

Casualties: Pilot 'dozed off' before hitting moored tow in Houston Ship Channel

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At Work



New Lake Charles launch keeps pace with LNG boom

Story and photos
by Brian Gauvin

In front of the Lake Charles pilot station in Cameron, La., the 70-foot *Cameron Pilot II* went from zero to 28 knots in a matter of seconds, and did it as smoothly as the hand of Capt. Mark Foster advancing the throttles.

The boat derives its elegant lines from the classic Ray Hunt Design deep-V hull, synonymous with the pilot boats built by Gladding-Hearn Shipbuilding of Somerset, Mass. The launch is fast for its length and weight, and it needs to be. From the Cameron jetties, it is 30 miles to the sea buoy across the open, and often rough, Gulf of Mexico.

"I've been a pilot for 27 years and it's the best pilot boat I've ever been on," said Capt. Brett Palmer, president of Lake Charles Pilots Inc. "It's solid and rides really flat, and

cuts the waves with no pounding in 5-foot seas. It has incredible visibility and is a very functional, purpose-built pilot boat."

In 2016, local pilots and industry saw a need for new infrastructure to support the expected surge in vessel traffic because of the turn from importing liquefied natural gas (LNG) to exporting it. Currently, Cameron LNG is up and exporting, Venture Global LNG is under construction, and three more LNG terminals have received permits and are expected to be built along the Calcasieu Ship Channel.

"We have 14 jobs today," Palmer said. "Six months ago, we were not nearly that busy. But we knew this was coming."

With three Gladding-Hearn/Ray Hunt Design boats already in its

fleet, the Lake Charles Pilots had the confidence of outstanding history when ordering *Cameron Pilot II*. It was delivered in October.

"Not wanting to reinvent the wheel, we rode the *Galveston* (Texas) boat and knew that it was the boat we wanted," Palmer said. Gladding-Hearn delivered *Galveston* to the Galveston-Texas City Pilots in 2010.

The Calcasieu Ship Channel cuts through marsh, replete with sediment, floating grass and hyacinth. For that reason, the Lake Charles Pilots deviated from *Galveston* and chose propellers instead of waterjets.

"The jets act like a vacuum cleaner in the shallows," Foster said.

The Lake Charles Pilots also chose to have shaft tunnels fabricated into the hull. Winn Willard, president of Ray Hunt Design, explained

that the tunnels reduce draft and, most importantly, allow for a lower shaft angle. The effect is to improve water flow into the propellers, reducing turbulence and cavitation.

"Efficiency is improved and cavitation damage is then limited, giving longer propeller life," Willard said.

Currently, about 1,000 ships visit the Lake Charles area each year. Palmer expects the number to double in 10 years.

"We got the new boat in October, and the first of the LNG ships started arriving," he said. "That was how it was supposed to work." •

Cameron Pilot II SPECIFICATIONS

Owner/operator: Lake Charles Pilots Inc., Lake Charles, La.
Designer/builder: Ray Hunt Design, New Bedford, Mass./Gladding-Hearn Shipbuilding, Somerset, Mass.
Dimensions: L: 70' B: 21' D: 6'8"
Crew size: Two

PROPULSION

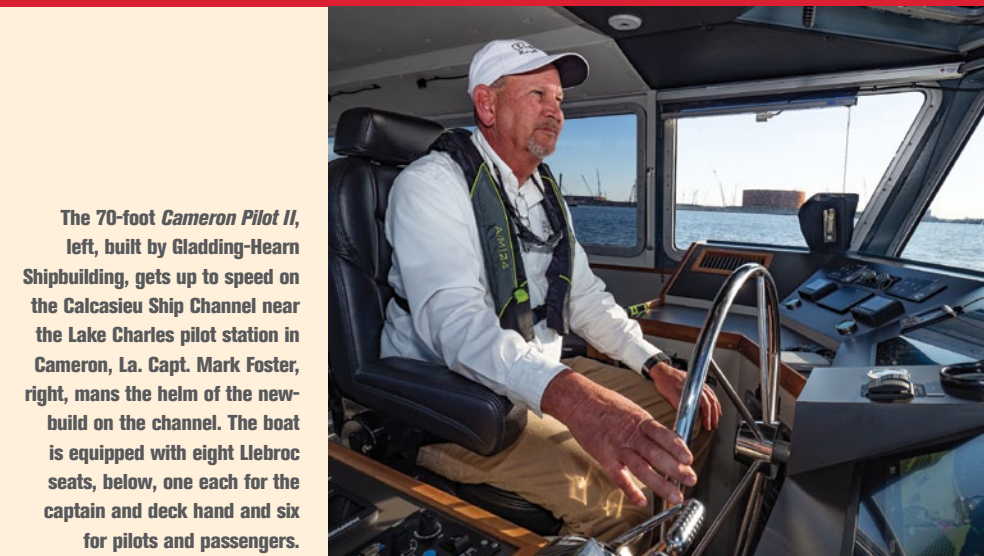
- (2) Cummins QSK38-M Tier 3 engines, 1,300 hp each at 1,800 rpm
- Twin Disc MGX-6620A gears
- Cummins C Command and Twin Disc EC300 engine controls
- Bruntons five-blade nibral propellers
- (2) Humphree HE 1500 interceptors
- (2) Northern Lights M864W3 25-kW gensets
- Maximum speed: 28 knots

NAVIGATION/COMMUNICATIONS

- (2) Garmin xHD2 open-array radar units
- Garmin 8616xsv MFD chartplotter
- Garmin 19x GPS
- Garmin B260 depth sounder
- Furuno FA170 AIS
- (2) Standard Horizon GX6000 VHF radios
- Ritchie compass

ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

- (8) Liebroc seats
- Harken TR31 rail and trolley restraint system
- (5) MarinAire reverse-cycle air-conditioning units
- Winch-operated J-basket rescue system



The 70-foot *Cameron Pilot II*, left, built by Gladding-Hearn Shipbuilding, gets up to speed on the Calcasieu Ship Channel near the Lake Charles pilot station in Cameron, La. Capt. Mark Foster, right, mans the helm of the new-build on the channel. The boat is equipped with eight Liebroc seats, below, one each for the captain and deck hand and six for pilots and passengers.



Two Cummins QSK38-M main engines, above, deliver a combined 2,600 horsepower through Twin Disc gears.



Foster heads for the sea buoy, off Cameron, La. The pilot boat's wheelhouse provides operators with easy-to-reach controls and impressive visibility. The foredeck, right, has port and starboard boarding platforms and a Harken rail and trolley system for increased pilot safety.

