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New services, new ships

In the next few months the ferry operator Finnlines will bring six newbuildings into service. ITJ correspondent Lutz Ehrhardt recently spoke to Finnlines president Uwe Bakosch about the advantages of belonging to the Grimaldi group.

Mr Bakosch, you have been president of Finnlines since 2009. What have you changed since then?

In the last few years we introduced new liner services to more destinations far beyond our traditional markets on the Baltic seaboard. What is more, we will be bringing six newbuildings into operation in the next few months. These are amongst some of the most modern ro-ro ships, and are equipped with some of the most technically-advanced and environment-friendly innovations.

Can you give us an overview of the company in terms of ships, services, personnel and turnover?

Finnlines began regular liner services between Finland and the US east coast in 1947. Since then the company has continuously invested in new ships and liner connections that extended outside the Baltic Sea.

«The value the Grimaldi group brings to the table is undoubted.»

Today Finnlines operates a network of regular liner services with 24 modern ro-ro ships and ro-pax ferries and employs more than 2,000 staff. Revenues from January to September 2010 amounted to EUR 421 million (EUR 372 million in 2009). We carried 470,000 units (450,000 units in 2009), 1.5 million t of freight (1.47 million t) and 39,000 new cars (25,000 in 2009).

Which new liner services were brought into operation last year and which regions do they cover?

In the past two years we added several more ports of call to our Trans Russia Express (TRE), which shuttles between Lübeck and St Petersburg. These include Sassnitz on the island of Rügen and Ventspils (Latvia). New liner services were established between the Polish port of Gdynia and Rostock, and between Helsinki and Rostock. The existing ferry offerings be-



Finnlines president and CEO Uwe Bakosch is optimistic about his company's future

tween Helsinki and Travemünde, Naantali and Kapellskär as well as Travemünde and Malmö were expanded, and some ships were replaced with larger ones. The latest scheduled links to start are our North Sea and Baltic ro-ro options, which connect Bilbao with Antwerp, Helsinki and St Petersburg. Currently three liners are used there. The central line, which plies between Hull and Immingham via Helsinki to St Petersburg, was also started in 2010, as well as the weekly sailings that directly connect Helsinki to St Petersburg. New liner services have also been added between Kotka, St Petersburg and Zeebrugge, as well as Zeebrugge and Bilbao.

«Four newbuildings in the next 18 months will follow the latest additions.»

Finnlines now belongs to the Italian Grimaldi group. What benefits have resulted from this?

The value of the synergistic liner services network and the broad spectrum of experience which the Italian group brings to the table are undoubted. The Grimaldi group is one of the world's largest ro-ro opera-

tors. Thanks to the new arrangements we can offer our customers a broad network of ro-ro services. Today it is possible, for example, to provide our competitive and quick Euromed service to the east coast of the US, connecting Baltic and North Sea ports with Mediterranean hubs. The same is true for our numerous regular liner services to West Africa and the east coast of South America, on which we also provide a transit stop in Antwerp.

You recently launched the first of a new series of liners from China. Can you give us some details?

The *Finnbreeze* was the first of six newbuildings to be finished on 10 March at the Nanjing shipyards. These units with movable 'tween decks for 900 cars offer 3,245 lane metres and can be operated at a service speed of 20 knots. All these liners are built to the highest ice class 1A. The first two vessels will be incorporated into our services in April. Four more newbuildings will follow in the next 18 months.

Mr Bakosch, thank you very much for the interview.

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