

Unit45 into reefers

Specialist 45ft palletwide container supplier Unit45 BV has received its first major order for reefer units. The Dutch company has been asked by its largest customer, European Container Services (ECS), to supply 100 45ft palletwide reefers as part of a larger order covering the delivery of 2000 dry freight boxes.

The 2.57m wide reefers are being built at Maersk Container Industri (MCI)'s Qingdao factory in north China, while Unit45 continues to rely on its relationship with Jindo's Guangzhou factory to satisfy all of its customers' needs for dry freight boxes.

Unit45 admits some surprise at the level of demand for palletwide 45ft containers in Europe. "We knew that the expansion of the European Union and the increasing popularity of intermodal solutions would generate increased interest, but we did not anticipate the levels we have achieved, selling 6,000 units in 2004. Our forecast at the end of 2003 had been sales of just 2,000," said Unit45 director Anthonie Wurth.

Unit45 began operations at the beginning of 2003 under the direction of Peter van Dijk who, as technical manager of Geest North Sea Line (GNSL), had been instrumental in developing the concept and design of road-legal 45ft palletwide containers. Selling 1,875 containers in its first year of trading, customers included GNSL, ECS, BG Freight/Coastal Container Line, Eucon, Transfennica, John G Russell and 2XL. New customers this year include Samskip, Van Dieren, Paltrans, Scanfor and the newly formed Delphis.

Unit45 provides its customers with various financial options including outright purchase, lease purchase and finance leases. "We take the hassle out of purchasing containers in China. In comparison to the larger deepsea carriers, our customers operate small fleets and are not in a position to specify and supervise construction in China. Unit45 has developed excellent relationships with Jindo and with MCI for reefers," said Bob Walker, who is responsible for sales and marketing at Unit45.

According to Walker, although Unit45 offers various options with its 45ft containers, almost all of its customers choose the standard specification: "At the beginning of 2003, our standard box weighed 4,850 kg. By using SSAB's Domex high strength steel for the corner posts and for the complete understructure, and 28mm laminated birch flooring supplied by Scandiwood in Denmark, we now have this down to 4,280 kg. It's rare for a customer to order anything significantly different," Walker said.

With effect from this month, all of Unit45's containers will be capable of seven-high stacking at 45ft and three-high stacking at 40ft at a maximum gross weight (MGW) of 34 tonnes. Until now, these stack-

ing heights were based on 30 tonnes MGW.

Despite the untimely death of Peter van Dijk (see *WorldCargo News* October 2004, p10), Unit45 is positive about 2005. Wurth remains optimistic that sales of both the 45ft dry freight and reefer units will continue at reasonable levels. He also anticipates significant orders for a new curtainsided unit, prototypes of which are on trial with several customers.

Unit45 is also planning to increase its own rental fleet in 2005. "In 2003, we ordered 125 containers for our own account but in 2004, we have sold every box we have produced. Hopefully, in 2005, we can find time to expand our own inventory," Walker said.

ECS, Unit45's largest customer for 45ft dry freight boxes, has now become the first to order reefers

