



MSC surpasses Maersk Line as world's top container carrier

MSC has overtaken Maersk Line to become the world's biggest shipping line, in terms of vessel capacity. According to recently published figures by IFW sister publication Containerisation International (CI), MSC's containerships have a total capacity of 1.84 million teu, while Maersk Line vessels can carry 1.82 million teu. The figures do not include vessels owned and operated by Maersk's sister shipping lines, Safmarine and MCC Transport.

Safmarine owns 11 containerships, (with a total capacity of 31,632teu) and charters-in a further 45 (76,379teu), while MCC Transport charters 52 containerships (78,070teu). If the MCC and Safmarine vessels were included, their capacity being available to Maersk customers, Maersk would operate a fleet with 9% more capacity than MSC's.

However, Maersk's lead including its two sister lines is shrinking by the year. Just five months ago the Danish carrier led MSC by 20% in terms of vessel capacity.



Matthew Beddow, Managing Editor of CI, said the battle for the top spot was "a race between two very different beasts". He said: "Family-owned MSC thrives best in niche north-south trades and benefits from mercurial management, whereas Maersk Line focuses more on east-west trade lanes and is managed corporately, as well as being more process-driven. "According to Drewry Shipping Consultants' Schedule Reliability Insight, Maersk is always one of the best performers, whereas MSC is much further down the ladder.

"How all this translates into profitability is not clear, as Geneva-based MSC's financial results are not published. "The AP Møller-Maersk group's financial position is, however, much more transparent, and it is consistently a top performer."

CI data shows that MSC owns 187 vessels, with a total capacity of 873,281teu, and has 241 chartered vessels with a total capacity of 975,159teu.

Maersk Line owns 185 vessels, with a total capacity of 1.03 million teu, and charters 226 vessels with a total capacity of 797,572teu. According to figures produced by analyst AXS Alphaliner, Maersk today operates 14.5% of the containership fleet, compared with 15% at the beginning of last year, while MSC has lifted its marketshare to 12.6% from 10.9% a year ago.



NOL reports USD 461 million net profit in 2010



The Singapore-based NOL Group recently reported a net profit of USD 461 million for 2010, representing a USD 1.2 billion turnaround from its USD 741 million loss in 2009. The container shipping and logistics company said that group revenue reached an all-time high of USD 9.4 billion in 2010, up 45% from 2009. NOL's Q4/2010 net earnings were USD 198 million.

"Strong demand from shippers and rate increases in our major trade lanes helped drive the turnaround," said the NOL Group's CEO Ronald D. Widdows, and added that "a continued emphasis on the fundamentals of our business – efficiency, cost discipline and service quality – is just as important going forward."

TUI group selling Hapag Lloyd shares

the German tour operator that owns almost half of Hapag-Lloyd, sold part of its stake to the container line's other shareholder and said it may sell more through an initial public offering. TUI, which owns 49.8 percent of Hapag-Lloyd, will sell an 11.33 percent stake to Albert Ballin GmbH for 315 million euros (\$439 million), the Hanover, Germany-based company said in a statement today. The price may increase by as much as 35 million euros if an IPO takes place, providing "certain conditions are met," according to the statement.

TUI's supervisory board authorized the executive board to sell more of Hapag-Lloyd through an IPO, the statement said, without providing further details. An IPO of the container line is scheduled to happen by April 15 and will raise 1 billion euros to 1.5 billion euros, according to two people familiar with the matter. That may give a valuation of 2.8 billion euros to 3.5 billion euros, depending on demand, the people said.



The stake sale "is good news, as it values TUI's Hapag-Lloyd stake at almost 1.8 billion euros," or about 2 billion euros including the potential premium from an IPO, said Stefan Kick, an analyst at Silvia Quandt & Cie. who has a "buy" recommendation on the stock. That value is "much more than was expected by most people."

Hapag-Lloyd returned to profit last year as a rebound in global trade enabled it to raise container-carrying rates. The shipping line has returned to a "position of strength," Chairman Michael Behrendt said in December.

An IPO would also be subject to the approval of Albert Ballin shareholders. Albert Ballin, a Hamburg-based investment group that includes German billionaire Klaus Michael Kuehne, M.M. Warburg & Co., HSH Nordbank AG and Hamburg's state government, bought a majority stake in Hapag-Lloyd in 2009. TUI, which controls U.K. tour operator, has said it wants to invest proceeds from the IPO into its tourism business.



APMT opens Vietnam's largest container terminal

Terminal and port operator APMT opens new, large port facilities on the Cai Mep International Terminal (CMIT) in Vietnam. The port facilities will be the first in Vietnam with a capacity to handle the world's largest container vessels of 11,000 TEU, and Maersk Line is among the potential clients.

Vietnamese ports are experiencing strong growth in the number of handled containers and thus the APM Terminals port joint venture, the Cai Mep International Terminal has great expectations, said Michael Them Rasmussen, General Director of CMIT.

»Asia is a growth market, and Vietnam has realised that more ports are needed. The government has wanted an expansion in order to strengthen the country's competitiveness. It is important to the development that goods may easily and quickly get in and out,« said Michael Them Rasmussen.



At present, the largest shipping line in Vietnam – the Maersk Line – is an obvious, potential client. Maersk Line now uses the APM Terminal rival, the PSA's port facilities, but the company is ready to change to the CMIT facilities if price and quality prove better than at PSA.