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CRUISE & FERRY Info

SEPTEMBER 2006 NO. 9



ITALIAN DIFFERENCES

COSTA AND MSC TAKE
DELIVERY OF NEW SHIPS



THEME: BOOKINGS
OPERATORS EMBRACE IT-SOLUTIONS

PLUS:
Company profile
Wagenborg
Passagiersdiensten
Just delivered
STENA TRADER
TRANSPAPER



Start your engines
- if you have any, that is.
Engines are in short supply

The MTV approach
"Pimp my ride" goes to sea. We take
a look at two recent refurbishments

Stock market in sight
Gerassimos Strintzis sees a
future listing of Hellenic Seaways





Photo: Neven Jerkovic

Mediterranean maturity

With the MSC MUSICA, European cruising is coming of age.

By MIKE LOUAGIE

The MSC MUSICA left the Aker Shipyard in Saint Nazaire on Wednesday June 21, a couple of minutes after midnight. According to an MSC spokesman, superstition dictates that no ship should leave a shipyard on a Tuesday. The ship headed for Venice, Italy, where the christening ceremony was to be held on 29 June.

Many European travel agents have been slightly reluctant towards MSC. Ten years ago MSC was known as a cruise company with rather old ships (MONTEREY, RHAPSODY...), mainly focusing on the Italian market. The company's share of the overall cruise industry was marginal.

Later on, many travel agents also perceived MSC as the company that jumped into the gap left by Festival Cruises. This perception was not to the benefit of MSC. Agents were used to the smooth operations of the big players from the US (in Europe especially with the immensely popular Royal Caribbean), whilst they were confronted with many mishaps from the Pan European newcomer Festival. The result was that when MSC came into the picture the scepticism was widespread, many agents thinking "not again!" And by purchasing two Festival vessels the perception seemed to be confirmed.

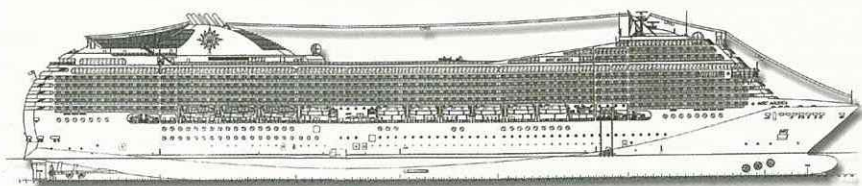
Tough task

The task of Aponte's company was, consequently, a difficult one. A quantum leap in new tonnage is one thing. Building confidence among agents and customers is a different one – but of paramount importance.

At least it was clear that MSC Cruises had a strong financial back up. Whereas lots of people were wondering where Festival's money came from (and if there was enough), it was clear that the Aponte group had the required financial muscle. And so, MSC's reputation within the cruise industry seemed to improve at the same pace that the company placed orders for new ships.

Still the delivery in April 2003 of the first new built, the MSC LIRICA did not convince. The vessel was OK, but too many travel professionals from the northern countries saw it as a Festival hull with an Italian interior design. (One could ask what Europeans really want: they say they don't like the Americanization of the cruise industry. However, when attempts are made to create a pan-European product not much credit is given.)

MSC must be praised for its marketing efforts. Never before was there such a massive marketing campaign in central and Northern Europe. In addition to the visual omnipresence, MSC promoted itself with an advantageous pricing policy. One of the company's main promotional weapons is the "two kids up to 18 travel for free in the parent's cabin, the whole year round". Combined with affordable prices (truly



MSC MUSICA

Facts & Figures

Builder

Built by Chantiers de l'Atlantique/
Aker, France

Tonnage

GT.....92,409
tDW.....10,000

Dimensions

Length oa.....293.8 m
Beam mld.....32.2 m
Draft.....7.7 m

Capacity

Passengers (max).....3,605
Lower berths (double occupancy).....2,550

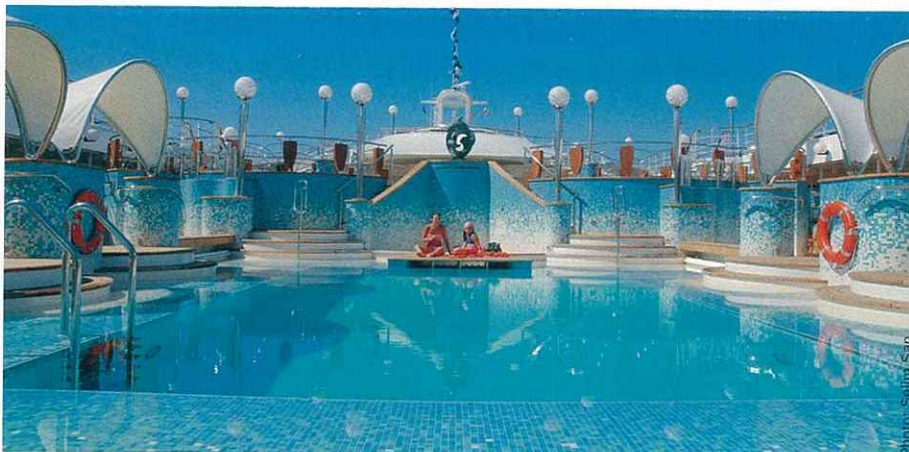
Total cabins.....1,275
Crew.....987

Machinery

Gensets.....5 Wärtsilä W16V38B
Effect, each.....11,600 kW
Bow thrusters.....3 Brunvoll
Effect, each.....2,300 kW
Stern thrusters.....2 Brunvoll
Effect, each.....2,000 kW

Speed

Trial speed.....23 knots
Service speed.....22 knots



Plenty of space at the pool area on board the MSC MUSICA. Four heightened Jacuzzis and two pool bars supplement the main pool.

