

TALL SHIPS No 10 OOSTERSCHELDE

The largest restored sailing ship in the Netherlands, *Oosterschelde* provides sail training, including Tall Ships races, and a lot more besides. *Holly Hollins* reports

Oosterschelde is unique, being the largest restored Dutch sailing ship. Rotterdam, her present home port, is where she started her cargo sailing days in 1918. Nowadays people are her cargo and those lucky enough to sail aboard have visited Spitzbergen and the Antarctic, cruised around the world, joined the Tall Ships' Races and a variety of festivals, or sailed ocean routes.

Oosterschelde's keel was laid in 1917 and the next year, at her launch, she was named after the eastern (ooster) part of the river Schelde, which flows from France through Belgium and Antwerp to the Netherlands. Her original owner was shipping company HAAS, which sold her in 1921 to Captain Kramer. Her cargoes consisted of clay, bricks, wood, salted herrings, potatoes, straw, bananas, etc and her routes took her around the coasts of Europe and as far as the Mediterranean and Africa. In 1939 her ownership changed again and she went under the Danish flag with the name of *Fuglen*. During the war she and her crew had a close call when she hit a mine.

Fifteen years later, sold to Sweden and called *Sylvan*, her routes were concentrated in the Baltic Sea. As late as 1970 she was fully modernised as a motor coaster.

Captain D van Andel bought her in 1988 and two years later the restoration began with the recommissioning by HRH Princess Margriet in 1992. Her present captain, Gerben Nab, has been closely

involved with the project since those early days. The office is based at Rotterdam though she is seldom there – this winter being an exception. In late November she was at the dry dock at Stellendam for about 10 days for her annual inspection and a fresh layer of paint, some new plumbing and pipes and general maintenance work.

On 21 February she sets sail south again, heading on a spring voyage around the coasts of Sardinia and the Balearic Isles for participation in the Garibaldi Tall Ships' Regatta being organised by Sail Training International in Italian waters. Later her routes takes her north to the Hebrides where she will make a few voyages out of Oban before catching up with the Tall Ships in the North Sea for the Regatta race from Hartlepool to Sail Amsterdam, a perfect place to show off her historic heritage.

High level of authenticity

Oosterschelde has been restored to a very high level of authenticity with particular attention being paid to her unique character and tradition. Her distinctive lines will be admired as she makes short sail-pasts in front of the fleet of Tall Ships and traditional vessels moored at the docks during Sail Amsterdam.

At other times she participates in a wide range of activities other than voyages. These include sail training, management and team-building courses, filming and photoshoots and all manner of corporate

"Voyages combining island hopping, exploring and blue-water sailing"

events – both moored-up alongside and on passage. Then there are the programmes involving the ship and her crew with physically or socially disabled young people. Over the years experience has been gained in all these spheres and the ship has been welcomed in numerous ports worldwide and covered thousands of miles.

When sailing in cool climates like the Hebrides, Spitzbergen or Antarctica it is easy to feel warm and cosy on board with underfloor heating and a wood-burning stove in the saloon. There is also a library, collected around the world, and a piano for music and singing. Other spontaneous events occur when the ship enters port and usually prove memorable.

In the 2009 season on the voyage from Aberdeen to Oban, Roelof, who was the first mate, describes some such unexpected moments: "On our first ever visit to Stornoway we were immediately invited back to participate in a small sail festival the following week. Having changed crew at Oban we went out to St Kilda, a wel-

come rare opportunity, and then via the Sound of Harris and the Shiant Islands we arrived back at Stornoway." With perfect timing it was the climax of the first evening of the festival, and boats and music filled the harbour.

Making many friends

"The next day two of our crew, Lukas and Frianko, came second in the traditional fishermen's rowing-boat race and were rewarded with Scottish beer. That afternoon *Oosterschelde* functioned as starting ship for some races. When we left harbour later that day, a fisherman came alongside to present us with some mackerel. Stornoway has become one of those places where we made many friends and where we would love to come back to."

During 2010 more islands are on the route. Having returned to the Hebrides in the summer, *Oosterschelde* will be setting sail to visit the Cape Verde Islands, with voyages combining island hopping, exploring and blue-water sailing.



Oosterschelde

Launched: 1918
Builder: Appelo, Zwartsluis
Owner: Shipping Company Oosterschelde
Flag: Netherlands
Rig: 3-masted topsail schooner
Construction: steel
Length overall: 50m (164ft)
Length waterline: 35m (115ft)
Beam: 7.5m (24ft 8in)
Draught: 3m (10ft)
Tonnage: 226 Gt
Sail area: 891m² (9595sqft)
Engine: 6-cylinder Deutz - 360hp
Complement at sea: 24 guests plus 8 crew; 120 guests on daytrips
Usage: cruising /sail training/ offshore voyaging/ corporate hospitality events

Shipping Co Oosterschelde, PO Box 23429, 3001 KK Rotterdam, Netherlands
 Tel: +31 104 364258, Fax: +31 104 36210
www.oosterschelde.nl



"Easy to feel warm and cosy on board with underfloor heating"

Spacious and elegant saloon; there's also a piano aboard