



The "Great Land" below the skyline of Seattle (top) and at berth in Anchorage (title page)

... of two cement trucks and other cargo ...

"Some three months ago, we urgently needed two cement trucks for pipeline work—the sort of trucks which can also be used for hauling fertilizers. Of course, we looked in the lower forty-eight and finally heard about the availability of two such trucks in Montana.

"On a Wednesday night, I sent my manager to Missoula, to take a look at the trucks. The next day, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, Missoula time, the manager telephoned and told me that these trucks were what we had been looking for. Then he said—I have been told that if I get these trucks to Seattle by tomorrow, Friday morning, they can be loaded with cement and shipped right away, and we'll have them in Anchorage by next Monday morning with this new steamship company, TOTE.

"That will be the day—I replied. This will never happen . . . I told him to buy the trucks and get them to Alaska as fast as possible, and if he thinks that these TOTE people are okay, to ship with them.

"Well, he got two truckers who drove all night and arrived in Seat-

tle early Friday morning. They stopped first at our cement supplier, where each truck was loaded with 55,000 pounds of cement, and then delivered them to TOTE's pier 37.

"Next Monday morning, about 10 o'clock, the manager, who over the weekend had returned to Anchorage, comes grinning into my office and says—I just got a call that our trucks are here. Would you like to come down to the port and take a look at them?

"I thought, he was kidding. But when we came down to the port, the two trucks were already off the ship, sitting on the pier, on dollies. And another thing: he had asked the TOTE people in Seattle not to put the landing gear down and to jack the units up some way so that the heavy load wouldn't ride the landing gear as this quite often causes damage. They had relayed these instructions to Alaska and all had been done just as he had asked them to do it.

"Within one hour, our own trailers pulled the trucks out and they were on their way for delivery in Valdez the same day."

Joe D. Blackard, to whom we owe this step-by-step account of buying and shipping two cement trucks, is president of Alaska Transportation Services, Inc., an old-established firm with offices in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Palmer and Valdez. He sums up:

"If I wouldn't have seen it with my own eyes, I never would have believed it. In my 33 years of living in Alaska, 30 years of it in private business, it's the most unusual thing I've ever encountered. Getting our supplies and materials, especially oversized and heavy stuff into Alaska at least somewhat on time has always been our biggest problem. We've suffered many delays and interruptions that often caused financial losses.

"But now, with this new trailer-ship, it appears Alaskans will enjoy speed and service the kind of which they've never had before, and indeed never even dared to hope for."

The case of the two cement trucks is by no means unique. One can hear around Anchorage and Fair-

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TRANSPORT 2000

THE SEA BRIDGE TO ALASKA

A TRANSPORT 2000 SPECIAL REPORT

banks many similar stories, concerning the ro-ro movement of all kinds of freight. But what might be "business as usual" and therefore pass for an entirely normal, regular event in many other places, is still surprising news in Alaska.

Alaskans, for the first time, experience the operational efficiency of a roll-on/roll-off steamship service.

But that's not all. TOTE—an acronym for Totem Ocean Trailer Express—which began operations between Seattle and Anchorage in September 1975, features in this service the largest and fastest trailership anywhere in the world.

The Alaskans, for most of their needs, depend on imports from what they call "the lower forty-eight." The current pipeline boom has increased this dependence to virtually everything, with all kinds of construction and housing materials in the forefront of the most urgent requirements, and consumer goods for a population growing in affluency not far behind.

As one old-time resident of Fairbanks puts it: "Life on the last frontier is not anymore what it was even only five years ago. Today, everybody needs the automobile, and more and more households can afford to buy dishwashers, washing machines and electric ranges. Remember the joke about the supersalesman who tried to sell refrigerators to the Eskimos? Well—Eskimos, like everybody else, today do have refrigerators. Like everybody else, they buy them in department stores . . ."

Small wonder that the market is always hungry for more and more goods. And while there are no actual shortages, there are often vexing delays in delivery time, because of insufficient means of transportation which are, in many cases, further hampered by climatic conditions.

The arrival of TOTE on this scene of growing pains of an entire country is therefore considered to be a transportation and supply development of great importance.

How do Alaskans evaluate the impact on their lives, economy and business, caused by this fast, all-weather trailership operation?



