1. Tell us about Tristar Transport, what has made it the company it is today and what makes it tick?

Tristar Transport LLC is a fully integrated liquid logistics company headquartered in Dubai and serving the petroleum and chemical industries. It has a diversified portfolio of services ranging from road transportation, warehousing of dangerous goods and chemicals, management and operation of fuel farms, turnkey fuel operations, into-plane aviation fuel services, and ship owning and chartering for movement of petroleum and chemical products by ocean, sea and river.

Tristar operates in more than 13 countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Central America.

2. How long have you been with the company?

Tristar was born out of a need for road safety. The company was founded here in the UAE in 1998 with three used trucks. I have been with the company since inception.

3. Last year you signed a deal with Hyundai Mipo for six new chemical tankers, the vessels are said to already be chartered to oil major. What details can you share about this deal?

We reached an agreement and placed a firm order for 6 new MR Product/Chemical Tankers with Korean shipbuilder Hyundai Mipo Dockyard. This was one of our major successes in 2013.
The vessels are expected to be delivered in 2016 and will be built to the latest specifications with an improved hull form design, making them more fuel efficient and eco-friendly.

The ships will be placed on long term time charter with an oil Major. This deal indicates our willingness and appetite to invest in the shipping business on selected and strategic opportunities.

The new vessels will operate with lower fuel consumption than existing tonnage, making them much more economical to operate. They will be fitted with additional fuel saving equipment such as Propeller Boss Cap Fins, New Profile Technology Propeller and Trim Optimization System.

This investment fits well in our long term strategy to diversify our business portfolio and to position our company as a major player in the Middle East shipping industry.

4. Are there plans to invest in further tonnage? And if so which sector?

Speculative investment in shipping is not envisaged; however, if there are opportunities with secured returns then the company will invest. Currently the focus is much on the smaller tanker sector for coastal movements but we are open to exploring investment in other shipping opportunities particularly the MR sector if there is long term secured employment.

5. You’ve said that the investment mirrors your strategy which is to diversify your portfolio, which other sectors are you looking to invest in?

Tristar has a unique business model built around the needs of customers and today the company offers a diversified range of products and logistics services to the petroleum and chemical industries. We will be looking to compliment our surface and sea capabilities with air transport of fuel in the not too distant future.

6. What are your thoughts of how the chemical tanker sector will develop over the next 12-24 months?

There are quite a few mega chemical plants developing in the Middle East region as well as in China. The lifting of sanctions on Iran expected to
happen in the not too distant future will bring additional opportunities for the chemical tanker market in this region.

Due to subdued market the chemical tanker segment has not seen much investment in building new tonnage. Currently the supply demand imbalance has kept the rates slightly depressed compared to what was about five years ago. We expect the market to firm up gradually in the next 12 to 24 months.

7. Are there any other sectors you have identified that show strong potential for growth during that same period?

We believe there could be opportunities for Tristar to expand its shipping business in the offshore sector, namely in AHTOSVs and PSVs.

8. Do you believe the shipping industry is making a recovery?

Like everybody else we are hopeful that we have reached the bottom of the downturn and that the Industry will start making a full recovery in the next year or so.

9. You’ve recently announced an agreement with Emirates National Oil Company to set up a new joint venture in Saudi Arabia focused on specialized logistics services for the Kingdom’s petroleum and chemicals sectors. What details can you share about this JV? Does it involve a maritime arm, and if so will you be making any further investments in new tonnage.

Yes, we have established a new logistics company in the Kingdom under the banner of Integrated Logistics Company which is 50/50 joint venture between ENOC and Tristar. Under the terms of the agreement Tristar will have management responsibility to build and operate a 500-strong trucking fleet in the next three to five years. Our efforts will be focused on capturing all logistics opportunities in the Oil and Gas sector with special focus on transport of fuel to retail outlets and power houses. Naturally we will also implement international best practices in road safety which we are confident will play an important role in raising the overall standard of road safety in the Kingdom.

For the time being our focus will be on gaining a strong foothold in surface transport operations but this does not mean that we will close the door on
10. What are some of the challenges faced by shipping companies in the UAE / GCC and what would you like to see done by governments in the region?

There is room for improvement in order to raise the level of maritime and logistics education in the country. However, it is not up to the government alone to make this happen. It requires a partnership and collaboration between public and private sector organizations to work together to promote careers in the maritime Industry.

Having premium infrastructure alone is not enough but we require an active knowledge-based sector at the core of all development in the shipping, maritime and supply chain sectors. Government could play a role to ensure that a continuous pool of talent flows from the local universities and institutes into careers in the Shipping and Port or logistics sectors.

