

# Ferry flexible

Simon Johnson asks executives from Brittany Ferries, DFDS and Stena Line about the origins of their new E-Flexer ferries, as well as why they expect them to become so popular with guests

**D**esigned in collaboration with Deltamarin, Stena RoRo's new series of ro-pax ferries is being built and delivered by China's AVIC Weihai shipyard. The vessels are already living up to the E-Flexer name, being some of the most fuel efficient in the world for their size and being flexible enough to be uniquely customised to meet specific operator and route demands. We ask Brittany Ferries, DFDS and Stena Line to explain how they successfully met the challenge of modifying the ferries to suit their operational requirements and how they have bought their visions to life.

**Why did you choose an E-Flexer as part of your newbuild strategy?**

*PA:* Stena Line started the E-Flexer project back in 2013 with a pre-design study based on our fleet strategy and long-term tonnage plan. We needed to add larger ro-pax ferries to the fleet, but we didn't want to build bespoke vessels with unique and inflexible features that would increase both capital and operational expenditures. Together with Stena RoRo, we agreed to design a larger ro-pax that could operate on a range of routes offering both high-intensity day crossings and quieter night sailings, while offering high operational efficiency



Cote D'Opale will begin service for DFDS in summer 2021, sailing between Dover, England and Calais, France

**The host:**



**SIMON JOHNSON**  
Director of Shipshape Consulting

**The panel:**



**PETER ARVIDSSON**  
Chief Operating Officer at Stena Line Group and Head of the E-Flexer Steering Group at Stena Line



**KASPER MOOS**  
Vice President and Head of the Passenger Business Unit at DFDS



**CATHERINE QUERNÉ**  
Strategy Director at Brittany Ferries



Brittany Ferries marked the end of Galicia's first commercial voyage from Santander, Spain to Portsmouth, England with a fireworks display on 3 December 2020

and low energy consumption. We took inspiration from our Visentini-class vessels and our large and standardised ro-ro vessels, such as Stena Transporter and Stena Transit.

*CQ:* Brittany Ferries has a long-term fleet renewal and expansion strategy, so we always keep an eye on the market and explore different options for new vessels. When Stena RoRo asked if we wanted to purchase an E-Flexer, we evaluated the design and decided it met our needs for the routes linking Portsmouth, England and Santander, Spain, and Portsmouth and Cherbourg, France. For example, the 215-metre-long vessel (now named Galicia) had capacity to accommodate all freight and passengers on the routes, while her green technologies will help us meet our emissions and environmental sustainability goals. The flexibility to customise the design was an added benefit and we've since purchased two more E-Flexers – Salamanca and Santoña, which will debut in 2022 and 2023.

**What customisations were you able to make to your E-Flexer?**

*PA:* The key principle of the E-flexers was to develop a standardised but versatile ro-pax platform. Stena Line's

five vessels all have the exact same configuration, although the last two are bigger with additional cabins and more lane metres. However, the platform is so flexible that it will allow for adaptations and conversions in future, for example changing propulsion or electrifying the ferries. We've tested the vessels on several routes, and they work well everywhere.

*KM:* Cote D'Opale is optimised for operating cross-Channel services between Dover, England and Calais, France, so she has a different design to other E-Flexers. The bow, stern and cargo loading equipment are arranged differently to facilitate fast unloading and loading in port and we've replaced passenger cabins with an additional car deck and more public spaces. The interior design has also been adapted to ensure it is consistent with other DFDS ferries and also meets current and future passenger expectations. As always, we had to make design compromises, but we worked closely with Stena RoRo to create a vessel that fully meets market requirements and improves the overall passenger experience.

*CQ:* Galicia has the same basic structure, technical systems and interior layout as the other E-Flexers, but we've added an extra 100 passenger cabins

to ensure we have the right balance between space for customers, their cars and freight vehicles. We've also adapted elements such as colours, fabrics, carpets and artwork to reflect Brittany Ferries' branding and create our first-ever Spanish-inspired interiors. It was challenging, but we successfully transformed an off-the-shelf ferry into a bespoke vessel that feels like she has been specifically designed for Brittany Ferries and the routes she operates.

**How do the completed vessels compare against your expectations and how will you gauge their success?**

*PA:* Our first three E-flexers are now trading in the Irish Sea and have been very well-received by both our customers and the wider market. We are very happy with the capacity they offer and the broad range of onboard experiences they provide to guests, both from an interior and outlet perspective. We're more than satisfied with their performance and the operational expense development is better than expected. They are very efficient.

*KM:* Cote D'Opale will begin service in summer 2021 and our main metrics for evaluating her success will be whether the advanced engine and other

## ROUNDTABLE

technologies lead to improvements in overall fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions compared to other vessels operating on the Channel routes. Passenger and freight capacity will be significantly improved in comparison to our existing vessels and the active stabilisation technology will result in very smooth crossings. In addition, the extra bow thruster and high-lift rudders will improve port manoeuvring times and allow continuous operation in severe weather conditions without additional tug support, which is essential for the high-frequency service we offer on the Channel.

*CQ:* Galicia only started service in December 2020, so we don't have sufficient data to gain meaningful insights into how she is performing in terms of operational efficiency, energy consumption, emissions or costs compared to our other vessels. However, all the technical systems performed well during her sea trials so we're confident she will meet all targets. The vessel is also very comfortable and quiet, and we've had amazing responses from our crew members and customers. Of course, we'll continue adapting and improving the vessel over time.

**Which features of the ships are you most proud of, and which do you think will appeal to passengers?**

*PA:* I am personally very satisfied that we managed to hold true to the standardised and flexible approach on the entire newbuilding programme. I am also sure that our E-flexers will provide



Stena Line's Stena Embla is already operating on the Irish Sea and receiving positive feedback from customers

great customer satisfaction to our passengers and freight customers many years from now.

*KM:* Cote D'Opale will have several impressive areas, including the first 7 Seas Restaurant on a DFDS ship; an enhanced Light House Café and Premium Lounge; and the newly designed Road Kings area for freight drivers, which will have a restaurant, lounge and showers. However, the duty-free ship will be the outstanding feature because it's very much at the heart of the ship and all passengers will walk through it. The space spans more than 1,000 square feet and will evoke the feeling of an airport, thanks to its dedicated boutique areas, various duty- and tax-free products, LED lights and digital screens displaying adverts and information.

*CQ:* Galicia is a truly international ship – she is owned by a French operator, was designed by Europeans, built in China, outfitted with products from countries

around the world, and has Spanish-inspired interiors and onboard venues that are targeted mainly at British passengers. I felt very proud when I saw customers enjoying the Taberna de Tapas restaurant on Galicia's inaugural sailing. To me, it symbolised that we had achieved our onboard experience goals – our French chefs and crew members successfully brought an authentic taste of Spain to both Spanish and British passengers in a space filled with Galician artwork and everyone was in the holiday mood.

One of the best parts of the E-Flexer project is that it shows how several competitors can work together to take a standard ferry design and produce a series of extraordinary ships for very different brands. We collaborated to ensure we all achieved our common vision (producing economically efficient ships), but also our own specific goals – it was a completely new way of working, but everyone has come out a winner. **CFR**

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