

# A pioneering spirit in a pioneering industry

As any manufacturer of wind turbine components will testify, the handling of their precious cargo is of critical importance. PES caught up with John Fricker, General Manager of RoRo/Special Projects, Europe, for Atlantic Container Line (ACL), to discover how his company smoothes the transportation process.

**PES:** Welcome to PES. Firstly, can you tell us a little about the history of your company?

**John Fricker:** For over 40 years, ACL's pioneering spirit has been the driving force that has made this company a leader in the North Atlantic Trade and one of the most respected names in the ocean transportation.

A consortium of five major European steamship companies joined together to meet the high capital investment involved in building and operating an innovative fleet of Roll-on/Roll-off (RoRo) containerhips. This historic union, the first of the container age, resulted in the creation of Atlantic Container Line (ACL), serving the trade between Europe and East Coast of North America with the world's largest Roll-on/Roll-off containerhips carrying containers, project and oversized cargo, heavy equipment and vehicles.

ACL is now a wholly owned unit of The Grimaldi Group of Naples.

**PES:** What fuelled your diversification into the carriage of wind turbines?

**JF:** ACL has always been involved in the shipment of wind turbine components, be it the blades or the nacelles. We see a strong future for the wind power business, based on interest that is fuelled, at least

in part, by US government incentives. Manufacturers have located some blade and tower production in the destination markets, but they tend to hold the more highly-engineered components for their own plants. This suggests that wherever demand develops, the heavy components for wind power generation will continue to be a long-haul logistics issue.

ACL has taken a different approach from the project carriers. With weekly sailings from Europe to the US East Coast using RoRo methods and by moving smaller shipments from the factory to the installation site without the interim accumulation and storage – a just-in-time (JIT) approach. Employing this method, components flow from the factory to the destination port, where a logistics company arranges the final inland move to storage or staging site, or directly to the wind farm.

**PES:** And how important is this facet of your business to your total operation?

**JF:** Wind turbines are an important part of our operation the same as any other cargo – we don't differentiate, we consider all cargo and clients an important factor to ACL's operation.

**PES:** What particular parts of the world are your prime markets? Do you have plans for expansion into other geographic areas?

**JF:** ACL offers a weekly container and RoRo service between North America and Europe as well as North America and West Africa. ACL also offers oversized service to the Mediterranean and South America though our parent company, the Grimaldi Group of Naples, Italy.

**PES:** Can you explain a little more about how RoRo benefits your customers?

**JF:** RoRo is one of the safest and most inexpensive ways to handle and transport oversized or special project cargo. Most times the manufacturer is not forced to dismantle the product into numerous pieces and then reassemble the product at final destination. This is costly and time-consuming.

There is no exposure to water or the elements because the cargo is always secured in ACL's RoRo/containerhip's garage decks for the entire voyage.

**PES:** How is your fleet suited to the particular challenges of transporting (often massive) wind turbines?

**JF:** ACL is the carrier with the special capabilities to handle unusual cargo: the right vessels, equipment and experienced professionals to get the job done right.

It begins with our vessels. Each ship is the length of three football fields; they were designed to carry a wide variety of

TOO FRAGILE TO BE HOISTED, AND TOO HARD TO HANDLE  
THEY WERE TOO LONG FOR A CONTAINER, TOO

## SO HOW DID THEY GET THERE?

UNUSUAL PROJECT CARGO CAN BE A REAL TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGE – BUT NOT FOR ACL. WE MEET THE CHALLENGE EVERY TIME WITH THE RIGHT VESSELS, EQUIPMENT AND EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONALS. THESE 72' LONG WINDMILL WINGS WERE DRIVEN DIRECTLY ONTO ACL'S RORO/CONTAINERSHIP FOR THE OCEAN VOYAGE. WE HANDLED ALL OF THE INLAND TRANSIT DETAILS INCLUDING SPECIAL OVER-THE-ROAD PERMITS, AND DELIVERED THE WINGS SAFELY TO THEIR FINAL DESTINATION.

FOR CONTAINERS AND COMPLEX RORO SHIPMENTS, CALL ACL. WE ALWAYS OFFER EASY SOLUTIONS TO DIFFICULT TRANSPORT PROBLEMS.



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cargo types. ACL's vessels offer 100 per cent under-deck stowage, allowing the ultimate protection for cargo with dimensions of up to 6.8m high or 9.0m wide, from massive turbines and heavy machinery to aircraft and giant cranes. The vessels have a ramp capacity of 420 tons, enabling us to take very heavy pieces of cargo.

**PES:** The wind industry is growing at an impressive rate – what measures are you putting in place to ensure that your company capitalises upon this?

**JF:** A project charter vessel could have handled the entire shipment for the manufacturers, but that would involve staging the components at or near the origin port while the major components for the full order are built and assembled for shipment. With our weekly sailing from Europe, we can offer the JIT

to manufacturers – thus saving on expensive storage costs. This is what ACL can offer and sell to the industry.

**PES:** Is there an argument for the 'containerisation' of wind power equipment to reduce transportation costs?

**JF:** The components are heavy and bulky, but also sensitive. Units destined for a US wind farm measure 9.62 metres long by 3.7 metres wide by 4 metres high (31.6 by 12 by 13 feet). The full order was for 20 nacelles (the part between a wind turbine's tower and rotor), 20 hubs, and 20 spinners. The nacelles weigh 75 tons and the hubs 24 tons. Because of these factors they are totally unsuitable for containerisation.

**PES:** How far in advance would one of your wind clients typically have to book in their shipments? Are you looking at

ways of reducing this to encourage a degree of flexibility?

**JF:** This depends on how large the shipment is, normal RoRo cargo is booked on a weekly basis, however larger and heavy pieces need special equipment and these are booked up to a month or longer in advance of the sailing date.

With large volumes we have to plan the space, so we ask the shipper for as much notice as possible – but we are flexible and try to work with manufacturer delivery dates. ■



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