

SEVENSTAR YACHT TRANSPORT

“Seven seas and more... “

Sevenstar Yacht Transport transports over 1,200 motor and sailing yachts each year all over the world. A global network of destinations ranging from the familiar to the exotic, and its own fleet of transport vessels have propelled this Dutch company to the peak of its sector in just more than 25 years. Managing director Richard Klabbers gives Yacht Valley an inside look into the workings of the global yacht transport sector and Sevenstar’s meteoric rise.

The idea of having a yacht transported somewhere else on another vessel was not always an obvious one – yachts are, after all, by their very definition a means of transportation. Rising fuel prices and, crucially, the increasing accessibility of previously undeveloped sailing areas have, however, seen demand soar for this type of service over the past decade or so. And the trend shows no signs of abating. As the concept of motor yacht transportation has become more commonplace – due in no small part to Sevenstar’s success and affordability – sailing yachts have followed suit and new destinations are opening across the globe.



Jigsaw time

Once customers get in touch with us at Sevenstar, our first step is to find out their exact requirements. Although this might seem simple – owners want their boat moved from one place to another – many variables need to be taken into account. At the most basic level, we need to know when the move is to take place and to where exactly. Even if the actual final destination of the yacht is exotic, it might be more practical for us to drop her off there than at the nearest major port.

After a yacht is booked, we create a link for its planned route. Obviously, this is easy if she is going from the Med to the Caribbean

in the autumn, say. But if we need to transport a yacht to India or another unusual destination, things become more complex. For regular routes, we start setting up the logistics a month in advance of the date of departure. Then we make a planning for materials – cradles, lifting gear, etc. – and special requirements, like the need to use specialised supports or water and electricity supply on board. We also need to know if any crew will stay onboard the carrier during the transit.

Next we start making the stow plan for each particular vessel. Together with bringing materials into position – this is the real challenge, especially when there are lots of yachts involved. It is a jigsaw puzzle in terms of how the yachts will fit together on deck and whether they can easily be brought into position given the reach and limitations of the available cranes and the lifting requirements of the specific yacht models. We may need to buy or rent specific equipment so the operational plan or preplanning on the loading of a difficult yacht can take several months.



Working with experts

All of this is why we have a single person organising each trip – there is simply too much complex information to write down properly and transfer between people. As stow and lift plans can change up to two days before loading, the project manager has to constantly make fast and efficient adjustments. Once a vessel is nominated it is

in our interest to fill up the available space, finding the best way to combine the largest number of yachts on deck safely, for example by fitting smaller yachts under the bow of larger ones.

For owners, the most important thing is to know that their yachts are in expert hands. Sevenstar load masters are people from our own fleet, i.e. mostly former seamen, captains and mates. Most have worked with cranes for years, giving us an edge in this regard. We have our own training programme as well, in which we team up new arrivals with experienced load masters for a year. Nobody can really know a job like this in advance – while it may be easy to hoist a yacht within a marina, a dynamic lift with both yacht and transit vessel in the water is a different kettle of fish altogether. We are proud to be recognised as having some of the best load masters in the world.

Moreover, as in any area of expertise, it's the little things which are crucial to efficiency that only experience can teach. For instance, we always have divers placing lifting belts in position underwater and ensuring that they are not tangled or touching any stabilisers, propellers or submarine hatches – basically anything you might find on the underwater section of a yacht. Fitting these in ports where there are currents can be a real challenge and the work requires a certain degree of independent expertise as you can't communicate with someone 20 metres below the surface.

Management and people skills are very important too. Once the technical side of things is completed, there's still the human side – dealing with owners or their crew.

A growing world

The number of yachts Sevenstar transports has been growing year-on-year since 1985. This is due to the expansion of the market and the fact that our market share has

risen. When we first started, the yachting world was confined to the Caribbean, the Med and Northern Europe. Now, people want to go to Dubai, the west coast of North America, South Africa, the Seychelles and the Maldives.

Australia and New Zealand have become incredibly popular, not only for charter yachts or private individuals who want to do a world tour. Antipodeans increasingly buy yachts abroad with their strong dollars and ship them home. This can make more sense than buying local yachts and you can arrange practically everything from behind your computer.

Emerging economies like India, Brazil, China and other Asian countries are also coming on strong in terms of numbers of yacht owners. Things are evolving, and our network is keeping pace through an ongoing expansion and increased geographic dispersion. For instance, we just opened an office in the UK that will specialise in the liner business. This means that we can now also provide a complete package for any yacht to any destination for major yacht builders. We will be able to take a 120-footer to Mozambique, say, because we will have a liner service with custom-built cradles – so whatever we don't do with our own geared vessels or on chartered tonnage, now we will also do with liner vessels. This customised approach is only set to increase in the years ahead as nobody in the world offers such a comprehensive service.

Safety first

Weather conditions are rarely a problem for Sevenstar. All its vessels nowadays sail at a speed between 13 and 18 knots. Weather data is also a lot better, so really bad storms can easily be avoided by changing the route. And the larger ships that cross the Atlantic can go at 18 knots and outrun any front. This means no carrier gets caught in really bad storms, except in very specific areas –

for instance going from the east to the west coast of Australia in the wintertime, where fronts appear so quickly that the occasional storm is unavoidable. Everything is planned in advance and the safety of the yachts and the carrier crew is the principal point of concern.



Key to success

Sevenstar's dramatic success is mostly the fruit of the hard work of its skilled employees, flexibility and competitive pricing. The company's greatest strength is that it owns its carrier vessels via mother company Spliethoff – and therefore almost never needs to search for a vessel to charter – while competitors need to line up orders and only then find a carrier, with a large chunk of their commission paid to the ship owner.

Sizing her up

When transporting a yacht, the most important thing is getting the most precise data possible. Size is not the only variable: A 40m sloop is usually a breeze, while a 25m ketch can be more of a challenge. Sports fishing boats tend to have a centre of gravity in the centre because of fishing towers, making lifting quite complex. Any yacht up to 20m will take a single lift with a single hook. Above this size, safety comes first and a tandem lift is preferred. Sevenstar's experienced loadmasters and engineering department always ensure the safest and most reliable service for each and every yacht.