shipment that included marine insurance, shipping cradle and the services of its own cargo supervisor at loading and discharging ports. It quoted a crossing time of between 20-21 days.

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superstructure of a superyacht requires transporting by road during the process of construction and very occasionally, a completed vessel does take to the road. Van de Wetering in the Netherlands has been specialising in this form of yacht transport since 1955.

Cost Comparisons

SB asked four companies for a quotation to ship a 35m (115ft) yacht from Miami to the south of France in high season. Peters and May based their quote on a 34m Sunseeker shipped from Fort Lauderdale to Genoa, Italy, and gave a figure of US\$96,000 to include insurance and the supply of a suitable cradle. Customs clearance charges were excluded.

Dockwise quoted in feet for a yacht of 120ft x 25ft from Port Everglades to Toulon stating that the cost, including insurance and cradling,

Sevenstar, were unable to give a quote but stated that it is the company's new policy to beat any price quoted by its competitors.

The Future

All the companies interviewed agree that the piggyback concept of yacht transportation is only going to continue to grow — both in numbers and size of yachts carried. Costs may increase, at least in the short term, because of increasing demand.

The Internet is also becoming increasingly important for enquiries, making the physical location of the shipping company less important than its service and reputation. This, too, will undoubtedly continue.

And — whilst the Atlantic crossing is likely to remain very important for all the shipping companies — the range of yacht destinations is certainly going to grow. ●



Yachts being discharged at anchor by floating crane

CONTACT DETAILS

DOCKWISE YACHT TRANSPORT

► Web: www.yacht-transport.com

YACHT PATH INTERNATIONAL INC

► Web: www.yachtpath.com

PETERS & MAY

► Web: www.petersandmay.com

COMPLETE FREIGHT LTD

► Web: www.completefreight.com

SEVENSTAR YACHT TRANSPORT B.V.

► Web: www.sevenstar.nl

Big Lift Shipping B.V.

► Web: www.bigliftshipping.com

GLOBAL BOAT SHIPPING GMBH & CO. KG

► Web: www.gbs-germany.com

PSP PREMIER SHIPPING AND PACKING LTD

► Web: www.psap.co.uk

VAN DE WETERING INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT B.V.

► Web: www.vandewetering.nl