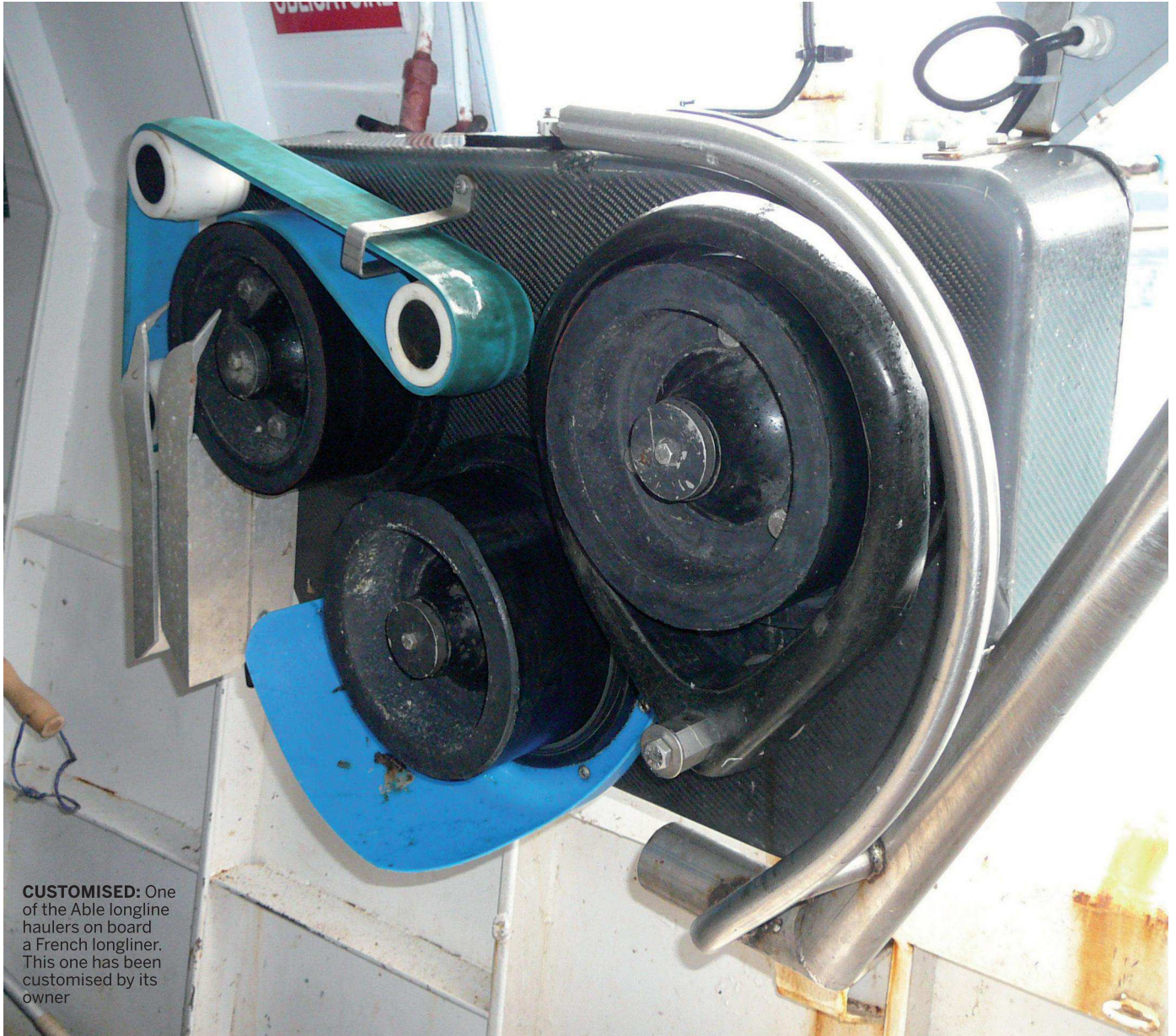


GEAR FOCUS



CUSTOMISED: One of the Able longline haulers on board a French longliner. This one has been customised by its owner

Expanding in a tough climate

Quentin Bates

Despite a tough business climate and the loss of one of its more important customers as the Guadeloupe fishing co-operative ceased trading last year, French manufacturer VirHydro, based at Saint Malo, has been able to expand its business, attract new customers

and move into a new building in the space of a year.

"The loss of a big customer is worrying," Isabelle Blancard of VirHydro told *Fishing News International*.

"But we have managed to grow and recently we had a significant order for French Guyana."

Under a European Fisheries Programme modernisation

initiative, twenty small fishing boats are being fitted with VirHydro net haulers.

This is out of a fleet in that region of eighty boats where conditions are fairly basic and efforts are being made to improve working conditions.

"We would hope that the project is successful and that the rest of these eighty boats

might also be modernised, but that depends very much on the outcome with these first twenty," she said.

"Some 18 of these boats have outboard engines, so we are also supplying them with portable petrol hydraulic power packs. For the two of them that are powered by inboard engines their haulers are coupled to the hydraulics they already have onboard."

She explained that these are 12 to 14m boats, none of which are new and they fish with nets for a variety of species including acoupa, a variety of snapper, and for this reason the haulers have been specially modified for this fishery with extra-wide drums to allow these long fish to be hauled on board in the nets without damage.

