



RFD Beaufort MES can perfect the ark of escape

Its latest chute and liferaft combination is claimed to be the world's largest marine evacuation system

RFD Beaufort has told SASI that its flagship marine evacuation system (MES) has proved a success and will be installed on several vessels in the coming months.

The Marin Ark 632 was officially launched in April of last year and sales manager Richard McCormick explained that the first example will be installed on Norwegian Cruise Line's Norwegian Epic, being constructed by STX Europe at St Nazaire, France. Other orders include two Royal Caribbean International 'Solstice' class new build currently known as H679 and H691, two vessels for Blue Star ferries being built by Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering, two naval vessels being constructed by Navantia of Spain, and three vessels for the US Navy.

The product has been marketed as the world's largest MES. The Marin Ark 632 (so named for its capacity of four 158-person reversible liferafts) is a complete redesign of its predecessors. It was developed to meet industry needs, McCormick told SASI. "Larger vessels with increased demand on deck and shell space meant that MESs had to increase, similar to what happened with lifeboats," he noted. "The Marin Ark 632 was designed to be compact and fit into the same deck space and shell space as the 430-person version, but giving almost 50% additional capacity." The latest version took almost two years from design and development to approval validation.

The Marin Ark 632 is aimed at high-capacity cruise, ro-pax and naval vessels, but McCormick remarked that its modular design, multiple configurations and variable capacity – 158, 316, 474 or 632 people – make it suitable for a wide range of vessels. The initial concept was conceived in the 1970s with twin-slide MESs, and the first Marin Ark products featured fully reversible liferafts. "Recently, we decided to again revolutionise the MES market with another complete redesign," McCormick announced, summing up the product's benefits as "compact design, increased capacity, significantly improved chute performance and bringing a reduction in operational costs".

Responding to the possibility that passengers might fear a dark descent off the side of a vessel (see SASI, May 2009), McCormick countered: "I can tell you that more than 14,000 persons

have confidently descended the Marin Ark 430P MES chute since first introduced to market.” The chute design on the Marin Ark 632 has been improved, he said: “a helical slide path with a tube, it is open, spacious and a very natural descent path”. The system is designed to function with low and high freeboards, up to 27.5m.

McCormick predicated that the “chute technology is the future of MES” and said the Marin Ark’s chute performance was consistent regardless of sea state and vessel list or trim. “The RFD chute is not susceptible to high wind and will not buckle, the descent is consistent, steady and reliable,” he added. So far the company is aware, the product has never been deployed in a genuine emergency.