

ATLAS



ThinLINE® Units Deliver For Alaska Tug Operation

It's a big job delivering food and other goods by sea to the vast but sparsely populated northwestern tip of North America, and it requires a special kind of logistics operation to do the job.

Alaska Marine Lines (AML), part of the Lynden family of companies, takes it all in stride, with regular tug-and-barge service that departs from Seattle and navigates the northeastern Pacific's coastal waters and narrow inlets up to Alaska, the largest of the 50 United States, yet the fourth smallest by population.

Each AML barge travels at a speed of about 10 knots, towed 1,200 feet behind an ocean tugboat. Given a deck size approximately 400 by 100 feet, a barge can carry a 600 to 700 TEU load, with containers stacked five-high. It's just a fraction of what today's super-sized containerships carry, but no less important to the residents of Alaska.

Other ships pass by at 25 knots. "We are the tortoise, they are definitely the hare," quips Les Candee AML's manager of Maintenance and Equipment Procurement. But larger containerships cannot economically traverse the islands and ports of southeast Alaska – the "Panhandle" along Canada's western edge – making stops at 13 communities delivering "sometimes as few as half a dozen containers a week," he explains.

Onboard AML's barges are Carrier ThinLINE® units, some

of which are mounted to custom-built 53-foot containers, uniquely designed by AML to maximize interior dimensions so as to help the closed-loop carrier deliver provisions to Alaska's far-flung population.

Cold Frontier

Bordering the chill waters of the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea, Alaska is nearly 2,300 miles wide from Ketchikan in its southeastern tip, to Attu, the most western island in the Aleutian chain – a span that would extend from Florida to California if overlaid on the Lower 48 U.S. states, with the main mass of Alaska covering most of the Upper Midwest.

Yet with 698,000 residents, Alaska has only 29 towns and cities with populations greater than 1,000, and nearly half its citizens live in or near Anchorage. "We're not talking about Rhode Island here," says Candee in understatement, contrasting Alaska to the smallest, yet even more populous, U.S. state.

In his position, Candee is in charge of some 9,000 pieces of equipment, including the 1,200, mostly 40-foot, refrigerated containers equipped with ThinLINE units that, depending on the cargo, must be as adept at heating as cooling when Arctic temperatures dip from October through March.

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AML's year-round departures from Seattle serve 70,000 residents in the Panhandle communities, including Alaska's capital city, Juneau.

"Our tug-and-barge system consists of four vessels traveling north and south, and one that travels east and west, providing twice-a-week service to those communities," Candee says.

Further north, three vessels in rotation provide reach to Central Alaska, with goods arriving weekly through Prince William Sound to the town of Whittier, where containers are offloaded for rail transport through mountains to distribution centers in Anchorage.

Although its major customers are retail businesses, such as grocery stores and restaurant chains, AML ships all types of freight. "Every entity known to man that a human consumes in the state of Alaska is something that we haul," Candee explains. And although AML focuses on Alaska, when combined with other Lynden businesses and connecting services, "we can put anything in the world anywhere you want."

Unique Solutions

"Being a closed-loop service, AML can also do things with equipment that may not be applicable for anyone else in the world," explains Candee.

That spirit led to one of AML's latest innovations, a 53-foot container, as long and wide as a traditional highway trailer, but

10 feet tall. Unlike AML's 200 earlier 53-foot units, the newest have ThinLINE units mounted to the container's front face, bumping out, to maximize the internal dimension to nearly 3,800 cubic feet.

"It looks very much like a trailer unit, except it's all electric," Candee says. "There's probably not a bigger ISO container like this in the world."

The larger internal cube gave AML a competitive edge in winning a contract with a Portland, Ore., bakery. Fresh-baked bread is loaded warm and then frozen in transit during the 10-day, 1,500-mile trip to an Anchorage distribution center, where it is thawed for retail sale.

"The goal was to achieve a cubic capacity that made us cost-competitive with the 53-foot trailers that move on RORO (roll-on/roll-off) ships," says Candee. The ThinLINE unit's design allowed for necessary adaptations to provide performance in the extra-long units.

"In our fleet now, the predominant piece of refrigerated equipment we use is the Carrier ThinLINE. We've standardized on it," Candee says, noting its reputation for reliability. "It does the job." Candee also credits the attentiveness of Carrier's sales and service personnel for a relationship with AML spanning more than 30 years.

Exceptional situations require special solutions. AML and its ThinLINE units are up to the distinct challenges posed by Alaska.