

Sarens has been working on the new Champlain Bridge in Canada, where it developed a unique system with two floating pipes – the Floating Foundation Installer.



Moving with the times



Sarens, the Flemish family company that began in the heavy lifting business by moving trees with horses and carts during the 1920s, is now a global leader. Peter Shakespeare, HLPFI consultant editor, talks to Carl Sarens and Gert Hendrickx about what is next.

The Sarens group is represented by 100 entities in 60 countries across six continents, and has an annual turnover of over EUR590 million (USD633.7 million). With more than 4,500 employees, it is still a family business, owned and managed by the fourth generation of the Sarens family.

From its earliest days, Sarens' approach was to analyse the problem, find a technical solution and get the job done.

Its approach is the same today and despite its years of experience, it is not necessarily the biggest heavy lifting and engineered transport provider. But the director responsible for technical solutions, projects and engineering, Carl Sarens, claims, without hesitation, that it is the best.

He claimed: "There are a lot of heavy lift and heavy transport companies, but if you look at the total picture of international global companies, there are only three or four that may claim to be in the premier league."

Sarens said that while some of the company's competitors have a huge fleet of self-propelled modular transporters (SPMT), they do not have any marine assets. Others have plenty of alternative lifting equipment, but no big cranes and no marine equipment. He added: "Sarens has all three. Maybe not the same quantities but we can offer the whole package. We always say, 'if Sarens cannot move it, it will not move'."

Engineering expertise

Having such a diverse capability is partly a result of Sarens' in-house engineering expertise. It works closely with equipment manufacturers to design and develop state-of-the-art cranes, jacking systems and barges; any equipment it buys as standard must meet its own stringent specifications.

Gert Hendrickx, Sarens sales director, explained: "We will always be at the very top of the market because we always try to come first with new developments and ideas for new equipment."

HLPFI asked Sarens about any projects it has in the pipeline and the associated challenges. Carl Sarens replied: "I think everybody knows about the big project in Kazakhstan. It is one of the biggest projects in the world for heavy lifting."

Tengizchevroil (TCO) - a joint venture between Chevron, Exxon Mobil, KazMunay Gas and LukAgro, which operates the Tengiz oilfield - has contracted Sarens to undertake the land transportation and installation of the pre-assembled units (PAU), pre-assembled racks (PAR) and associated oversize equipment for the overhaul of the Tengiz refinery in Kazakhstan.

Gert Hendrickx added: "Another project is the new Champlain Bridge in Canada. We

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– Carl Sarens (pictured)



The Nyhamna project in Norway.



Sarens working on the Kears project in Canada.

just won two big projects in Australia as well, so Australia is slowly building up. We see good things happening in Vietnam. The offshore wind business is picking up in Europe. We have seen that in Germany. Now we see that the UK is picking up, France is also gathering speed.

“On offshore wind farms, we transport the steel piles that they put in the sea, and we lift them from the onshore part as these pieces can weigh 1,000 to 1,500 tonnes. This is now big business for Sarens in Europe. Another example is Egypt. Following the revolution, Egypt is picking up from a power generation point of view.

“In Canada, we have the new Champlain Bridge. This is a unique project. We had to develop

a system with two floating pipes, a sort of catamaran, with a lifting system on top. It is known as the Floating Foundation Installer,” he explained.

“There are also opportunities coming up in Latin America – especially Brazil, but also Peru, Venezuela and Mexico.

Asked whether the heavy lift industry is concerned about the political situation in the USA, Carl Sarens said: “The answer is no, we are not too concerned. There are so many different market sectors – power, civil, oil and gas, petrochemical, nuclear and general industry.

Bridge replacements

“President Obama launched a plan to replace the old bridges. This is really geared for Sarens and in total in the USA I think there are around 10,000 bridges to be replaced in the next 20 years. If we can pick up only 5 percent of them, that is 500 bridges in 20 years.”

“However, it does not always have to be a big value contract.

“We also take projects of USD500,000, which can be very difficult, or very complex or very challenging because of the technicality of the job. The value of the contract is not always equal to the complexity of the project.”

Hendrickx continued: “An example of this from four or five years ago was when we moved some huge columns for a reactor from the Port of Burgas in Bulgaria. We had to take them through the city centre. At some point the load was 2-3 m from houses, trees and electricity pylons.

Opportunities

There was a lot of engineering work beforehand to make sure that once the ship arrived, the unloading and road transport took only one or two days.”

Hendrickx said the company is “ready to take any opportunities that arise in the USA” once the political situation becomes clearer.

It is clear that what Sarens has achieved is extraordinary. It solves engineering problems and a bit of economic or political turbulence is not going to stop it from doing that.

Hendrickx concluded: “Whenever a sector or country moves up or down, we can easily adapt.

“We can do this globally as well. For example, in Australia, when I was there in 2010, business was sky high and there was the global economic crisis in 2013. So, we moved to Latin America. Then Canada was picking up. Someone somewhere will always need what we do.

“We have the flexibility as a global player to load everything onto a ship and sail it to wherever our services are required.”



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– Gert Hendrickx (pictured), Sarens