

MarFlex is making inroads into the American inland market

Well known as a supplier of electric-drive pump systems to the MR tanker market, MarFlex is reporting strong interest from builders of shortsea tonnage, as well as the American inland barge market

Activating shortsea tanker market is driving interest in MarFlex deepwell electric pumps systems, especially in the 10,000–30,000 dwt range. In parallel, the company has won a succession of contracts in the South American inland barge market, where prospects are said to be promising.

“We see a lot of interest from European shipbuilders, with Croatia and Turkey getting back in business,” explains MarFlex commercial manager Richard Beek. Here the scope of supply is not radically different from what the company has been supplying in the product tanker market and other segments.

The North American barge market is a new departure for the company, and there is a belief that MarFlex could become one of the most significant suppliers. In Europe, the MarFlex electric-drive deepwell pump systems have been the standard in the inland barge market for more than 30 years.

In America, the typical barge concept has one pump in a big pipe connected to several tanks, with the diesel engine behind it and a cut-down shaft in between. “The MarFlex system has no rotating parts on deck, so there is no risk of injuries,” says area sales manager Jasper van de Kant. “Another advantage is that we can vary the pumping speed. MarFlex pump systems allow a variation in speed that allows for a broader range of cargoes to be carried, including high-viscose ones,” he says.

MarFlex has secured an order to supply up to 70 barges for a major South American operator. “The first barges in the 70-barge series have been in operation for a few months. They have proven to be very versatile and reliable. For these barges we have trained crews where we have the different systems next to each other. The MarFlex system discharged in a third of the time of its counterpart,” says Mr van de Kant.

“Besides the solution for the crude oil barges, we see many interesting opportunities

in the US market right now,” he says. One of them is the electric-drive pump system for articulated tug barges. “These vessels have a lot of discharge moments that make our pumps very suitable. Electric-drive systems are quiet, so you can discharge day and night. Also, the MarFlex pump is very efficient: the more you discharge, the more you save. Right now we are talking with a lot of customers to see how we can optimise the configuration,” says Mr van de Kant. Typically the barges will have a number of pumps or systems on board, all of which require electric drives, though they are never used simultaneously. MarFlex has been encouraging the barge operators to consider using the converter system that drives the pump to drive other systems on board.

On the software side, MarFlex has developed a system for monitoring the shaft torque. It serves as a protection system that automatically decreases the pump speed to secure the discharging process.

The company has also developed a remote access system, eliminating the need for onboard MarFlex assistance for the electric-drive pump system. If there is a problem the crew can turn on a switch that allows MarFlex to analyse the system remotely, and advise the crew accordingly.

Mr van de Kant foresees that more and more crude will be carried along America’s waterways and that safety regulations will tighten. He believes that will only benefit the case for MarFlex electric-drive deepwell pump systems. **TST**

OVERVIEW OF THE MARFLEX REMOTE ACCESS SYSTEM

