

ASD tug simulator training is a Class act

The SeaWays Group has gained ClassNK accreditation for its world class training programme – a first in the towage sector. Contributing editor Joceline Bury visited the UK tug simulator to find out more

It's Day Two on the SeaWays Europe Tug Master training course in Portsmouth, UK, and the tension is building. Capt Neil Sadler is taking trainee Darren Nutt through a harbour manoeuvre for the nth time, and... he nails it. The Damen 2411 ASD tug is safely parked at ladder 6. Darren's fellow trainee Carrick Robinson steps up to the controls.

They have been at it since 8.30am and it's now late morning – but intensive, repetitive training is what makes SeaWays' courses so successful, says Sadler. "They need to get all this into their subconscious, so they don't have to think twice about how to carry out a manoeuvre or deal with a problem when they are operating a real ASD tug."

To say the simulator is state-of-the-art is something of an understatement. The simulation facility, which is part of the Transas Academy, is recognised as the most advanced in the world.

As well as the tug simulator, where Darren and Carrick are being put through their paces, the centre also has a full mission bridge that can be used in joint operations with the tug sims to train pilots and tug masters together.

The Damen 2411 tug sim bridge is equipped with latest in Rolls-Royce combi controls and electronics, and ASD/ATD/CTS/VSP controls. It is remarkably realistic: it runs on real time – so light and weather conditions change during the day – using 44 LED screens and 50 computers to run the advanced software. And although the floor doesn't really move, so convincing is the view from the bridge that one trainee recently fell over during a spell of computer-generated stormy weather.

The two-week training takes place in and around 'Port SeaWays' – a virtual environment that includes a comprehensive array of harbour and open sea conditions, allowing the trainees to experience a full range of manoeuvres, building up to complex circuits. Sadler says: "It's all about developing competence and increasing confidence. And these two have made great progress in their first two days."

Darren and Carrick – both experienced tug masters – are here because the SeaWays ASD course is becoming something of a prerequisite for employment within harbour towage in their native Australia. Sadler adds: "We have had direct feedback from employers and employees alike that the



▲ Darren Nutt takes the controls during his time spent at the SeaWays Tug Master training course

SeaWays standard is becoming the preferred standard within the industry there, and the message is spreading across the globe – so much so that the training has recently been endorsed by classification society ClassNK."

After a year-long process, the SeaWays Group has gained ClassNK accreditation for its tugmaster training programmes: an industry first within the towage sector, and a source of great pride for Sadler and fellow directors Capt Arie Nygh and Capt Steve Sandy.

The accreditation process included a complete rewrite of a number of the SeaWays training manuals, a full review of all training material, and scrutiny of training masters' qualifications and experience.

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In addition to ClassNK accreditation, SeaWays has also been accredited as being RTO compliant for delivery of training in Australia and the course programmes are also currently being accredited by the Nigerian Maritime Administration & Safety Agency.

The next set of trainees at the centre will be officers in the Bangladesh Navy. Sandy explains: "All the harbour tug crews in Bangladeshi ports are commanded by naval officers – and they're about to update their tug fleet with Damen ASD tugs, so they're coming to us for training."

Back on the bridge, Darren and Carrick have moved on to side-stepping. Tomorrow, they will be starting to complete full circuits. By the end of the course, they will be competent, and confident, in their new skills.

'Confidence and competence'

Capt Brendan Cooley, COO of Western Australia-based ship delivery specialist IMS, completed module 1 and 2 of SeaWays Europe's ASD tug training course earlier this summer.

Cooley, who attended the course along with his colleague Shannon Bentley, explained: "IMS sea trials and delivers ASD tugs on a regular basis and we are positioning the company to increase our involvement in the industry.

"Although we are both experienced masters, neither Shannon nor I had any previous experience in commanding vessels with azimuth propulsion. Our objective was to increase our knowledge and skillset of how to handle vessels with these propulsion systems.

"Despite our lack of experience in

driving vessels with azimuth propulsion, the structure of the course was easy to follow and enabled us to quickly gain some confidence in manoeuvring the tug.

"As we advanced through the course, we pieced the various exercises together to perform more complex manoeuvres, either free running, or in a towage environment.

"Neil and Steve's style of delivering the well-structured training was professional, and of a very high standard.

"After two weeks of training, SeaWays increased our levels of confidence and competence far beyond our expectations, and we look forward to putting our new skills to use. I highly recommend this course for any masters who want to either learn how to drive ASD tugs, or those who wish to hone their skills."