



# CSL Assiniboine sets sail

*New forebody creates virtually new ship*



Captain Daryl Brain

BY PATRICK LAPINSKI

**T**he radio crackles with static. First Mate Wilson Walters calls out mid-ship draft marks to Extra First Mate Murray Latham, standing half a ship's length away at the stern. The radio crackles again.

"I'm going to have them put in another hundred tons, and that will be it," Wilson says. *CSL Assiniboine*, formerly *Jean Parisien*, is completing its first load since leaving Port Weller Dry Dock, where a new forebody was added, virtually re-

placing the ship's entire original hull.

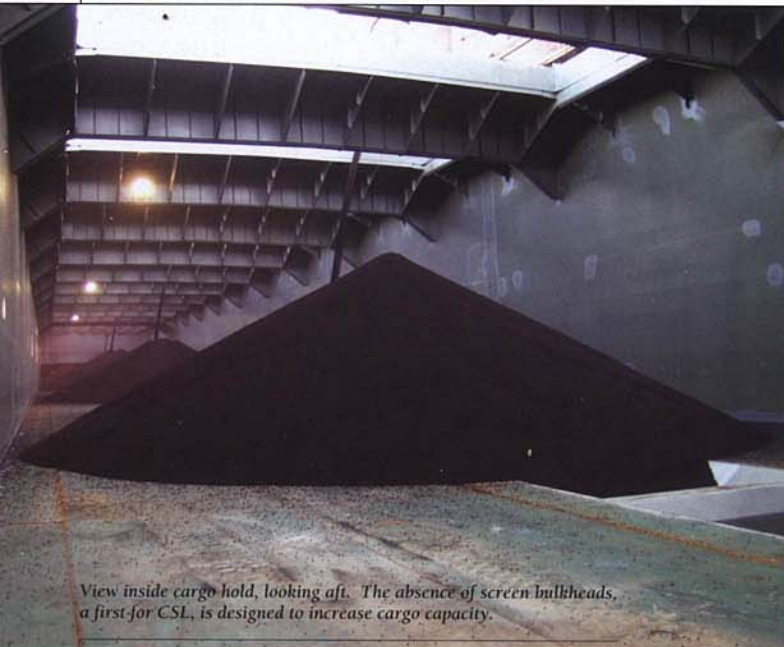
In a matter of minutes both mates gather at the stern to confer. Murray jots notes on a crumpled copy of the loading plan as Wilson calls up to the ship loader for a tonnage total; 30,192 long tons is the reply. Both men are satisfied with the figure and expect this is likely to set a new record for a Canadian ship hauling taconite on the Great Lakes.

*CSL Assiniboine* is the fourth vessel in CSL International's Canadian fleet to receive a new forebody, part of a C\$225 mil-

lion fleet renewal program. The SeawayMax specification (739'10" x 78') is designed to increase the life of the vessel, while taking full advantage of the size constraints in the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Seaway system.

**Open cargo hold.** In addition to its increased dimensions, *CSL Assiniboine* features a totally open cargo hold, a rarity on the Lakes. The absence of traditional screen bulkheads gives the vessel a slight edge in cargo capacity over CSL's previous conversion projects. The vessel has a single-belt unload-





View inside cargo hold, looking aft. The absence of screen bulkheads, a first for CSL, is designed to increase cargo capacity.



CSL Assiniboine, loading in Superior on its first trip, sets a new cargo record for a Canadian vessel carrying taconite.

ing system, and will use two large front-end loaders to help clear the hold. The use of front-end loaders is a first for a CSL vessel. It is anticipated that the relatively low-tech solution will require less long-term maintenance than a mechanical reclaiming system.

Throughout the day, since its early morning arrival at Superior's BN-SF taconite facility, the ship has been alive with activity, most of it taking place on deck. To the untrained eye, a view of the deck from the pilothouse reveals the familiar symmetry of multiple loading shuttles extended over open hatches—typical for a bulk freighter. What's noticeable with *CSL Assiniboine* is the fewer number of hatches, 16, than a traditional laker, and their larger size, 18-feet, set on 36-foot centers, compared to the norm on the Lakes of 12-foot hatches set on 24-foot centers.

On the upbound trip, Walters has worked out his loading plan based on the new hatch dimensions. Wilson figured that, because the larger hatches would not line up perfectly with the dock's ship-loader, a system designed to align with hatches on a 24-foot center, they would need to shift the vessel two times, loading with eight shuttles per pass. However, with the ship actually at

the dock, and the loading shuttles extended over the hatches, it quickly became evident that they did not line up as expected. In reality, it would only be possible to load four shuttles per pass, and the vessel would have to make a third shift at the dock to complete its load. For Wilson and the deck crew, it was all part of the learning process for a virtually new ship.

**Preparing to sail.** Most of the crew reported aboard in mid-June to begin outfitting the ship. The *CSL Assiniboine* has an experienced crew of 20, largely "hand-picked" sailors.

"It's like starting to sail again," says OS Terry Clark, as he takes soundings along the port side. One of the new features on the deck is the inclusion of access hatches for the ballast tanks. If he suspects a problem with the sounding, Terry can visually inspect the tank by looking into the open hatch. As a second generation sailor from Montreal, Terry began his career on the Lakes in 1977 aboard the *Pic River*.

Many of the crew hail from the Canadian Maritime Provinces. OS Paul MacDonald, with 11 years prior experience on *Jean Parisien*, is a second-generation sailor from Gambo, Newfoundland. His father retired in 2004 after 40 years on the Lakes. One of the highlight's of

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Paul's career was sailing for a month last year with his father. Dave Chaulk, Leading Seaman from Burnt Islands, Newfoundland, began his career with Canada Steamship Lines in 1971, aboard the steamer *Simcoe*. Two of the ship's officers, Extra First Mate Murray Latham and Second Mate Jason Church, each started their careers as cadets on the *Parisien*.

In command of *CSL Assiniboine* is Captain Daryl Brain, of St. Catharines, Ontario. Most recently, he was skipper aboard *CSL Tadoussac*. The sometimes daunting task of getting the ship up and running has been a challenge Daryl has enjoyed.

"We know what to expect, and everyone has worked real-

ly hard to get us going," he says.

Captain Brain first began sailing in 1972 for Quebec & Ontario Transportation as a deckhand on the *New York News (Tecumseh)*. In 1999, he received his first permanent command aboard the self-unloader *Frontenac*. In his spare time, to help unwind from the daily stress of the job, he enjoys biking, often riding miles away from the ship if time permits.

The engine department is headed by veteran mariner Chris Greguric, who first began sailing in 1961, working deep sea until coming onto the Lakes in 1975 aboard the tanker *Congar*. For the chief, having spent 23 seasons on the *Jean Parisien*, working on *CSL Assiniboine* is like "coming home."

Even with the first cargo safely aboard, Captain Brain and First Mate Walters expect six months of heartache. Envisioning the ship from their perspective, an intense combination of aural, sensory and verbal information, is like trying to decipher a multi-dimensional blueprint of the ship. It is only after watching *CSL Assiniboine* back away from the dock, seeing the ship as a whole as it begins a broad, sweeping turn toward Lake Superior, does the blueprint come together as an impressive new addition to CSL's fleet. ■