

Service is low-cost entry to broadband

In November, Zakher Marine International Inc (ZMI) upgraded its vessels, which provide anchor-handling, supply and towage for the merchant marine and offshore oil & gas industries in the Middle East, to Inmarsat's FleetBroadband 150 (FB150) mobile broadband satellite service from Stratos.

Working with Stratos' channel partner Monarch Telecom, the FB150 service was installed onboard six ZMI vessels: *Zakher Duty*; *Zakher Pelican*; *Zakher Eagle*; *Zakher Supplier*; *Zakher Atlanta* and *Zakher Emperor*.

IT&S asked Wadie Farah, communications department manager at ZMI, what the main factors in Zakher Marine's decision to adopt FleetBroadband 150 were.

He said: "Zakher Marine is a continuously growing company in terms of vessels and personnel that provides support to the marine and offshore oil & gas industry, therefore adapting top of the range technologies such as FBB is part of ZMI's vision of continuous improvement and quality."

And how did the company find the installation process? How long did it put its vessels out of action?

"The system installation is basically easy and straightforward: once the cable is laid out between the terminal on the bridge and the antenna in the top antenna deck, the rest is

done with minimum effort, and since most of our vessels return back to shore on a regular basis for supplies and fuel or loading/unloading certain cargo, the FBB system was planned to be installed at that time, therefore reducing vessels' downtime to virtually zero."

What has been the reaction of ZMI crews to the new equipment?

"Our crew – being aware of this technology after we had introduced it prior to the installation phase – were very satisfied due to the quality and speed of the terminals, especially the data."

What do you feel is the main advantage of FB150?

"Adapting the recent technology not only helped us improve the overall quality of ZMI Fleet communication systems, but at the same time provided faster data transfer rates with more controllable costs – so most of our vessels' monthly bills have reduced noticeably. Nowadays larger types of documents are being attached to emails, demanding higher bandwidth for transfer, so communication between the ZMI office and our fleet is now more convenient, as we can



Zakher Pelican.

send them in less time and at reduced cost."

Would you recommend it to other tug operators/owners?

"Yes absolutely, especially for companies with a large fleet of vessels where the reduction of total cost will be evident. Also most of the FBB airtime providers offer solutions for controlling the cost in a more detailed way by enabling managers and owners to set various filters and alerts for the FBB traffic and to monitor all fleet traffic activities."

To help meet its performance goals, with each FB150 system ZMI is deploying the popular AmosConnect from Stratos messaging service, which integrates vessel and shore-based office applications.

AmosConnect from Stratos is an easy-to-use, yet highly sophisticated service incorporating email, fax, telex, GSM text, interoffice communication, and access for mobile personnel into a single messaging system.

"The data rates provided by FB150 are much faster than the Mini-M service we had been using. This will help us get more value from applications that help ensure superior crew communications, business productivity and cost efficiency," said Farah. "The FB150 hardware footprint is also smaller than the Mini-M. These factors, combined with competitive pricing, make FB150 an attractive communications upgrade solution."

Stratos has activated more than 2,000 FleetBroadband systems across all major geographic regions and vessel types. ZMI selected Stratos as its FleetBroadband provider based primarily on the wide range of value-added services that Stratos offers. Those field-tested services, known as The Stratos Advantage, help ship managers attain the highest possible performance and support from FleetBroadband, at the lowest possible cost.

Stratos president and CEO Jim Parm said: "In all global regions, we are seeing the strongest interest in FB150 from operators of small to medium-sized fishing vessels, supply ships, offshore utility vessels, barges, tugboats and pleasure yachts."

Developed for smaller vessels

Launched in May last year, FleetBroadband 150 (FB150) is the newest and smallest of Inmarsat's FleetBroadband family of services. It was developed to address the specific needs of smaller vessels – from tugs and coastal merchant fleets to fishing vessels and leisure craft.

As an entry-level service, FB150 is suitable for vessels that may not previously have used or even considered satellite communications, but which have a growing requirement for voice and data communications. It offers high-quality voice calls, text messages, and IP data at 150kbps. Voice calls and data sessions can be accessed simultaneously.

Crucially for the target market, the FB150 equipment is highly compact. The above-deck dome that houses the antenna, which can track the satellites in even the roughest conditions, is the size of a basketball. The below-deck equipment is also small, and installation is simple.

The FB150 service is accessed globally on the Inmarsat-4 (I-4) satellites, which are among the world's largest and most advanced communications satellites. The I-4s were designed with IP communications in mind, and are optimised to deliver high-quality and reliable data communications. Inmarsat operates in the L-Band of radio

frequency, which is unaffected by harsh weather conditions.

The I-4 satellites are paid for, launched and fully operational – and have an expected lifespan well into the 2020s.

"FB150 takes all the benefits of the larger FleetBroadband services, and squeezes them into a form that can be used by smaller vessels," explains Kyle Hurst, maritime market manager at Inmarsat. "It offers the same guarantee of reliability and the same quality of service that users have come to expect of an FB500 or FB250, but in a compact size and priced competitively for the small vessel market."

The FB150 equipment, tested according to Inmarsat's rigorous type-approval standards, is manufactured by Thrane & Thrane and AddValue.

"FB150 is the no-risk option for small vessels considering satellite communications," said Hurst. "Tug owners or managers should ask three important questions: How can I be confident that the operator will have a satellite network in place for the next 5 to 10 years? Was the satellite network designed for carrying the data communications that I now rely on? And how proven is the technology? We believe FB150 is the only service on the market that has a solid answer to all these important questions."