

natural requirement that the vessels hired should be suitable for the task, conforming with any insurance requirements as far as Bhp and bollard pull are concerned, and be taken on for as little money as possible.

What Asco was offering was effectively a means of managing all the marine requirements of the operator. The service was taken on at its inception by Conoco and BP, and Asco, who already operated the South Base in Peterhead Harbour went to work, apparently with a seamless efficiency which confounded the critics, who could see many reasons why the service should not be successful. Predominant amongst these was the theory that as soon as a ship was unreasonably delayed at a platform then such swingeing penalties would be imposed that the oil companies would soon take back the management of their own ships. And to a point this may be so, although the financial arrangements between the service providers and the oil companies have remained shrouded in mystery.



*The VS483 Toisa Intrepid, one of a number built in UK for British and Norwegian ship-owners at River Clyde ship-yards. An unsophisticated but effective design.*

*Picture: Victor Gibson*

and now they were ready to bring out their own design. This initiation resulted in the construction of the Toisa Coral and Toisa Crest, both of which were built at Appledore Shipbuilders in North Devon. They entered service in 1999. These two ships were completely up to date and aligned to today's thinking on what support vessels are about, though their concept originated in the Canadian built Balder ships, offering an alternative ROV support or platform supply role. They looked superficially like UT755s but were in fact almost as large as VS483s. They went to work both as supply vessels and in support of ROVs initially for cable laying operations in the Far East.

Meanwhile Ulsteins, apparently prompted by Gulf Offshore, the UK arm of GulfMark, developed the first iterations of the UT755. They appeared as the Highland Piper and Highland Drummer in 1996. It was apparent to no one at the time that the UT755 was to become the second most successful design in the history of Ulstein. Gulf went on to commission the Highland Rover, a 755 with the ability to carry out survey work, with the addition of a moonpool, extra accommodation and DP capability, and that vessel was delivered in 1998.

## *New PSV Designs*

As the turn of the century approached the confidence gradually returned in the oil industry and a number of ship-owners ordered VS483s, Vik Sandvik platform ship designs. These ships could possibly be described as the workhorses of the North Sea. They were big lumbering craft but they were provided with a protected working area and were of a robust design. The Clyde shipyards turned out several for Sealion, Farstad and Stirling between 1996 and 1998.

Sealion had also made some major design changes to existing hulls and had carried out five conversions for the standby market,