The "Great Land", the world's largest roll-on/roll-off trailership, which was introduced on the Seattle-Anchorage route in September 1975, has fast won widespread shipper acceptance — says William B. Maling, president of Totem Ocean Trailer Express (TOTE).

"Alaskan shippers have been as quick to appreciate the clear-cut cargo flexibility advantages of pure roll-on transport as have shippers in the Puerto Rican and Middle East trades, where our first and smaller class of trailerships have been successfully operating for some time," Maling adds.

TOTE is a rarity among ocean cargo steamship carriers in that it is in part owned by a major U. S. shipyard — Sun Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Inc., of Chester, Pennsylvania, which holds 30 percent of the \$60-million venture. The other 70 percent are owned by Sun Oil, Sun Ship's parent company.

Sun Ship, which is the world's leading designer and builder of ro-ro trailerships, began studying the Alaskan market several years ago.

hundred loads of bagged cement on flatbeds, as well as steel fencing and other material for the pumping stations of the pipeline.

It's "hot" material—in the words of Sandra Walsh, assistant traffic coordinator in Anchorage—urgently needed supplies which had to be in place before the weather changes.

"TOTE was the decisive factor to get the material there on time," says Ms. Walsh.

However, that's premium shipping, just as it is the case also with containerizing, and the company uses it only when the supply situation is critical—she adds. Fluor's basic transportation system relies still

Explains Maling, who was formerly Sun Ship's vice president in charge of marketing:

"We liked what we saw. We soon understood the tremendous potential for growth for a high-speed ocean carrier that would provide a service capable of carrying both regular and oversized cargo. The answer was the "Great Land" which has been designed to operate through the rigorous Alaskan winter months."

Like the previous trailerships Sun Ship built for the Puerto Rican and Middle East trades, the Great Land can take the full range of over-the-road transportation equipment, such as highway and rail piggyback trailers, automobiles on auto carriers, oversized cargo more than 40 feet long, mobile homes, steel pipes, boats, chemical tanks, buses, and fully assembled industrial, heavy machinery — in fact, anything and everything that can be put on wheels, so that it can be rolled on and off the ship over the giant side or stern ramps. The carrying capacity of the 790-ft. vessel is, measured in 40-ft. equivalents, 386 trailers and 126 automobiles or other vehicles. Deadweight tonnage is about 17,000 (approximately 32,000 displacement tons); maximum speed is 24 knots.

Noting that the Great Land's speed makes possible an over-the-weekend express service from Seattle to Anchorage, some 1420 miles away, Maling adds:

"A substantial portion of the cargo we are carrying is the direct result of the construction program for the Alaskan pipeline. But of greater significance to TOTE's long-term prospects is our attracting that cargo which will be a major part of the Alaskan trade long after the pipeline will have been completed."

on the much slower barge transport via a marshalling yard and transfer point at Kenmore, Washington, just outside of Seattle, and from there into the ice-free port of Valdez.

"Still—it's good to know about the availability of a service like TOTE's. It fills a void," Ms. Walsh concludes.

Earl Shiffer, of United Lumber, comments:

"We bring into Alaska whatever a lumberyard requires for its operation. We use containerships, barge lines, railbarges, and we even charter barges.

"Of course, we now use TOTE also, and we are well satisfied with the way that carrier is working. It's certainly the fastest service of all that are available. In our business, one or two days of speedier service may, in some cases, make a lot of difference in the supply of an urgently needed product.

Barry K. Droke, Hardwood's Inc., also in Anchorage, offers this appraisal:

"We import the entire line of building materials, but especially hardwood lumber, plywood, mouldings and windows. Usually, our orders are consolidated in Seattle into 100,000-pound consignments. Part is shipped on flats, part in containers, and what can't be packaged or is too large to fit into a van, moves on barges. We never route by truck, because it's too expensive for this type of freight.

"Now, that we have tried TOTE, we find that we have here a very fast, efficient service and rather prompt delivery. The last mentioned point is of course obvious, because everything is on wheels and wheeled cargo quite naturally comes off this ship with great speed."

Hardwood's also uses TOTE's high-cube trailers which are "tailor-made" to the company's freighting requirements—explains Droke.

He concludes: "All-in-all, it's refreshing to have someone new in the business here, who provides competition to the long-existing services which sometimes can't meet the increasing demands and shut out cargo, thus creating serious problems.

