



and it was around this time that the designers began to realize that they could have as many designs as there were letters in the alphabet. However, various versions of the 745 continued to be seen in the northern ports of Europe, including Solstad's Normand Flipper, officially a UT745E, where the E stands for Environmental, and the Northern Canyon, supposedly a standard UT745 but looking entirely different from all the early 745s and for that matter from the Normand Flipper, even though they were built only twelve months apart.

Almost unnoticed amongst these attractive superships the Vik-Sandvik VS470 appeared on the scene in the form of the Eidesvik-owned Viking Surf. This ship was followed almost immediately by the VS470 Mark II, four of which were ordered by the upstart SBS (Shetland Base Services), which had developed as an offshoot of the company of that name, and which had been set up to operate the remains of the port services in Lerwick. The first Mark II to be delivered was the SBS Nimbus, resplendent in its black livery with red and white striped funnel, eerily reminiscent of the OIL colour scheme. This ship was followed by numbers of others for a variety of owners, its popularity based more on its carrying capacity than its looks.

Another Vik-Sandvik design, the VS 493 Avant made its appearance in 2004. It was the second supply vessel after the Oil Challenger to go against convention and have its accommodation sited at the aft end rather than the forward end of the vessel. It was operated by Eidesvik and called, inspirationally, the Viking Avant. The rationale for this innovation was apparently a reduction in the number of control positions – from two to one – and greater comfort

*The MT6000 Skandi Buchan working at a semi-submersible. As well as elegance of design these ships set new standards for available deck space and crew protection. Picture: Victor Gibson*