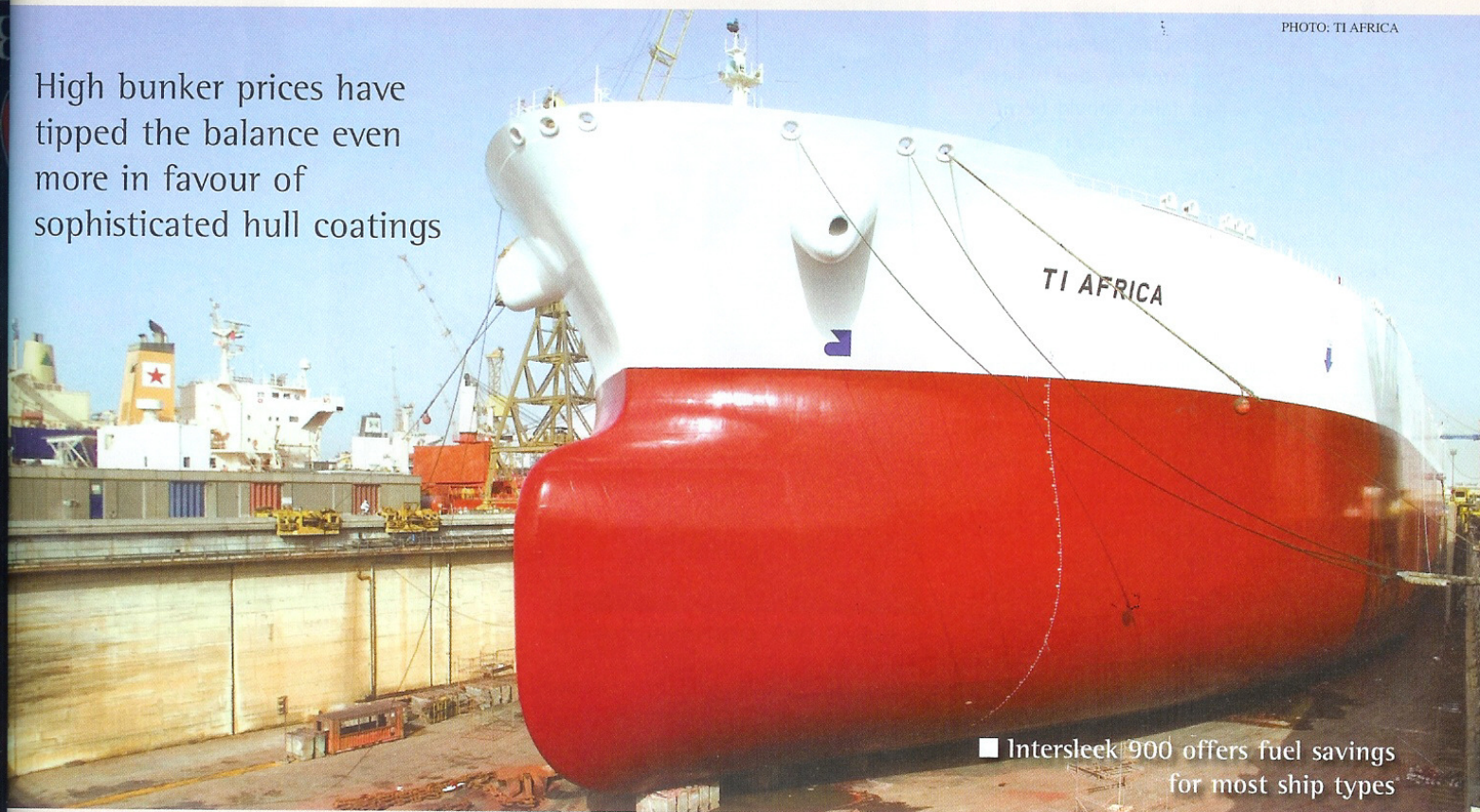


Ever more essential

PHOTO: TI AFRICA

High bunker prices have tipped the balance even more in favour of sophisticated hull coatings



■ Intersleek 900 offers fuel savings for most ship types

Marine coatings companies 'already had a lot to offer, but now dramatically higher bunker prices have changed the fundamentals,' according to Jim Brown, marketing development manager at International Paint Ltd. 'Ship owners can realistically spend far more on hull coatings and get their money back in much less time. Capital invested in high-performance hull coatings is money well spent,' he says.

Marine paint manufacturers are heavily reliant on raw materials such as copper, zinc and, of course, crude oil as well as its various derivatives including epoxy resins, solvents and other chemicals. They are as vulnerable as anyone else, therefore, to rising energy and commodity prices, some of which have been passed on to customers in the form of higher prices. Not all, though, says Hempel Group marketing director Klaus Møller who reckons new price levels in no way reflect the full extent of higher raw material costs.

Meanwhile, ship operators are heavily exposed to rising oil prices, in particular, in the form of dramatically higher bunker bills. And it is the paint companies' products that

offer the potential for significant fuel savings as well as extra environmental benefits in the form of reduced emissions.

Bunker prices have more than doubled over the last year and for a large container ship, could well cost more than \$3m a month, compared with less than \$1.5m one year ago. Even a modest saving in fuel consumption could have a substantial impact on a liner firm's operating economics even if the hull coatings cost more to start with. And, as coatings manufacturers point out, many of the latest systems are designed for 60-month drydocking schedules anyway, so there are also in-service savings to offset higher first cost.

Obtaining reliable cost data is practically impossible – the coatings companies are as cagey as ever and prices vary significantly depending on client, volume and product. However, it is fair to say that the potential savings offered by high-performance coatings have never been greater.

Take Intersleek 900, for example, introduced by International Paint last February and designed to work effectively on all vessels trading at more than 10 knots.

Described as leading the way in the next generation of foul release technology, International claims the coating performs more effectively than even its own top-of-the-range silicone-based Intersleek 700.

The new coating works on patented fluoropolymer foul release technology and has a range of superior properties which, the company claims, can conservatively deliver fuel savings half as much again as those afforded by 700. As an example, International says a VLCC coated with 900 could save 4,500 tonnes of fuel a year which, at today's typical bunker prices, works out at well over \$2m.

Says Brown: 'With Intersleek 900, we are into a whole new technology which offers dramatic scope for fuel and emissions savings across a broad range of ships. It is a significant development that will have a very positive impact on shipping's environmental profile and the fuel efficiency of the global fleet.'

All of the coatings companies have expensive R&D programmes in place. However, Hempel's Møller points out that today's products tend to have shorter life cycles and there is therefore less payback time on R&D investment. ■