► affordable, in our view) MSC managed to win market shares. The threshold for a cruise vacation was lowered considerably, making even other cruise companies happy.

There was a "WOW!" when travel agents boarded the MUSICA – surely an enormous relief for MSC. Imagine the small groups of colleagues and friends meeting each other in the public spaces, and visibly sharing their surprise and respect. It is clear that the MUSICA is the ship that catapults MSC beyond a critical point. MSC, with M for maturity.

Aponte input

The interior has again been designed by the interesting cooperation from Studio De Jorio and Mrs Rafaëlla Aponte, wife of Gianluigi Aponte, owner of MSC. Mrs Aponte has been seriously involved in the choice of colours and fabrics. The result is a warm interior, with a very European flavour. One could say that the trademark of De Jorio is the amount of brass balustrades throughout the public spaces and staircases. It's not different on the MUSICA. Another characteristic is the use of dominant colours. If so, the MUSICA is definitely a De Jorio ship. The best example can be found in one of the two main restaurants, Le Maxim's. All visitors were unanimously admiring the predominantly red interior. High, red chairs, red lamp caps, red cushioned walls and purple curtains.

Another all favourite is the lounge Il Tucano. When entering, there is the impression that the interior is made up of two colours: purple and ivory white. The name refers to the bird, hence the beautifully designed lamps in Toucan shape. The table -legs look like elephants' teeth. The same motif can be found in the long, elegant bar.

It is remarkable to see how the

MUSICA incorporates almost all industry innovations from the last decade. There is the Sushi Bar, and the alternative à la carte restaurant Il Giardino (both charged extra), a Wine Bar, a very contemporary Cyber Café, a golf simulator, a recreation area with slides for the smaller kids, and of course a huge spa- and wellness area. For once, real Balinese therapists provide expert service at the Aloha Beauty Farm: very charming, in our opinion. Treatment rooms with ocean view, sauna, Turkish steam bath, body wraps, etc...

Ship with character

Other items that are industry classics include the many balconies (80 per cent), the small atrium with a cascade, a cigar club, a disco, and etcetera. Nevertheless the MUSICA is not a copy and paste ship. It

absolutely has its very own character. The strongest feature is definitely the feeling of spaciousness. The corridors and public spaces are large and airy. But never is there a feeling of being on board a 90.000 ton ship. The interiors rather give a feeling of warmth and cosiness.

The exception is (luckily) the pool deck, with plenty of space for both quiet and high tempo activities. The intersection between the two pools is made of a stage and a large multipurpose dance floor. In addition to the pools, there are four heightened Jacuzzis, two-pool bars and a mix of pleasant elements like plants, sail covered terraces, curvy balustrades and contemporary furniture.

With the MUSICA it is obvious that not only MSC but the whole European way of cruising in general is on the right track. Although the vessel is not a ship full of industry firsts, she represents a major step for Europe. An in depth analysis of the MSC MUSICA will be available in March 2007, as she is the main theme of ShipPax Information's annual publication GUIDE 07. ■

A selection of suppliers

Almaco Group	Refrigeration machinery, provision stores
Dansk Wilton	Carpets
Evac	Vacuum toilets
Fincantieri	Stabilizers
Gislaved Folie	Decorative wall finishes
Kalmar Lighting	Decorative lighting
Kone	Lifts
Lautex	Ceiling
Marioff	Sprinkler
Schat-Harding	Lifeboats
St. Gobain Marine	
Applications	Security glass



Gnocchi or penne?

Two Italian operators that both use their country of origin in their marketing: no wonder that Costa will always be compared with MSC, and vice versa. When the two operators took delivery of new

ships this summer, the COSTA CONCORDIA, by coincidence, was delivered shortly after the MSC MUSICA. Many people from the travel industry visited both ships within two weeks time. This, of course, fuelled the desire to compare.

While both companies profile themselves as being "Italian", most observers would probably say that MSC is more genuinely so than Costa, the latter being more "Americanized".

The general feeling during the first hours onboard the MUSICA was one of admiration: Studio De Jorio realized a beautiful ship. There was admiration all over, with the Maxim's restaurant as the highlight onboard. Also the wide-open decks with lots of space were much appreciated. Most travel agents had seen other MSC ships before. For them, the MUSICA clearly represented a quantum leap in design. With the MUSICA, the