Our Story.

This story begins, and ends, at sea.

It is in a sense my story, being a mariner for over forty years, from the early days as an Ordinary Seaman in Her Majesty’s New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserves, through Commanding Officer of an inshore hydrographic survey vessel HMNZS Takapu, to the many years spent on construction vessels and barges building offshore oil and gas complexes.

Many have been the hours and days spent waiting for the weather, particularly the sea and swell to drop so we can start work, again, or just for the first time. It always struck me that really we weren’t moving that much. I could still leave my coffee on the table without it catapulting across the room as if thrown by some unseen hand.

Yes it did get rough, very rough, but then nothing could work and most ships sought shelter behind an island or headland, or if you were fortunate enough, to go in to port while the winds howled and the seas raged, and you could sit in the comfort of a good coffee bar with a decent book.

But most of the time Waiting on Weather (or WoW as it is written in the DPRs, Daily Progress Report time allocation), was not that arduous. The wind and sea was not that rough but still we waited because the vessel was moving more than the installation parameters permitted. And every day we waited the accountants added more vessel costs to the project account. Major losses, that is the real meaning of WoW.

I looked at the seas rolling by, wandered up to the bridge and checked on the wind speed and the heave on the helideck, always exaggerated because it was usually at the bow. The motion reference units the surveyors had were amidships and a much better indicator. Still 2.5m of heave, so we wait a little longer.

The morning management conference has but one topic on the agenda, the weather! There may be a 24 hour window coming up on Thursday, probability, fifty percent, so we wait some more. I look out at rolling seas and the scattered white horses galloping by, whilst behind me I hear the sound of the project cash register ringing up the losses.

We were just into the new century and I was on a major offshore oil and gas project in Russia, It was a transit of over 500 nautical miles and with all the construction crews that was a lot of crew change time. I suggested high speed catamarans, but the methods were already established. Later though, for the platform crew changes in summer (winter is pack ice), they did contracted two high speed catamarans to do the work. Still, lifting the crew up would have been very weather dependent.
That’s when I thought of the idea of transforming the catamaran into a semi-sub. I looked around and saw there was nothing like this on the market and determined to investigate this when I got out of Siberia. Well, a while later my contract ended and I began to seriously look at this proposition. I realised that I have something here, a real game changer, something to silence that ringing losses register. That it was not just crew changes, it was installation and surveying, cable laying and inspections, supply and support, even pipelay and wind tower installations.

A game changer, the submersible hull enabling any vessel, mono hull or multihull, to transform from one mode to another, to actively change its own internal volume, to make part of itself that was internal, external, adding to the available buoyancy and changing the metacentric height. To be fast and stable.

A ship that would have the ability to keep working in weather everyone had in the past considered unworkable. To not only stay on site when the white horses galloped but to keep on working as well. To silence that loss register bell and plug the project gap which was swallowing thousand, millions even billions of dollars every year in waiting on weather and transit time.

This story ends back at sea where I started, but this time it is on a revolutionary new ship, a transformer, a morphing lift vessel semi-submersible, that will one day be seen on every offshore project all over the world. That will become the vessel of choice for many different kinds of work.

This time at sea I will watch the white horses and listen to the wind, with the sounds of construction, a working ship behind me.

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