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Moran's building program never seems to end: Eleanor F. Moran

Eleanor F. Moran is one of numerous new tugs being introduced by Moran Towing Corp. The Connecticut-based company is in the midst of a building program involving ship-assist tugs, pushboats, offshore towing vessels and various types of barges. Washburn & Doughty, the Maine shipyard, currently has several years' worth of business building new tugs for Moran. [Gregory Walsh photos]



Moran Towing Corp., which has almost singlehandedly kept a Maine shipyard busy for close to a decade, plans to continue building new tugs at the same shipyard for at least six more years.

In 2006 Moran introduced two new 5,100-hp ship-assist tugs, both featured in this article. In 2007 and 2008 the Connecticut-based company will introduce a pair of 121-foot ocean-towing tugs fitted with Intercon articulated coupler systems. And in coming years, Moran will take delivery of another half a dozen z-drive tractor-style tugs in the 5,000-to-6,000-hp range.

So steady has the Moran building program been that its shipyard, Washburn & Doughty of East Boothbay, Maine, has announced plans to open a second construction yard farther upstate to accommodate its backlog of orders. Bruce Doughty, co-owner of the 30-year-old business, said he has been turning away orders for new tugs for a year or more.

Washburn & Doughty delivered its first Moran tug, the 92-foot z-drive tractor Marci Moran, in 1999. Since then the same shipyard has delivered an additional 13 z-drive tugs for Moran, plus a handful for other tug companies.

Announcing its plans to build six additional tugs with Washburn & Doughty in coming years, Moran officials claimed that at the end of their building program the company may be operating the largest fleet of ASDs in the nation. However, two other companies that operate large fleets of tractors — Foss Maritime and McAllister Towing — are also engaged in building programs that could keep pace with Moran in that regard. Currently, Moran operates 17 tugs with twin azimuthing stern drives, plus four single-screw tugs with single azimuthing z-drives mounted forward, known as combi-tugs or Mortrac tugs.

The most recent Moran tug to be introduced is the 92-foot Eleanor F. Moran, with EMD power, Schottel z-drives and fitted with FiFi-1 firefighting capability plus additional features that would theoretically qualify it for work at LNG terminals.

Eleanor F. Moran and its immediate predecessor, April Moran, are the last in a long line of Moran tractor-style tugs to be built with EMD main engine power. EMD's long-familiar 645-series engine is no longer compatible with EPA emission standards, while the EMD 710 series diesels are too large for these particular tugs, according to Jim Coyne, Moran's vice president of harbor tug construction. New tugs for the foreseeable future will be fitted with Detroit Diesel/MTU 4,000 series engines of about 2,550 hp each, said Coyne. Elsewhere in the engine room, Moran continues to use John Deere diesels for auxiliary power generators and Caterpillar diesels for its Nijhuis fire pumps.

These two new tugs are also the first in the Moran fleet to be fitted with Schottel z-drives instead of

the more common Rolls-Royce (aka Ulstein/Aquamaster), which has been the driving force behind Moran tugs since the first tractors were built. Rolls-Royce discontinued its 1650 series z-drive packages, while Schottel has a suitable product of similar size and power, according to Coyne. The company plans to continue with the Detroit Diesel/Schottel combination, at least for the short term, according to Coyne.

These latest Moran tugs are set up specifically for ship-assist work with a Markey hawser winch forward, a capstan with H-bitts aft, and heavy fendering on the bow and elsewhere. The winch, as well as the firefighting equipment, can be operated from the pilothouse.

On its most recent tugs Moran has also been installing a fuel accountability system produced by FuelTrax of Houston, Texas. This vessel-based system provides complete real-time and historical data on just about everything aboard a tugboat that has to do with fuel, including a constant inventory of all fuel stored on board. The system can also provide the exact amount of fuel used on any particular tugboat job, potentially useful information for operators of a ship-assist tug. Information is collected from data points around the vessel and then made available through an Internet-based central data center, accessible by crewmembers as well as by shore-based vessel managers.

Moran's barge operations have also been in the news lately. The company has a pair of new 118,000-barrel oil barges under construction at Bay Shipbuilding, Wis., to be matched up with new ATB tugs under construction at Washburn & Doughty.

More significant, perhaps, Moran, as of the end of 2006, had achieved the distinction of having an all double-hull fleet of oil barges. At the end of the year the company was operating eight double-hull oil barges ranging from 40,000 barrels to 145,000 barrels. In the past two years the company has retired or divested itself of the single-hull barges Texas, Maine and Delaware. The last to go was Delaware, sold to Seaboats Inc. of Fall River, Mass. In late 2006 the new 60,000-barrel tank barge Long Island was delivered from Bollinger Shipyards of New Orleans.

Other new double-hull barges introduced by Moran in the past year or two include Georgia and New Hampshire, both with 118,000-barrel capacity, and Massachusetts, with 145,000-barrel capacity, having recently undergone a double-hulling and refurbishment at a Florida shipyard.

In all, at the beginning of 2007, Moran was operating a fleet of about 85 tugboats and 27 barges. Moran currently operates in ports from the Texas coast to New Hampshire. Recent new contracts will also soon have Moran operating at LNG terminals in Freeport, Texas, and on the west coast of Mexico.