

In good repair

Bernard Furic, managing director of Sobrena highlights the company's operations and its successful alliance agreement

Sobrena, the major French ship repair yard, was established in 1987 after the collapse of the former ARNO Group. Today, Sobrena is owned by Groupe Meunier, a major industrial maintenance company as well as the third world leader for the production of generating sets. Following a long tradition of ship repairing in Brest, Group Meunier brought in a new style of management. When it was commissioned in 1910, Sobrena's drydock number one was the largest drydock in the world, and today the company is a major ship repair yard in France. With three drydocks of up to 80 metres in width and 420 metres in length, Sobrena is able to accommodate nearly all the ships in the world, with only very few ULCC exceptions.

Sobrena is proud of its long reference list including major operators, as managing director, Bernard Furic, states: "We have dealt with various operators such as Atlantic Container Line (Ro-Ros), Brittany Ferries (car ferries), CGM (container ships), Franship Management (tankers), Gazocean (LPG-LNG), Interocean Uglund Management (shuttle tankers), Bro Ström (product tankers), Shell (LNG, shuttle tankers) as well as P & O Ferries. Our aim is to provide our customers with a high standard of quality, competitive prices and a very reliable delivery time. Most of our clients are owners or companies managing ships for other owners in the oil and gas industries."

He continues: "We have agents located in various parts of the world including Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Singapore, Sweden, the UK as well as the US. Through these agents, owners of ships might be made aware that we exist. We are fortunate that most our customers are repeat businesses, but in order to be known by other potential customers, we do invest in advertising, for example we are present in several ship repair exhibitions mainly in London and Oslo.

“By using our services, customers are aware that they will benefit from the guarantee offered by belonging to an important group. The family origins of Sobrena bear witness to its dynamism and this is supported by the competence of our management team. The technological, financial and human resources, which we have within the framework of our holding group add to our credibility – they justify the confidence shown in us by important national and international companies. Located in Brest, the most western part of Brittany, Sobrena is ideally situated at the entrance of the English Channel. Well known to seafarers, Ushant Island marks the entrance to the Channel for all vessels heading to Northern Europe, and with no entrance restrictions, we are also located in a sheltered area providing safe mooring with more than 20 metre draft.”

Sobrena took its first steps into the LNG market when it acquired a contract for the refit docking of the French LNG Carrier, Descartes, in 1987. This was soon followed by Dreyfus’ 126000m³ LNGC Edouard LD for its 1988 refit docking, and again three years later in 1991. Then in 1992, Sobrena won a two and a half month contract for the refurbishment of Shell’s LNG Port Harcourt. Built by Nestor by Chantiers de l’Atlantique in 1977, the vessel received its first commercial cargo after the Brest refurbishment. In the same year, the Shell-managed Methane Princess was also refurbished at Sobrena.

Year after year, Sobrena docked more and more LNG tankers from customers who placed their confidence in Sobrena repeatedly including Shell, Dreyfus and SNTM Hyproc. Sobrena was selected in 1999 by Shell, yet again, for the refurbishment of LNG Lagos, the former Gastor that was built in 1976. The success and reputation of Sobrena’s performance led to increased confidence amongst its clients especially Shell, which brought about the signing of an alliance agreement. Bernard adds: “Shell International has got two alliances now, one in the Far East in Singapore and one in Europe with us, for the service and refurbishment of its tankers, shuttle tankers, product tankers and LNG carriers. There is a drive in the company to constantly provide the best service to this highly valued customer, which also acts as a form of advertisement for

us.” Since then, a number of LNGs have docked and Sobrena has had the pleasure to accommodate Edouard LD for the seventh time this year.

Moving on, Bernard highlights the secret of the company’s success: “We aim to sell what we are and strive to be what we say we are, which increases customer’s faith in us. Apart from mastering technologies the needed, we believe it’s vital to listen to customers because we learn a lot from them. They express what they’re happy about and what dissatisfies them as well as what could be improved – listening to their needs keeps us in business and them very satisfied.”

He concludes: “Our aim is to maintain a steady growth by continuously improving efficiency, safety as well as productivity. We strive to increase our reputation and work hard to maintain the very same high quality standards with every one of our customers.”