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(Tradewinds)

### **Clean first place for Dorado pool**

US-based Dorado has shot ahead as the number-one grouping of handy-max products tankers.

Dorado Tankers long seemed destined to remain the poor stepsister of Heidenreich Marine's Star Tankers panamax pool, anemic and all but ignored in the shadow of its popular, robust sibling.

But the fortunes of the 2001-founded products-tanker pool improved in 2003 and, with a major growth spurt in the past few weeks, Dorado appears to have surpassed Denmark's Torm as the world's largest medium-range (MR) pool.

Four new members and seven additional tankers in that stretch have grown the pool to 27, a handful more than Torm by the count of Heidmar boss Per Heidenreich. What is more, Dorado has gathered its recruits from China to the US, where Florida-based Seabulk International committed the two international-flag tankers it acquired from World-Wide Shipping.

Dorado is still smaller than the panamax-oriented Star pool, whose 40-odd tankers hold top market share in the Atlantic Basin. But maybe not for long, muses Heidenreich.

"I would like to think we'll be able to go up to 40 by the end of next year," he said. "That's the goal and I definitely think it is possible. Don't forget we had a running start when we founded Star with Pleiades [of Greece]. We had a big fleet of 18 or 19 vessels instantly. With Dorado we started from scratch and it was more difficult to build the pool from scratch."

But build they have. El Paso Corp's decision to enter seven OMI-owned vessels at once last year provided a big chunk. Then came the recent entries:

Fort Lauderdale's Seabulk, which has spurned charter employment with an oil major in favour of the pool for the two ex-World-Wide vessels, the 48,000-dwt Seabulk Trust and Seabulk Reliant (both built 2000);

Two Chinese owners, the Cosco-affiliated Dalian Ocean Shipping with its 44,000-dwt Ming Ze Huand Yan Shui Hu (both built 1995); and Nanjing's 46,000-dwt Da Qing 451 (built 2000);

Prima Marine Management of Greece with its 46,000-dwt Puma (built 1998).

In addition, existing pool member Sanmar of India has added a second tanker, the 40,000-dwt Sanmar Serenda (built 1992). Another existing member, Unicorn of South Africa, has put in its 46,000-dwt newbuilding Kuda.

"These are mostly people that we've known or have been talking with for some time so it's not like anyone entered overnight," Heidenreich said. "I think it's more coincidence that we've had this many at once." Brokers say Heidmar has been clever about using the success of its Star pool

to lure people in on the clean side. And with a sustained strong market in products, Dorado has its own track record now. Dorado has been able to show a premium over time-charter employment for a protracted period, Heidenreich notes.

Dorado also has strong incentive to build its numbers because it is likely to lose the seven El Paso/OMI tankers in a staggered redelivery to OMI running from late 2004 through 2006, another source notes.

OMI will not comment on its plans for the products tankers, which it calls a core aspect of its fleet. However, Heidenreich acknowledges Dorado may lose them.

"I think it's very possible," he said. "But for every ship leaving, we feel we have one or two coming in so it's not something we're worried about."

Heidmar thinks the influx of Chinese tankers is especially promising, in that so many more will be coming on line in the next few years.

The Dorado pool currently does about 40% of its business in Asia, 40% in the Atlantic Basin and 20% in Europe and the Mediterranean.