

First SkySails retro fit

Interview with Gerd Wessels, Managing Director of Wessels Reederei GmbH & Co. KG

HANSA: The SkySails technology has now been in use on seagoing vessels for almost two years. You were the first owner who decided to retro-fit a vessel with this system which is meant to save fuel and reduce emissions output to a significant extent. Can you tell us what your main reasons were to opt for this innovative venture?

Gerd Wessels: Every innovative technology which comes to shipping has to be supported by the industry. We as Wessels Reederei decided to support this idea because it is in line with our company's environmental protection philosophy: Making the same quantity of voyages while using less fuel and consequently reducing the CO₂ emissions.

HANSA: What was your initial experience with the towing kite on the »Michael A.«?

Gerd Wessels: Despite some initial engineering changes the experience was positive. As we are measuring the towing forces (bollard pull) regularly we saw up to 8 tons of tractive force on the »Michael A.« using SkySails propulsion in good wind conditions. For comparison: The »Michael A.« needs approximately 11 tons of thrust for full cruising speed. Using the SkySails kite, 15 % fuel was saved.

HANSA: Sails have driven ships for many centuries – but a »kite« is a very bold method of moving a cargo vessel forward. Could you confirm that the system can really be operated by »normal« crew members?

Gerd Wessels: Following the pilot phase on board of our MV »Michael A.« we gained a lot of experience, improvements were made and the newest generation of the SkySails-System was installed on our newbuilding MV »Theseus« recently. The initial familiarization of our seafarers with the system

was performed on board the MV »Michael A.«.

HANSA: Do you expect to continue furnishing your ships with »SkySails« also in future?

Gerd Wessels: After nearly 200 sailing days since October 2007 we have two ships flying the SkySails-System in total. By the beginning of next year 4 ships will have SkySails propulsion.

HANSA: Will the next generation with 320 – or even 640 m² sail area also be an option for your fleet?

Gerd Wessels: Our fleet mainly consists of vessels of a similar size and type than the MV »Michael A.«. The current SKS C 160 system with towing kites of 160m² sail area can deliver an effective towing force of 8 tons and our ships are thus optimally equipped with this system size. The next generation 320 or

640 systems will only be of interest for us if we expand our fleet with larger ships.

HANSA: Innovative systems always bear the danger of being vulnerable in daily operation. Do you think that service and maintenance of the SkySails's worldwide network is appropriate to meet owners' needs – or can you tell us something about your experience on your ship(s) in this respect?

Gerd Wessels: From our experience, we cannot agree with the statement that innovative systems face a danger of being vulnerable. Regarding service and maintenance delivered by SkySails we are satisfied. Last years cooperation with Zeppelin Power Systems will provide a worldwide service network and we are convinced it will further improve the service and experience of the SkySails-System.

HANSA: As someone who as a boy let his self constructed kite fly in autumn one is inclined to believe that such a system can only be used in fair weather conditions – or not?

Gerd Wessels: The kite is quite heavy and we needed a minimum wind condition of 3

baufort to get it up sailing. Throughout the last year the SkySails-System has continuously improved so that starting and landing is possible in almost all weather and sea conditions. With these improvements we increased the availability of sailing days per year.

HANSA: The producer is calculating an amortization of the SkySails-system within a few years time. What are your expectations on your particular vessel (s) in this respect?

Gerd Wessels: It really much depends on what the charter market and fuel prices are at the time the investment is made. As fuel prices are very volatile we expect that our investment on the long run will be returned as calculated.

HANSA: Mr. Wessels, we thank you for your statements. □



Another bird's eye view of »Beluga SkySails«