

Torres Pilots Choose Yanmar.... Again & Again

Torres Pilots is the largest GBR pilotage provider in the three compulsory pilotage areas on the Great Barrier Reef being the Great NE Channel, Torres to Cairns route and Hydrographers Passage. In order to board and disembark pilots to ocean going commercial ships, Torres Pilots operates a fleet of purpose designed and built transfer vessels.



With up to 80 shipping movements serviced monthly out of Cairns, Torres Pilots is kept busy year round. Commercial ships which include bulk bauxite carriers, Maersk container ships, small bulk sugar vessels and cattle ships all use the inner reef passage as they travel along the Queensland coast. Each of these vessels must have a pilot on board and it is the Torres Pilots vessels like Alpha which provide the service to transfer these men of the sea.



Systematically, Torres Pilots is going through the process of re-powering their fleet with Yanmar marine diesel engines currently 75% of the fleet are Yanmar powered. Transferring pilots is an operation which not only depends on reliable engine power year round, under all sea conditions, but it is also one operating in the largest and most pristine coral reef system and national park in the world.



The most recent pilot transfer vessel to be repowered with Yanmar commercial diesel engines, is the Alpha. Launched in 2007 the 13.21m vessel was still powered by her original dual USA built 373kW diesel engines mid 2013, when one of the engines failed.

Torres Pilots were well prepared for the event and had a pair of Yanmar

6CXB-GT engines on hand in anticipation of the re-power project. The old engines were removed through the purpose built engine service hatch forward of the wheelhouse and onto the aft deck with the Yanmar engines going back in the same way. The seamless engine swap was undertaken by Yanmar Marine Dealer KG Mechanical in Cairns.

Yanmar's 6CXB engine is commercially rated, IMO Tier 2 emission compliant and weighs in at only 856kgs. The new generation 6CXB series comes from a proven pedigree with the earlier 6CX series already establishing an excellent reputation with many Australian boat owners.

The Yanmar 6CXB is a mechanically governed, freshwater cooled, six-in-line marine diesel engine displacing 7.4 litres. It has a shrouded dry turbocharger cylinder block inspection

ports and is equipped with Yanmar's own proprietary fuel injection equipment. A dual cylinder head design, combined with front mounted filter positions makes for easy servicing.

While the re-power project was underway, the opportunity was taken to strip the engine room of electrics and exhaust for a complete refit. New engine beds were made up, but the original ZF transmissions were retained. The replacement exhaust system was increased from 150mm diameter to 200 mm diameter to reduce back pressure and deliver a better exhaust flow.

According to Michael Cox, Launch Master at Torres Pilots in Cairns, the new Yanmar 6CX BMGT engines have delivered an enhanced level of performance to the Alpha. With 3 months and 190 hours of operation behind them, the benefits of the new Yanmar engines are already showing through.

"Our fuel data confirms that we are saving more fuel with the pair of Yanmar 6CX engines on board Alpha," Michael Cox said.

"With the engine room being mid ships, the engines are fitted just forward of the helm position. The crew are operating all through their watch on top of the engine room. The Yanmar engines are definitely quieter than the old diesels and the wet exhaust further reduces the noise level."

Operating from their base at Cairns Marina, the Alpha makes a round trip run of 1 hour and 30 minutes to drop or collect a pilot. Such a trip uses about 110 litres of fuel. Under normal operational conditions, the Yanmar 6CXB engines tick over at a comfortable 2100 rpm for a speed of 20.5 knots. During sea trials the maximum performance was achieved at 2800 rpm for 28 knots.

"We're really comfortable operating at 2100 rpm," Michael Cox said. "But it is also really comforting to know that there is a lot more power there for when it is needed."

Operating in Far North Queensland from bases in Cairns, Thursday Island and Mackay, the Torres Pilots vessels frequently operate in very remote and environmentally sensitive areas.

“Reliability is everything for us, especially in the harsh tropical conditions in the Torres Straits” said Michael Cox. “That is one of the reasons we are using Yanmar engines in general and the 6CXB specifically. If ever we have a problem at sea, the crew need to be able to be resourceful and manage the situation themselves. The Yanmar 6CXB engines depend less on advanced electronics for the fuel management system and that allows us to better manage problems at sea, as operating electronic engines in the remote regions has proven to be more difficult.”

Another recent re-power undertaken by Torres Pilots was their 9.76m vessel, the Bob Guy. This vessel is used under lighter weather conditions and now has a single Yanmar 6LY2A in the engine room. With eight vessels in the Torres Pilots fleet, all but two are Yanmar powered providing a synergy with in the fleet for servicing and parts

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