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THREE SEA-LAND ATLANTIC-CLASS SHIPS TO BE CONVERTED IN GERMAN SHIPYARD

PETER M. TIRSCHWELL | Mar 23, 1994 7:00PM EST

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Sea-Land Service Inc. has chosen the German shipyard Blohm & Voss AG as the contractor to modify three of its jumbo Atlantic-Class vessels (ACVs) later this year, company officials said this week.

The ships, which Sea-Land plans to pull from its U.S.-Mediterranean service, will be converted over a six-month period beginning in May into a faster class of vessel appropriate for longer trade lanes. The first ship will enter the Hamburg yard May 18, with the other two following shortly, Sea-Land officials said.

Sea-Land said it selected Blohm & Voss, an established German yard that now does mostly conversion and repair work, after a lengthy selection process that included consideration of U.S. shipyards.

To achieve an extra three knots of speed, each of the former Econships will be given additional horsepower, shortened by about 135 feet, and refitted with new streamlined bow sections below the waterline. The ships will cruise at 21 knots, up from their current speed of 18 knots.

Sea-Land's plan to modify three of its 12 ACV's into "Global Class" vessels was originally announced in January, but the company did not say whether they would come out of the Mediterranean or the North Atlantic, or where the work would be done. Nine ACVs are in service in the North Atlantic and three are deployed in the U.S.-Mediterranean trades.

Over the last month, however, Sea-Land began to inform its Atlantic vessel- sharing partners that it plans to pull the ships from the troubled Mediterranean trade and replace them with smaller vessels obtained through charters. When the ships emerge from the shipyard this fall, it is almost certain they will not be returned to the Atlantic.

"We are looking at several of the faster-growing markets in the world, including the Asia-Middle East and the Asia-Europe services, but we have not finalized anything yet." said Jesse Mohorovic, Sea-Land's vice president of corporate communications.

Sea-Land originally purchased the fleet of Atlantic-class ships from the defunct United States Lines in 1987 at an average price of \$12 million. Each ship underwent a \$2 million modification at the time that reduced its effective capacity to 3,400 20-foot equivalent units (TEUs) from over 4,000 TEUs. Sea-Land has not disclosed the cost of the current projects, which will not affect the ships' carrying capacity.

The conversions will involve three separate projects, including modification of the bow, midsection, and power plant, all undertaken with a single goal to make the ships faster.

The bow will be reshaped below the waterline to enable it to cut more easily through the water, and the ships themselves will be more powerful

because horsepower is being added at the same time that weight is being taken off.

About 135 feet will be removed from the ships' midsections, which will reduce each ship's length to about 815 feet. The ships'

existing 28,000- horsepower diesel power plants will not be touched, but a supplemental power source will be installed that will add 5,200 horsepower.

The extra power will come from a diesel generator that will drive an electric motor, which in turn will be geared to the propeller shaft aft of the main engine, said Rod Vulovic, Sea-Land's vice president of ship management services, who led the group overseeing the project.

"They will become a wholly different vessel," he said.

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