

The New Tug In Town
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The Rolls Royce of tugboats is now in operation at Port Manatee for Marine Towing of Tampa.

The newest tugboat to join the Marine Towing fleet, Freedom, assists vessels at Port Manatee. It is the second state-of-the-art tugboat to join the Marine Towing fleet. The first, the Independent, was launched nearly one year ago. Both serve all ports on Tampa Bay.

The new tractor tugs utilize the latest technology for increase maneuverability and power and can gently handle any size and weight of ship on Tampa Bay.

Marine Towing has gradually improved its fleet operations starting with just one tug when operations commenced in 1999, and eventually growing to four tractor tugs today.

“Our tugs offer state-of-the-art ship docking,” said Marine Towing Operations Manager Dwayne Keith. “We expanded our fleet because we had a desire to operate the most modern equipment available in Tampa Bay.”

Freedom’s crew, Captain Jimmy Brantner, Engineer Otis Monteriro and Mate Robert Miller especially enjoy the new accommodations built on the tug. Although the living quarters are tight, it offers more luxurious and comfortable accommodations than older models. The operations deck is immaculate and trimmed with mahogany and cushioned seats.

“It has all the amenities of home,” Brantner said.

The crew, with a combined total of nearly 50 years experience, lives together on the tug for 7-day shifts. They respond to the needs of shippers around the clock. Brantner and Miller are licensed operators and alternate “driving” the tug 24 hours a day.

The 5,000 horsepower Freedom was built in Maine by Monteriro. The \$5.5 million tug took only one year to complete. It is 92 feet long with a 32-foot beam.

The tugs have dual Rolls Royce Z-drives with propellers that steer 360 degrees.

The engines are electronically controlled Caterpillars operated by computers, similar to an automobile.

“I used to show up to board a tug with a big box of tools, now I show up with a laptop computer,” Monteriro said.

Transponders are installed on each tug enabling the crew to see its location and route on television monitors throughout the ship.

“If the captain is eating in the galley, he can still see where we are and where we are headed,” Monteriro said.

According to the crew, the upgrades also help ensure the Freedom is at the top of its game to assist ships safely.

“Tugs now are a lot safer,” Monteriro said. “The power and maneuverability of this tug will help prevent ship groundings and collisions with docks -- all costly mishaps.”

Even the cuisine aboard the Freedom is top-notch. The crew takes turns cooking. “After 15 to 20 years of practice, you become pretty good at cooking,” Monteriro said.