

Discussion Forum No. 1: Project Planning

Reported by: Donald V. Gale

Panellists:

John-Kaare Aune – Cayman Islands Shipping Registry

Luiz de Basto – Luis de Basto Designs

Eric Norris – ABS Americas

Stuart McClure – Trinity Yachts

Success with yacht projects requires appreciation that, while form follows function, the yacht is ultimately the object of the Owner's desire rather than a mere technical tool or vehicle. Designer Luis de Basto cited the best projects in his experience being those where all participants were able to meet one another but acknowledged that the global nature of subcontractor participation on yacht projects results in great difficulty in scheduling a single introductory meeting. Eric Norris of ABS likewise said that kickoff meetings of the type customary with commercial and military projects are rare in the yacht field. John-Kaare Aune envisioned several meetings scheduled among groups of selected contractors at convenient times where a single face-to-face meeting is not practical. Sampson Brown added that Knight & Carver Yacht Center plans to include a project kick-off meeting involving all interested parties in their upcoming ISO quality system to be implemented by the end of 2006. Mr. de Basto also commented that in meetings with contractors he frequently sketches as he speaks, forming communications he characterizes as "halfway between speaking and drawing". In this manner, he helps a meeting to favor a total view of the project – the "whole" – rather than a collection of parts as some designers and others might be so given.

Successful project management requires that a clear vision and understanding of the nature of the project be transmitted among all responsible contractors and subcontractors. Schedules with unambiguous milestones, resource management and communications protocols are established. Planning and procurement protocol, material and product acquisition costs, including estimated costs for future acquisitions. A plan is developed for tracking labor costs with project phases. Policies and procedures for standards, testing and quality assurance are developed. Two key steps should follow the project's conclusion. These include a "post-mortem" phase that reviews all lessons learned from the participants and from the Owner's feedback, and a contingency and risk management plan.

In addition to kickoff meetings, Mr. Aune advocated regular communication among all parties, citing specification changes frequently occurring within months of delivery. Changes have been known to cause vessels to grow past 500 gross tons (GT) thereby being pushed into the onerous SOLAS regulations compliance regime. Where a 6- to 12-month build window would be expected for a commercial vessel, a similarly sized yacht typically will take longer due primarily to change orders many of which would be avoided through early and frequent communications.

Eric Norris, ABS, strongly recommended greater design effort on yacht projects, stating that while the design phase influences roughly 70% of the project it only accounts for about 5% of the cost. Designers frequently rush through the design process, resulting in errors and omissions of structural and other details that can result

in delays and cost overruns in construction. An inadequate end connection, for example, can be nearly impossible to rework if not discovered until the outfitting phase. (In a later conversation between me and William Blount of DLBA Robotics, Mr. Blount cited compressed design and engineering schedules common in his business due to restrictive shipyard build slots and yards' need to eliminate down time among their staff resulting from extended design package preparation time. Also in a later session, mention was made of a 29-knot Burger design turnaround time by Donald L. Blount and Associates, Inc. (DLBA) of 91 days.) Some delegates asked whether ABS could provide Class review checklists to designers and shipyards to better ensure Class Rules compliance. Eric said that this would not be practical as the internal ABS checklists undergo very frequent updates with changes issued even on a daily to weekly basis. In response to the astonishment of some present, Eric reiterated that the checklists were internal ABS working documents and that the Rules themselves are generally very stable through the years. While yachts tend more to explore new designs and novel features, Eric stated that the Class review process itself differs little between commercial vessels and yachts. Finally, Eric mentioned that ABS is currently testing electronic drawing review software. Mr. Aune stated that the Cayman Islands Shipping Registry accepts electronic drawing reviews for registry purposes, and this should likewise expedite transmittal of red-line markups to shipyards.

Other issues included tender selection and design considerations which historically have been given little forethought. Stuart McClure, Trinity Yachts, advocated selection of a tender early in the project and certainly before a construction contract is signed. The ultimate authority for project leadership can vary. Luis de Basto has often seen captains in charge as well as savvy Owners, as Stanley Bey so testified earlier. In other cases, the shipyard has insisted on maintaining the lead on its projects.