

Hellespont installs C-Bird VSAT

German shipping company Hellespont Hammonia has installed a C-band VSAT system onboard one of its vessels on a trial basis, with a view to potentially signing a multi-year communications agreement if it proves successful.

Hellespont Hammonia of Hamburg, Germany, has completed the installation of a new VSAT system featuring the Maritime Broadband C-Bird antenna system, aboard the MT Hellespont Progress.

The installation represents a 90-day trial of the antenna, which is integrated with the iDirect 5100 modem and utilises global satellite services provided by Maritime Telecommunications Network (MTN).

Hellespont says that it intends to evaluate the results of the trial of the system before committing to a 3 year agreement.

The company has installed a full 2.4 metre C-band system with global coverage, featuring 64Kbps/64Kbps bandwidth speeds, provided with a Minimum Information Rate.

"It was seen in the company that we must improve on our offer of modern communication tools to the vessel and particularly to the crew," explained Matthias Edler, manager, information systems at Hellespont.

"From the technical point of view we have to follow the path to purely IP protocol based connections which are the next

generation communication infrastructure in the shipping industry."

"As a quality ship manager and operator we must also look at the well being of our crews. The importance of them being able to communicate with their families on a regular and cost efficient basis must not be underestimated."

The MT Hellespont Progress, a 1996-built 228.6 metre product carrier, trades worldwide, and first began using the system during a voyage from Flushing, Netherlands to El Segundo, California, USA.

Captain of the vessel, Larry Deluna, commented that: "The C-Bird antenna is amazing. Cheaper telephone calls for the crew at any time, internet, updated news, chats and even typhoon tracking through the internet."

"The crew loves the antenna. They call their family or chat with them everyday. We have a happy crew."

Antenna service

The team behind the Maritime Broadband C-Bird system includes a number of people involved with former shipping VSAT



The Hellespont Progress (right) has installed the C-Bird antenna, designed to be used without a radome (centre of picture, left)



provider Broadband Maritime, with five members of the previous company involved in the new venture.

Broadband Maritime had been one of the early pioneers in the sector, having been founded in 1999, and was active in the market for a number of years, counting companies such as Danaos Shipping and General Maritime Corporation among its shipping VSAT clients.

The group of five that have formed the new company includes former Broadband Maritime president and CEO Mary Ellen Kramer, taking on the role of president of the new Maritime Broadband venture.

She told *Digital Ship* about how the new company plans to differentiate itself going forward, and in particular how it is aiming to provide a more focused service, based on the provision of its antenna technology rather than the full VSAT service.

"Maritime Broadband is focused on sales of antennas, with onboard services being provided in conjunction with MTN or other well established service providers and installation/maintenance services being outsourced as well," she told us.

"We will provide the antenna to service

providers in the market and onboard services will be provided in conjunction with those service providers. Service specifics will be determined by customer requirements and service provider capabilities."

"Broadband Maritime [was different in that it] provided its own network services, installation and maintenance, as well as the antenna."

Maritime Broadband has agreed a three-year umbrella service agreement with MTN in this regard, and has established a relationship with iDirect through the Hellespont project.

Redesign

The C-Bird antenna being offered under the new service does have some aesthetic similarities to Broadband Maritime's previous offering, most noticeably the absence of a radome covering the moveable dish.

However, the current incarnation of the antenna is the result of a complete overhaul in the design, and it can now be delivered to the ship in kit form for installation and commissioning by the crew itself, thus removing any requirement for cranes to get the equipment in place.

It comes in approximately 25 parts to be assembled onboard, with the heaviest single component weigh just over 80 kilograms. The total assembled weight is approximately 600 kilograms.

The absence of a radome is a unique aspect of this design, which the company says it has achieved by making the antenna non-critically balanced, with stabilised tracking and no outdoor control electronics.

The system has been created to withstand head winds of up to 110 knots, with the antenna continuing to be fully operational in head winds of up to 85 knots, and has automatic self locking for storm protection.

With this easily recognisable antenna the company will be hoping to become much more visible in the sector and take advantage of an expanding market for VSAT services in maritime, which Ms Kramer believes has been growing and developing in line with her expectations since she first got involved with shipboard communications.

"Always-on communications will be a must for competitive operation internally and with crew, charterers, etc," she said. **DS**



The antenna is delivered in a number of different parts, to be assembled by the crew onboard

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