"With TOTE's presence, sufficient ships' tonnage is now available to accommodate all freight requirements. We here in Alaska, who are on the receiving end, appreciate the importance of this and fully realize its positive impact on the Alaskan market."

This positive impact of the new transportation service is also stressed by C. W. Baer, general manager of the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce.

"Transportation is vital to us. The history of Alaska has more or less been governed by the amount and availability of transport. We here in Fairbanks are especially dependent upon the incoming flow of materials and goods. We don't have much to send out, but we need all that's coming in," Baer states.

"TOTE will be of great help to us, not only because it provides additional bottoms to bring the goods to Alaska, but also because of the

type of service the company offers—roll-on/roll-off. This helps a great deal in the kind of development we have here now and will continue to have during the next few years. We need a lot of heavy equipment, and a great part of it does not lend itself to containerization."

Baer is glad, that there is now an alternative for moving such cargo which, in the past, had to be sent either by a combination of slow barge and truck transport, or over the Alcan highway.

"The Alcan is a tough route," he says, "especially the 1200 miles through Canada which are only gravel. And the transportation costs over the Alcan highway are extremely high."

Lynden Transport, the largest overland motor carrier between Seattle and Alaska, appears to be in full agreement with Baer. While maintaining overland trucking service via the Alcan highway to Anchorage and Fairbanks, the company has formed a new division, Alaska Marine Trucking, which ships trailerized cargo to highway points in Alaska by utilizing TOTE's ro-ro ship.

Jim Beck, Lynden's terminal manager in Fairbanks, explains this new intermodal truck-roll-truck arrangement:

"We like the idea of moving freight to Alaska without driving the entire length of the Alcan highway, which is not only time-consuming, but also very hard on our equipment. Our operating expenses rise almost continuously. Labor costs increase, and fuel costs are skyrocketing. We have come almost to the point on the Alcan where it's very hard to compete with other, non-highway carriers, because it's so expensive. The costs of other transport modes do not mount as rapidly.

"One of the special things that we like about this new combined overland and water trailer service—and the shippers like it also—is the fact that there are practically no restrictions as to the size of the cargo, as long as it can be put onto wheels. We can run our 45-foot vans onto the ship without any difficulty, and we can also roll on flatbeds with long overhang loads.

"Only now, with this alternative mode of moving the freight, the shippers begin to realize how much more expensive it is to them to have oversized loads trucked over the Alcan, where they have to pay for special permits and pilot cars. Using the TOTE ship for such cargo means substantial, real savings."

The savings are not restricted to oversized cargo. The ocean rates are overall much lower than the highway tariffs and the shippers are well aware of it. Thus, by establishing Marine Trucking, Lynden Transport in fact has passed on substantial savings to the shipper.

A separate tariff has been published, and Lynden issues a through bill-of-lading from inland origin to inland destination. The entire movement is being billed on a single invoice.

For movements via TOTE ship, Lynden mostly uses its own rolling stock with special arctic equipment. "In addition to the less expensive shipping tariff for the shipper, we profit from savings in manpower and equipment wear and tear," adds Beck.

(In Seattle, L. H. Shapiro, TOTE's vice president—marketing, comments: "It costs approximately \$5,000 to run a trailer over the Alcan highway to Anchorage. Expenses to move the same trailer via our ship are only about \$1,500. Thus, rates can be lowered by up to 70 percent, without cutting profits. And Lynden is still able to offer the customer the expert and skilled service for which the company is especially well equipped.)

There is some difference between service to Anchorage and Fairbanks. Out of Seattle, TOTE serves Anchorage faster than any motor carrier over the Alcan. To Fairbanks, on the other hand, it's about one-and-a-half day faster by truck. That's because overland it's from Seattle about 2,300 miles to Fairbanks and 2,600 miles to Anchorage.

However, more and more shippers believe that they are better served also to Fairbanks by the combined routing that includes TOTE—says Beck. Unless they are greatly pressed for time, the cheaper rates of Alaska Marine Trucking are well worth the 36 hours, or sometimes even 48 hours of delay until the consignment reaches Fairbanks.

Concludes Beck: "Of course, next to not worrying about weight and size restrictions when shipping via TOTE, you are also not plagued with many other problems that prevail on the Alcan and often greatly prolong the travel time: ice and snow slides in winter, bridges washed out and parts of the highway flooded in spring, and the bad repair of some stretches all year round.

"Using the TOTE ship indeed makes for a well-rounded package."

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