



LexMar Engineering: The future of diving systems

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Current Managing Director, Iain Taylor, tells Energy Digital how LexMar has grown from strength to strength, providing the offshore industry with vital equipment and systems without suffering much from the economic downturn.

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LexMar Engineering was established in 1996 by Lex and Marieke Barker to supply technical services in support of the hyperbaric and commercial diving industries in South East Asia. Its location, in the heart of Singapore, adjacent to Loyang Offshore Supply Base, proved opportunistic and provided the ideal base from which to access local and offshore clients. However, the company suffered a sad turn of events when Lex Barker became ill and passed away. Thanks to favorable market conditions, Marieke, Iain Taylor (newly appointed Managing Director) and a great group of employees were able to move on successfully. "What the shareholders asked me to do was stabilize the company and put in place systems and facilities to manage the growth, which we have done," Taylor said of the intervening months.

The last two years has seen a period of growth at LexMar, which saw its staff complement soar from 35 employees to over 85.

DIVING SYSTEMS

While the company has changed dramatically, its core business remains the same. "We basically design and manufacture saturation diving systems," explains Taylor. "In the offshore industry, a lot of the subsea work is undertaken by divers. So because they're working at up to 300 meters water depth, they are required to be in decompression mode."

If you're familiar with decompression sickness, or 'the bends' as it's often called, then you'll realize quite how vital LexMar's work is within the industry. The condition generally arises through depressurization and its symptoms and resulting effects can be severe, even fatal.

"We supply a complete system which is a habitat," he continues, "and is on the diving support vessel, barge, or whatever the surface platform is. That's essentially a living habitat of pressurized chambers."

LexMar's remit is to provide all the support mechanisms for divers within that habitat. "We also supply a diving bell, and a launch and recovery system for the diving bell to enable the bell to be locked onto the chambers on the surface; also, to deliver the diving bell to whatever the operational diving depth is and, from there, the divers will go out to work."

Successful marketing by Lex Barker over the years and LexMar's strategic location has played a large part in its growth in the market. "We don't have any other direct competitors in our existing market. But obviously as

we look at diversification, there are some areas we will look at investing in, such as increasing our testing and calibration capability,” he says, “It’s an investment, both in our people in terms of training and satisfying the wider market in that area.”

Such strong commitment to investment surely indicates that the recession had little impact on the business, but Taylor is adamant that the effects of the economic downturn were felt by all in the industry. “A year ago, we saw a lot of companies looking very closely at their budgets, both with regards to their capital spend and their ongoing operational spend for this year,” he explains.

“We were fortunate we had a strong order book so the downturn didn’t really affect us greatly,” he continues, “But overall, the industry did see a slowing down, with a ‘wait and see’ attitude. But now there is a renewed appetite to invest, as we see through the many inquiries we receive for new saturation systems.”

Despite some of the larger oil companies cutting spending, few projects were postponed or delayed. However, LexMar also sells directly to ship owners and offshore contractors and a number of those businesses were forced to put project plans on hold. “We are seeing the market conditions stabilize,” Taylor insists. “Certainly, oil has been trading up in the mid-seventies, which is a reasonably good figure. If one reads the various analysts, our energy needs will continue to grow, what with China coming out of a recession.

“I think most people that I’ve talked to in the industry can see it growing, but not at the same level we saw three years prior to the recession,” Taylor comments.

LEXMAR’S ASSETS

While the market may be experiencing some turbulence, LexMar’s employees remain constant. Taylor explains the engineering department has seen the most significant growth, and is now made up of 18 technical experts. “We are actually looking to recruit a number of key positions in the next five to six months, and we will recruit locally,” he adds. “We have a number of expats who work here in terms of project management roles. Certainly, our longer-term aim is always to recruit locally and develop local talent.”

So what does the short-term future hold for the saturation diving system specialist? “Obviously, we’re looking to secure more business. There are quite a number of opportunities, particularly in our region,” Taylor continues. “So it’s really about capitalizing on that. Where we’ve got quite a diverse engineering capability built up is to try and apply that engineering capability to both the wider offshore industry and the marine sector.”

Taylor believes that LexMar has become recognized as one of the major players in the market offering quality with integrity. Following the tragic loss of one of its founders, the company has gone on to achieve great success and long may it continue.



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