FACT FILE

■ Under a European Fisheries Programme modernisation initiative, twenty small fishing boats in French Guyana are being fitted with VirHydro net haulers;

■ The vessels involved in the project are all in the 12 to 14m range

■ The entire package for this project will be completed and shipped out from the company factory in Saint Malo by the end of January

20

French Guiana
vessels to be
fitted with
VirHydro
haulers

12-14m

The average
size range of
the vessels
involved in the
project



ADAPTATION: Isabelle Blancard of VirHydro said that the haulers have been modified for French Guyana, with the drums made wider to allow them to haul acoupa without damaging the fish

"The whole package has to be completed and shipped out from our factory in Saint Malo by the end of January.

"One of our guys is going to French Guyana to help the fishermen there fit the haulers and powerpacks on board and he will also remain there while the local fishermen have time to get used to working with this kind of gear," she said.

Moving into longlining

After having been in discussions for some time, VirHydro last year

acquired the brand, designs and licences of Le Croisic company Able, which had been making its own brand of longline haulers for several years.

"We had been talking to Dominique Michon at Able for some time and now we have added his longline haulers to our range.

"To start with we are looking at how to incorporate them into our production using our standard parts where we can.

"Hopefully we can find some new markets for these haulers," Isabelle Blancard said, adding that the Able haulers are a well-known product and, that having been a successful fisherman himself, Dominique Michon had designed a very good longline hauler with a belt that worked well and had become popular with small-scale fishermen, especially in the south of France.

"Longline gear is becoming more attractive now that sustainability and selectivity are words that consumers want to hear," she said, adding that while VirHydro has its own range of smaller longline haulers, the Able haulers are a larger piece of equipment and complement the existing range of haulers.

There is only one size of Able hauler, which uses a belt to grip the longline as it comes over the side and it is used mostly for monofilament line between

1mm and 10mm, although some skippers have also used it for braided or twisted rope longline.

"We also bought the rights to the Able longline tubs, made to carry 100 hooks and for these to be hooked around the rim for semi-automatic shooting.

"It is a very efficient system and a lot of fishermen are using these. So far they have been sold only in France.

"But there could certainly be a market for these in Italy, Spain and in other areas.

"This also fits in well with the VirHydro range of deck equipment that is all designed specifically for smaller boats.

"This is mostly for fishing for bass, albacore, tuna and hake and it is a very versatile system as it incorporates snap-on clips that allow the skipper to switch from bottom to pelagic fishing easily," she said. The line can be rigged with loops of twine at intervals for the clips so that weights can be hung on it for demersal fishing, or buoys for fishing higher in the water.

New factory, new markets

VirHydro, and its sister company, engineering firm AFU, also expanded in 2012 with a move to a new factory, having outgrown its old place some time before.

"The groundwork started in December 2011 and we moved

in here in May.

"Now we have around 2,000 sq. m of space for VirHydro and AFU between them," she said.

Isabelle added that AFU has been working in what was a difficult climate with the economy not currently in great shape, but has been able to grow and attract new business, while manufacturing for the VirHydro range is only a part of its activities.

"We make as much as we can of the VirHydro equipment, although we use a foundry that makes the drums for us and a lot of the manufacturing is done by our sister company AFU.

"We also use a lot of standard industrial components, such as the motors for the power packs

that come from Japan, but everything is assembled here," Isabelle Blancard said, commenting that France remains the main market although there are sales overseas and these are growing gradually.

"We don't sell a lot to the UK or Ireland.

"The exchange rate isn't all that favourable for British fishermen and although we get enquiries, they don't often come to much," she said.

"But we have been selling small haulers recently to fishermen in Sweden and Finland, and not long ago we sold a reel to someone in Hawaii. "He asked if he could pay through PayPal, which wasn't a problem, and he had the reel three days later."

AWARD FOR INNOVATIVE FISH ESCAPE DESIGN



AWARD: smaller fish generally rise to the top in trawls and are attracted by the luminous rings which give escape from the net unharmed

British student Dan Watson was recently awarded the £10,000 James Dyson award for 'tangible technology'.

To tackle the increasing problem of overfishing, Dan, a graduate of the Royal College of Art, engineered a series of escape rings for fish, which can be retrofitted to trawler nets.

After reading about the problem of overfishing, Dan began researching ways of tackling the issue.

Nearly half of the fish caught are thrown back into the sea because they are not suitable to be sold, many don't survive.

SafetyNet provides an illuminated escape route to young, unmarketable fish, to prevent them being captured in nets. The rings exploit escape behaviours of fish. Small and medium fish swim up when stressed, whereas larger fish swim down.

By exploiting this, the net only catches mature, non-endangered species.

"SafetyNet shows how young graduates like Dan can tackle global issues in new and inventive ways," James Dyson said.

Since graduating, Dan has started a company, SafetyNet Technologies, to try and commercialise his technology.

"The rings are designed to be low maintenance.

"The rings are illuminated, acting in like an emergency exit sign for the fish," Dan Watson Dan added that he will be using the £10,000 prize money to further develop a broad range of prototypes for SafetyNet and finalise government testing.

A video explaining the invention can be seen at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Thov5k7fWlg&feature=plcp>

"The work began one year ago. We moved in here in May and now have 2,000 sq. m for VirHydro and AFU"

– Isabelle Blancard