11. How will the hosting of Expo 2020 and the Qatar World Cup impact on the shipping and logistics industries of the region?

These are two major global events that will need a lot of investment in infrastructure development. Logistics is a key driver of any economic growth and therefore we believe that there will be several opportunities for logistics services building up to these two major events in this region.

12. Tristar is currently operating in 13 countries are there plans for further growth and if so which other countries / regions are you looking at.

We have submitted tenders and are still bidding for new contracts in Africa and Western Asia which are emerging markets. In the case of shipping we are not really limited by any boundaries. So we are looking for opportunities in the West Africa Sea, the Northern Sea and the Indian Ocean, mainly in the Offshore Supply Vessels Operations and in increasing our current coastal operations.
13. If sanctions were to be lifted on Iran and the market opened up is it a country you believe offers potential for companies such as yours to move into.

Iran is a major country with immense potential for trade and commerce. Iran is also a major customer in the Shipping world. Unfortunately today we are unable to look at opportunities in Iran due to trade sanctions in place by the international community. Of course Iran has tremendous potential for oil and gas logistics players such as Tristar.

14. Is it complicated for a company such as yours, a growing company with operations around the world, to find the right talent to help continue growing?

Finding the right talent willing is always a challenging task. We operate in difficult and dangerous areas which are conflict zones, that means that there are challenging conditions to do business in. Thus, sourcing and placing the right talent with the specific set of skill needed to guarantee that our services are delivered with the same level of professionalism, safety and reliability, whether in the Middle East or in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is paramount. This is not an easy task, and we sometimes struggle to find the right candidates who fit the right profile. However our strategy to invest in people and our track record as an equal opportunity employer that offers a diverse and inclusive workplace means that there are people looking for employment opportunities at Tristar.

15. Is it hard to attract local talent to the maritime / logistics industries?

At the moment yes. As not many local talents are available who are interested in the shipping industry but gradually this is expected to change as the younger generation takes interest in moving to the sea and other supporting industries.

16. Are you involved in any educational programmes?

Several. We support the promotion of education in all our operating areas. We have our own school in Juba in South Sudan and are actively involved in promoting education in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan and
Haiti. Here in the UAE we have embarked on a campaign to promote road safety at the school level.

17. Would you like to see more done from Government to educate and train talent locally for a career in shipping, ports or logistics?

There is a big demand for qualified seafarers and we are confident that any private or government initiative to promote careers in Shipping and logistics will be well received.

18. Tristar has a very solid reputation as being one of the safest companies in its field; tell us about the culture at Tristar?

The culture of safety was born with the company in 1998. Safety in operations is top most priority and is the company’s success story. The safety culture starts at the very top and can be seen and experienced in the behavior and performance of each and every one of its 1,800 odd employees.

Safety programs start with changing attitudes and habits by using a variety of tools and best practices including but not limited to defensive driving training, driver medicals, tool box meetings, hearts and minds programs to change behaviors, and consequence management to ensure a consistent and zero incident performance in our operations.

Tristar owns and operates lubricants barges serving oil majors in the port of Fujairah since 2010. Conscious of risks associated with the operations and the need to be ready at all times to manage emergencies such as oil spill, Tristar has for the past few years been conducting with the vessels’ charterers and the vessel managers’ desktop oil spill exercises.

The desktop exercise is an efficient way of ensuring all parties are aware of their role and responsibilities in such an event. However, the biggest challenge to handle an oil spill is to deploy the containment and recovery equipment as quickly as possible at the accident/incident site and this was never tested.
In 2013, the Shipping management team decided to conduct yearly two oil spill exercises, one desktop and the other full deployment of equipment at outer anchorage area and will also involve port authorities.

The first exercise was conducted on June 5, 2013 with a scenario where two bunker vessels, Tristar Legend and Tristar Courage, had a collision off Fujairah port. The vessel managers, the charterers and port authorities took part in the exercise. The exercise went really well and all parties reacted timely and positively.

About Tristar:

Tristar Transport LLC (Tristar) was established in 1998 in Dubai, UAE and is now a market leader in delivering integrated liquid logistics solutions to the petroleum and chemical industries. Today, the company has an extended footprint across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Pacific island of Guam and Central America with interest in surface transport, ship owning and operating, specialized warehousing for lubricants and chemicals, turnkey fuel operations, fuel farms, and into-plane aviation fuel services.

Tristar operates in more than 13 countries and employs over 1,800 people of various nationalities. Committed people, superior customer service and uncompromising values are core beliefs at Tristar where safety in operations is accorded the highest priority.

Tristar has certifications on ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001 for its integrated management system. It was also the first transport company in the UAE to have been assessed by the CEFIC on the European Safety and Quality Assessment System (SQAS).

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