

Dear Sir,

While your Journal has consistently addressed the necessity of integrating the human activities of shipbuilders & seamen (I use the terms in their broadest sense) during concept, design, build and proper testing of new ships, I have to assert that you do so with an element of bias, exemplified in particular in Issue No.8, July 2005.

I have worked with five shipyards around the World and, in the course of my duties as a Naval Architect, have visited many others. I have NEVER come across a case where a 'substantial discount' is offered to Owners who surrender their right to have senior Owner's personnel standing by the ship at any stage of construction. It is, in fact, usual to specify that such overseers shall have the sole use of an office (with telephone & fax), and a changing room with washing & toilet facilities. In the same article you enumerate no less than six examples of 'irritating design errors' on the part of the Builders, and you refer to a 'quick briefing' on the machinery spaces by the commissioning engineer. These accusations, biased against the Builder are (admittedly with a few exceptions) simply not true.

All construction drawings are sent, on completion, to the Owners (and to his resident superintendent in the Shipyard), to the Classification Society (and to its Surveyor in the Shipyard) and to the flag administration Surveyors' Office, for approval (or amendment) and return to the Builders. Too many Owners either find difficulty in reading drawings or regard their stamp 'Approved' as being in some way 'provisional', subject to final comment when they see the subject of a drawing completed in the ship. Friction starts when the Builder is asked to carry out quite substantial modifications at his own expense when the item objected to was shown quite clearly on the relevant drawings. 'Ah, yes, but we didn't know it was going to be quite like that' is simply unacceptable in this technological age.

I don't know whether Capt. Harvey's note was intending to be gratuitously abrasive or whether it reflects his experiences in a Chinese shipyard (which I can attest is by no means the norm in China). As Director of Sea Acceptance Trials on many occasions, my understanding with the Trials Master & Chief Office was that they are responsible for the safety of navigation and do nothing 'at the drop of a hat' which may be considered to be in any way dangerous or unseamanlike. If sea conditions (other than during Seakeeping Trials) are such that 'most of the Yard staff are seasick,' I suggest that the ship should not be at sea on trials in the first place. The Master (or mate) have nobody (except two AB's, as helmsman & lookout) on the Bridge 'in their Bridge Team'. During speed and power trials (which I always preferred to do at night, when non-essential people are in bed rather than hanging around the wheelhouse, and when the lit shore beacons are more clearly discernible) my 'team' would rarely number more than four (including two Owners' 'time-keepers' to time the runs and see the mean of four stopwatch readings properly entered on the Progressive Speed Trials sheet.

As the ship nears completion the Owners are anxious to get their stores, Owner's spare gear, fuel and fresh water aboard as early as they can. The Naval Architect, on

the other hand, wants to delay his statutory obligation to carry out an Inclining Experiment until the ship is practically complete, but essentially before any items of deadweight are put aboard, except for a small quantity of fuel oil, as required for Dock Trials of main engines and generators. Only after the Inclining Experiment can the Trim & Stability Manual be completed and sent to the Administration ship Surveyors for formal approval. When the approved manual is returned to the Builders, it was always my practice to invite the Master, Mates and Midshipmen/Cadets to a meeting to go through the manual with them in detail, in particular in the case of passenger ships (e.g. Ferries) where a section of the manual deals with damage stability and each condition of flooding of two adjacent compartments. Such a meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss such matters as parametric rolling, squat, and the use of roll-damping fins.

It is obvious that, from the very beginning of a new project, the Owners, the manufacturer of the electronics and the Builders must work in the closest collaboration over the ergonomic layout and detailed specification of, for example, the Navigating Bridge and the Control console in the Engine Control Room – co-operation which will continue in close partnership until the ship leaves the Yard. Whatever the Building Agreement may stipulate, I think most shipbuilders will, if berthage is available in the Yard, also have no objection to the ship remaining alongside in the Shipyard for a few days after she is handed-over to allow the crew to get all in order and to acquaint themselves with items of machinery or equipment that may be new to them.

In case it is thought that I am biased towards the shipbuilder's point of view, I should mention that I served in a large tanker as a (very) Junior Engineer for somewhat less than a year, and then moved to Alfred Holt & Company (the Blue Funnel Line) where I eventually became a senior watchkeeping engineer. After three years at sea with Alfred Holt, I joined their Naval Architect's Department for two years when the change from break-bulk passenger-cargo liners to very large pure container ships was imminent. So I can claim about four years 'seaside', which I have repeatedly maintained should be a compulsory part of the naval architect's training, though not necessarily for as long as four years. I can vouch that no other period of four years in a lifetime's professional career was of more value to me than my time at sea.

I hope the foregoing comments are not seen as objectionable, but I really feel, in these days of every more complex ships, that close co-operation between Shipbuilder and Shipowner (and his officers and men) is much more the norm than used to be the case.

I trust that my letter can, in some way, be 'aired' to the readers of Alert.

Yours sincerely

P.G. Martin
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Editor's Note:

The following response to Mr Martin's letter has been sent:

All the articles that appear in the **Alert!** Bulletins are written in good faith by the various contributors, who are invited to do so by me, based on their experience as one of the stakeholders in the maritime industry. I therefore believe that Captain Harvey's article was not intending to be gratuitously abrasive.

I note that your criticism is directed mainly at the front-page editorial. You concede that there are 'some exceptions', and it is the 'exceptions' to which this article is directed – as is the case with most of my editorials. However, it is not just directed at Shipbuilders, but also at the Owners, Operators, Classification Societies and Flag Administrations, all of whom have a responsibility to ensure that the ship is designed and built with the User and the operational task in mind.

The reference to 'irritating design errors' merely serves as a reminder that if the Users - ie the seafarers - are not involved throughout the design and build of a ship, such errors may only manifest themselves at a very late stage during the build, which could be costly to rectify. The examples that I quote are based on my own experience of taking over ships from build, although I concede that such errors may still occur through oversight on the part of any of the various stakeholders who are involved in the design and build of a ship.

I am always grateful for feedback and very much value your thoughts. I will be happy to place your letter on the **Alert!** website database.

I trust that you will continue to support the **Alert!** Project in its aim to improve the awareness of the Human Element in the maritime industry.