



*This ship was originally the Kent Shore built in 1967 for Offshore Marine, one of a number of sister ships powered by Lister Blackstone engines developing 1600 bhp. Picture: Paul Gowen*

soon became evident, because of their difficulty in dealing with the weather conditions and their inability to run anchors and tow the new breed of semi-submersibles.

Hence a number of traditional British shipyards found themselves with these very unusual vessels on their order books. Charles Hill of Bristol and Bolson's of Poole, Cochrane's of Selby and J Samuel White of Cowes, Isle of Wight set to the task of metal bashing to fulfil the requirements of their clients. J Samuel White, a British shipbuilder who had once been known for manufacturing, in-house, every single component of the vessels they constructed, completed the first supply vessel to be built in the UK, the South Shore, for Offshore Marine.

Also typical of the vessels of the period was the Essex Shore, built in Rotterdam in 1967. Although the general shape was still that of the traditional Gulf of Mexico supply ship, it had a stern roller, to allow rig anchors to be lifted to the surface, and a winch to carry out the task. It was also capable of towing, having a bollard pull of 22.5 tons. While this figure seems ludicrous today, 40 years ago the Essex Shore was a powerful vessel, its two Lister Blackstone engines producing 2000 BHP.

She had further innovative features to help her tie up astern to the rigs. Forward she was fitted with a Gill Jet, a diesel driven 500 bhp omni-directional thruster, and on the bridge, she had a set of controls facing aft, so that the stern could be seen from the control position. The master could then drop the anchor and steer the ship astern using the bow-thruster until he was within range of the crane, and then manoeuvre the ship while the ropes were being attached.

While it appears that the Europeans were quick off the mark, Bryan Cooper and T. F. Gaskell writing in 1966 in their book "North Sea Oil – The Great Gamble" thought otherwise. They felt that it was public knowledge that the survey work had been going on for more than two years by the time the first rig arrived, and that the British could easily have anticipated the action and started earlier to build ships and rigs. Later, in 1975, pundits were still complaining about the lack of investment by UK companies.