

# Delivering a very special hospital ship

*Since 2013, Stena RoRo has been responsible for the design and completion of Mercy Ships' new hospital vessel the Global Mercy – the world's largest civilian hospital ship. After several years of construction at the Tianjin Xingang shipyard in northern China, the final test, the official sea trial, has now been completed with good results. The shipyard will present the ship for delivery this summer and the vessel will then sail to Antwerp in Belgium on its maiden voyage, where some members of the crew will board and the medical equipment supplemented. This will be followed by a visit to Rotterdam, and after this the Global Mercy™ will be ready for its first important mission in West Africa. Per Westling, Managing Director of Stena RoRo, explains how special the project has been, with the pandemic making the process even more complicated.*

Since 1977, Stena RoRo has led the development of new marine RoRo, cargo and passenger concepts. The company specialises in custom-built vessels, as well as standardized RoRo and RoPax vessels.

Mr. Westling has been employed by Stena since 1985. He has been Project Manager

for several new builds and major conversion projects but also served for five years within the Stena Line Ship Management division. In 2001 he moved to Stena RoRo as a Conversion Manager and took on the role of the Deputy Managing Director in 2008 and subsequently the Managing Director in 2011.



“Since then we have ordered nine passenger ships, and started work on the Global Mercy,” he says, explaining that the company develops all conceptual designs itself. “We design ships, order them, and once they’re completed, charter them out to companies in the Stena Group itself or to external parties: to Brittany Ferries and DFDS, among others. We are a tonnage supplier to anyone who wants to hire ships from us for either the short or long-term. So we design, order and build.”

This may seem pretty straightforward, but Mr. Westling emphasises that it is not. “Ordering a big ship in China, like the Global Mercy, is not something everyone would or could do. You need a good network of suppliers, for starters, and it’s of crucial importance to be in full control of standards, with thorough supervision at the shipyard.”

This became more complicated at the start of the pandemic, he adds. “Work at the Chinese shipyard on the Global Mercy continued, as, thankfully, Chinese government dealt with the pandemic quickly. The problem was, and to an extent still is, getting into China as visitors need to quarantine for three weeks. So it’s been difficult to get our specialists in. We were able to perform remote inspections from Sweden, however, and, in no small part thanks to our good relationship with the shipyard, have been able to meet all deadlines.”

The Global Mercy did experience some delays but Mercy Ships put that time to good use, he adds. “It’s given them the opportunity to raise additional funds. The ship is now fully funded.”

Mr. Westling is proud that Stena RoRo was tasked as project manager for the Global Mercy, which in many ways has been a unique project. As the world's largest purpose-built civilian hospital ship, it has received wide attention from all over the world from the very beginning of its construction in 2015. The new vessel is the first ship built from design to implementation by the Mercy Ships charity as all previous ships were adapted from other purposes. Mercy Ships uses hospital ships to deliver free, world-class healthcare services, capacity building, and sustainable development to those with little access in the developing world. The charity has worked in more than 55 developing countries, with its ships crewed by volunteers from over 60 nations, with an average of over 1,200 volunteers each year. "You actually have to pay to volunteer for them," Mr. Westling points out, underscoring just how prestigious the charity is.

While this was the first hospital ship Stena RoRo has project managed for, it hasn't been that different from developing a passenger ship, according to Mr. Westling. "We have applied one of our concepts on a ship from the RoPax-class, which are passenger and freighter vessels for international voyages, and modified her into a pure passenger ship with hospital capabilities. Instead of a car deck, we've built operating rooms and hospital wards. The ship will have space for about 950 persons with everything needed for both patients and those who work on board, including grade schools and nursery schools for the children of staff."

Hospital operations place large and specific requirements, which have affected both the hull design and the



layout of the interior. In addition, the ventilation system has been especially adapted and focus has been placed on minimizing vibration and noise. The ship is equipped with large cranes in order to be able to take on containers with provisions, vehicles and other equipment as the ship is to be used for long periods in port.

Meanwhile Mr. Westling and Stena RoRo hope that the worst of the pandemic is behind us. "Pure cargo ships have probably benefitted from the pandemic and had to carry as much as they can. Passenger travel has been affected, of course, but we're optimistic as you're safer on a ferry than in an aircraft. You can board the ferry in your own car and your car becomes your own cabin. And there's

plenty of space on board a ferry, inside and outside. So I'm confident that ferry travel will bounce back, perhaps not this year but definitely in 2022."

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