

First impressions pivotal in sealing a deal

Vijay Arora, technical head of classification society IRClass, the Indian register of shipping, discusses the value of cosmetics and why it is important to make a vessel look attractive to customers



▶ *Vijay Arora, technical head of IRClass*

Cosmetics have a huge impact on customer, stakeholder and overall market impressions of any vessel. A ship with a neglected, shabby or – worse – rusted look is likely to result in lower chartering employment, increased idle time, and correspondingly fewer earnings and more headaches for its owner.

A well-maintained vessel, including all its visible areas and internal machinery systems, will not only protect its owner's reputation, but also potentially lead to more utilisation.

In the OSV sector, facing enough challenges as it is due to the depressed oil and gas markets, and largely saturated with supply versus demand, every edge an owner can develop ahead of competitors is essential.

A potential customer's assessment starts with the vessel's exterior, so the 'at a glance' cosmetic side is as critical as the integrity of the internal machinery, being fully representative of owner's image. A decently turned-out vessel leaves a vitally important first impression with all involved parties.

It should be understood that many customers never really get to know the technical side of a vessel. Here the external

cosmetic condition of a ship matters perhaps more than anything in terms of influencing the decision to do business.

First impressions are also one of the pivotal deciding factors when it comes to Port State and any other third party inspections. If the vessel looks like a rust bucket, the vessel will be treated like one, no matter how good the crew on board and the systems.

Many customers require even chartered vessels to appear cosmetically attractive to minimise, in the event of an incident, the likelihood of negative media attention. With the vetting regime reaching saturation point, a ship can be rejected by an owner or oil major on the basis of appearance alone. Even a single rust streak can be officially classed as 'heavy corrosion'.

With a limited crew on board, the mantra for maintaining a vessel is 'preparation, preparation, preparation'. For example, deck corrosion is an issue, particularly in between dry-dockings. With hectic charters, impact damages offshore and in port, and sea spray acting as a catalyst, deck corrosion – if not addressed – rapidly transforms even the best ship into a rust bucket.

The quick rate of deterioration of fixtures and fittings, pipe clamps and brackets can cause fast and widespread deck staining. Proper surface preparation, prior to



▲ *Projecting a good image, Indra Point, a multi-purpose supply vessel, looks ship-shape at the quayside*



◀ *Regional support vessel, Shaun 1, looks to be in pristine condition*

the application of paint, is essential – as is the selection of the paint. Weeks of surface preparation may be wasted if the paint is not applied as prescribed in the paint scheme.

Rust spots should be tackled immediately to avoid spreading. This guards against mounting costs of repair if left unattended. Continual touch-up maintenance on a prioritised basis goes a long way to reducing long-term costs. Other simple steps like the maintenance of underwater coating systems lead to savings in fuel costs and a reduced carbon footprint.

Thoughtful preparation and product selection during dry-docking, coupled with considerably placed markings that avoid high abrasion impact areas, fosters longevity. Similarly, maintaining the pumping, piping, electrical and propulsion systems in a timely manner enables smooth functioning, leading to improved stakeholder dividends. This can be achieved using Planned Maintenance System tools, software that is a great asset to owners in facilitating both necessary cost planning and maintenance scheduling.

Cosmetic maintenance should not be interpreted as a cost, more a cost saver – an investment. A good-looking, well-maintained ship will reward its owner with better returns, it's as simple as that. Being proactive, applying early detection, diagnosis and preventative maintenance in all areas is the way to make this happen.