

FEMME (SIMRAD USERS' CONFERENCE) CADIZ, 1-4 APRIL 2003

We Visited for You

This writer was unable to take in the complete conference but from the part attended and the available programme can report on this interesting meeting. FEMME Conferences are held approximately at two year intervals and bring together all those who have either used the Kongsberg Simrad equipment or may be planning to use it. Approximately 140 people attended this year's event in Cadiz, which was held in the elegant Parador Hotel Atlantico, sited besides the sea, on the long peninsular on which Cadiz is situated. The conference organisers had been able to obtain permission to use the famous black bull, which is the symbol of the Osborne sherry producing company, as its logo. This familiar image can be seen throughout Spain in the form of huge silhouettes against the skyline.

These conferences are arranged as much to socialise and get people together as they are for formal presentations. Nevertheless both go to make a most useful conference. Not unexpectedly nowadays, most of the discussions centre around Multi Beam Sounding Systems (MBES), although they may range from imagining volcanoes to technical details of new systems. To the uninitiated, the reference numbers of the different types of equipment result in a first learning experience. What are the technical differences between an EM 1002 and an EM 3000 etc.? However once these are in hand, one can concentrate on their capabilities and applications.

At the hydrographic charting end of the scale there is considerable interest in object detection and a paper by Gardline Surveys noted some difficulties in this respect and consequently of meeting IHO S 44 standards. However work has now been done by Kongsberg Simrad to improve this situation and was the subject of another paper. The company is naturally aware of its competitive position with other companies producing MBES and must always strive to satisfy its market. The company clearly is viewed very favourably in many areas and one session devoted to survey and research ships reported on the extensive fitting and use of Kongsberg Simrad systems. These ships included the new French research vessel 'Beautemps Beupre', the US Navy's new swath (double hull) vessel 'Kilo Moana' and a mid life refit to the Spanish research ship 'Hesperides'. Particular attention on these ships has been given to the external fitting of transducer housing. The total range of equipment fitted is amazing including not only MBES, but sub bottom measuring systems and narrow beam echo sounders.

Not all of course, is hardware and several papers were devoted to software developments. Once again, one must learn the language and the names being bandied around for the various software developments. Many papers referred to the ubiquitous 'fleidermaus' but other names to grasp included 'Neptune', 'Poseidon', 'Triton' and the newly developed, MDM 400 for data management.

Ending on a social note, one should comment on the numerous social events, at which fine sherries seem to be the core. These reached a point of culmination in the Conference dinner, which was held at the Osborne Bodega, surrounded by casks of fine sherry, including one specially kept for the Spanish King, entertained by good music and served with fine local food.