



# SHIPREPAIR & CONVERSION TECHNOLOGY

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# TURBONED

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## Positive market movements underway

A magnetised Envirobot in action at Gibdock.

It is too early to say that the worst is behind the shipping industry, but certainly the container shipping sector is now enjoying a recovery, which will have positive knock-on effects for companies in the marine maintenance and repair business. The main trade lanes from Europe to Asia and from Asia to the USA have proved unexpectedly buoyant this year and this has caught containership operators on the hop. Equipment and vessel space shortages have arisen and new services are being introduced at short notice to keep up with demand.

Now this upturn may not endure for long, given the tough fiscal measures that many major economies are having to take to cut debt levels, but it is good news while it lasts. Containerships are being taken out of lay-up much earlier than expected, and these often need maintenance work to ready them for deployment. For example, underwater repair specialists say they are getting more enquiries for hull cleaning to remove fouling taken on during lay-up at anchorage. Shipboard riding squad teams are also being called up to complete last minute repairs while vessels are on route to new deployments.

Demand from the offshore vessel operating market is also on the rise, it seems. Confidence is returning to this market and with it more enquiries for conversions, as well as significant upgrades. South East Asian yards, especially Singapore, have significant amounts of FPSO and other specialist offshore vessel work in hand, while in Europe Keppel

Verolme reports that its focus for now is very much on offshore projects.

The cruise market is another that appears to be pulling out of the temporary doldrums, and there has been continued expenditure by various brands on upgrading vessels to keep pace with customer requirements. Lloyd Werft for example handled three major cruise vessel projects in the first half of the year, and the Grand Bahama Shipyard is also being kept busy by multi-million dollar contracts from several cruise operators.

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Environmental factors continue to have a positive impact on the industry with, for example, a rise in boiler work needed to prepare vessels to utilise alternative fuel types, as well as arrangements that can help return ships to service, quickly. The use of drydocking time to coat

underwater hulls with improved coating systems is still on the up.

There is also a greater willingness on the part of yards to utilise environmentally friendly technology. Gibdock for example recently redelivered three Danish-owned containerships that required full hull blasting and coating ahead of schedule, through the use of ‘Envirobot’ Ultra High Pressure (UHP) robotic systems. Developed by Chariot Robotics, this robot uses patented magnetic air gap technology which allows it to sweep or full blast, back and forth across the hull’s flat bottom, vertical sides, bow and stern shapes. The robot was used to blast 2000m<sup>2</sup> of hull underwater in the ship’s mid-section, with wetblasting used on the curved bow and stern sections. As no abrasives were used in the process, dust pollution did not occur and the need to dispose of spent abrasives was eliminated. Gibdock reports that not only was the work done quicker overall, the operation was more environmentally friendly, with no need to dispose of potentially harmful blasting materials.

Despite the positive signs of market recovery, yards will have to become more productive, and environmentally conscious, if they are to stay competitive in future, especially with more newbuilding yards on the look out for repair and conversion contracts. Gibdock’s embracing of robotics is an indication that new technology will play a vital role in sustaining a recovery. *SCRT*

