

# Turbocharged for expansion

By NISHA RAMCHANDANI

IT'S full steam ahead for home-grown Tru-Marine, which specialises in repairing marine diesel engine turbochargers, as the company aims to broaden its global footprint over the next three years.

A winner of the 2009 Singapore Quality Award, Tru-Marine has evolved from carrying out general ship-repair to servicing turbochargers for the industry. Today, it has a 50 per cent market share in Singapore and 15 per cent in key global markets.

It serves shipowners and managers in more than 30 countries and has eight service stations worldwide, including units in Shanghai, Mumbai, Haiphong and Rotterdam.

Still, Tru-Marine plans to grow by continuing to expand globally. It aims to set up service stations at several major ports over the next three years, including the east coast of the United States.

"We aim to set up a station wherever there is a major port with accompanying shipyard repair facilities," says managing director David Loke. "We may plan for South America if the investment along the US east coast works out well."

Factors that influence which areas Tru-Marine plans to expand into include port traffic and potential port developments.

And with competition from other cities heating up, Singapore's shipbuilding and repair industry needs to move up the value chain to remain attractive. "Over the past 10 years we have seen cities like Shanghai being developed and aggressively promoted as attractive maritime hubs," Mr Loke says. "The emergence of such locations inevitably draws traffic

away from Singapore. You now hear of Ohio and Sri Lanka being positioned as the next hubs."

Tru-Marine reckons one of the secrets of its success is strong leadership. Over the years, its management has steered the organisation towards becoming a market leader in turbocharger repairs. Also, the management has placed great emphasis on innovation. By ramping up its turbocharger repair capabilities, Tru-Marine has differentiated itself from its competitors.

From 2004 to 2008, the company chalked up double-digit growth in revenue. Singapore accounts for 40 per cent of total sales on average and has done so for the past three years.

At the same time, Tru-Marine has reduced its gearing through prudent financial management. However, like most companies, it has felt the impact of the economic slowdown this year.

"With reduced consumer spending, you have the contraction of seaborne trade," says Mr Loke. "We are inevitably affected, since shipping companies are tightening their vessel maintenance or repair budgets given the economic situation."

Another challenge for the company is finding the right people, since the work is labour-intensive. "We serve 24/7. It's

business as usual, even during public holidays," says Mr Loke.

Employees are rewarded through a system that links company and department performance to individual compensation.

The group has a headcount of more than 200 – 75 of whom are based here – across its eight service stations.

Tru-Marine prides itself on hiring staff with the "right attitude" to provide "exceptional service delivery". This enables it to build long-term relationships with clients and retain established shipping companies as customers.

"Tru-Marine is well known for an enduring culture of continuous improvement, which we embrace as one of our fundamental strengths," says Mr Loke. "We set our hearts on proving to the world that a decade of consistent efforts in business excellence by a privately-owned SME is capable of winning the Singapore Quality Award."

And Tru-Marine is no stranger to winning awards, having been awarded People Developer certification (2000) and the Singapore Quality Class (2002).

The Singapore Quality Award was earned by "our unified team who worked to the stringent standards" and demonstrated "our core 'can do' brand value", says Mr Loke.

**'We aim to set up a station wherever there is a major port with accompanying shipyard repair facilities.'**

– Tru-Marine managing director David Loke (right)

