



*The Hatch Tide. Built in 1982 at Halter Lockport. The enlarged funnels alone cannot hide the lines of the standard Halter Marine design. The towing gate is still in use. Picture: Ron Jansen.*

*The Trafalgar Service. Built in 1983 by Halter Marine. The engine exhausts still rise out of the afterdeck and are plumbed forward to the "North Sea Stacks". Photo: Sandy Stewart.*



The American ships continued to be successful in their traditional areas of operation, virtually the only concession to North Sea developments being the placing of the funnels in the area immediately aft of the wheel-house. Otherwise they were mostly still fitted with fixed-pitch propellers and were seldom more than 5000 BHP. They were much cheaper to construct, and were therefore able to trade at lower rates.

Indeed it is just a bit difficult to believe that while the Norwegians were designing the ME303 the Americans were sticking to the Halter Marine 180 footer, and there were brand new companies still springing up in Louisiana and Texas, commissioning small fleets of small vessels and going to work. Just as in the 1970s Arcadia Marine built a number of ships and advertised that they had been

blooded in the North Sea, so one or two of these new companies did just the same thing.

The oil industry itself was in its usual state of boom or bust. In 1981 the price of crude oil reached a level which was not repeated until 2004, and as the 1999 Marcon International report states "Shipyards could not turn out new vessels fast enough. Offshore Trawlers in Bayou La Batre, Alabama were delivering supply and utility boats at the rate of one every other week. It was almost as if hulls were being built by the mile and just cut off at the appropriate lengths".

There are records of the construction at Offshore Trawlers available, and between 1980 and 1985 this yard turned out 35 offshore vessels of various sizes, all for Seacor. The American Marine Corporation, on the other hand, did not built any offshore support vessels, probably because Tidewater had been their best customer, and it appears that this company had turned to other yards. Incidentally, Seacor does not appear anywhere as a ship-owner in the conventional sense, so one assumes that they were building and leasing ships to people who thought they could make money out of operating them. Unfortunately as anyone who has done it will tell you, bareboating ships is not a really successful activity.

Another major American supply vessel builder, Halter Moss Point, built 17 vessel in 1980 alone, many of them for Tidewater, and 53 in all during the decade. However, it is notable that at Moss Point production of supply vessels ceased altogether in May 1983.

Companies who sprang up during this short boom period included Petromar of Rockport Texas, who built seventeen ships between 1981 and 1982, all of then under 300 gross tons and about 4000 bhp. These ships were advertised as being able to operate in the North Sea, despite their moderate size, their 40 tonnes bollard pull and their 136 ton Smatco winch. The winches were at least permanently installed.

PBR Offshore of Morgan City built 24 ships, all of them under 300 gross tons in 1981 and 1982. Marsea Marine of New Orleans built 17 ships at the same time. And