

Gulf towers

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Demand for tower cranes is strong in the Gulf, particularly in Dubai and Doha, but challenges continue to exist as Saudi Arabia remains subdued and competition is fierce. Bernadette Ballantyne reports

At the end of 2015 crude oil process reached a low of less than \$30 per barrel. It had been consistently falling since July 2014 and the impact across the world has been widespread. For the world's biggest oil producer Saudi Arabia the plummet in national income caused the Kingdom to hit the pause button on major projects as it sought to recalculate and re-evaluate its spending priorities. For the Saudi construction market the effect has been profound with no new government contract awards made through 2016 and 2017. But ongoing projects have still required tower cranes to support the redevelopment of cities, airports and other infrastructure.

In other Gulf markets crane firms report strong activity particularly in Dubai and Doha where forthcoming events such as the 2020 World Expo and the 2022 FIFA World Cup are driving major investment in new buildings and facilities and tower cranes are in high demand.

"The Middle East construction markets vary greatly. In the Gulf, where construction is relatively strong, cranes are abundant on city skylines including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Riyadh. That being said, it is known that even the large companies here are being cautious; there's a market sensitivity of late echoing much of the world. We are seeing some of our best activity in this region, despite what some may call depressed market sentiment," explains Ahmed Alkhashabi, Group CEO of KBW Investments, owners of Raimondi, which it purchased in January 2014.

Liebherr too says that a number of major projects are driving the market which it describes as booming in Qatar, stable in Dubai and a little quiet in Saudi. Through its Qatar dealer United Equipment Group the firm recently provided 15 top slewing tower cranes to Doha Oasis project customer Redco Construction – Al Mana. The order included ten EC-H 12, two 200 EC-H, one 1088 EC-H 40 and one EC-B 6, and one 71 EC-B 5. The hook heights range between 53.5m and 169m and the cranes are to be used in construction of a unique elliptical building hosting seven residential blocks over 9 floors, a 28 floor hotel, shopping mall and amusement park.

This type of real estate development is also a driver of demand in Dubai. In July Manitowoc announced that ten of its Potain MR418 machines were being used for the first time in the UAE to construct the Royal Atlantis Resort and Residences on the man-made Palm Jumeirah island.

Supplied by Abu Dhabi-based NFT, which has 1500 tower cranes in its fleet, the cranes are on a rental contract to the joint venture (JV) of Belgium-based BESIX and South Korea's SsangYong Engineering & Construction. "We are using a fleet of Potain MR 418 cranes because of their excellent capabilities on high-rise building projects. Their high-speed and high-capacity hoists are exactly what's needed to ensure maximum productivity on site," says Bassem Kini, operations director at NFT.

Fitted with 270 VVF hoists with 254m/minute hoist speed the MR 418 machines have a maximum capacity of 24t, a 60m boom and a 5t capacity jib. The 830m rope capacity on the winch's drum means that in single-fall configuration a hook path of 830m is possible. There is also a 150 VVF 56 luffing winch which delivers a luffing speed of 1 minute and 15 seconds to manoeuvre the jib from 15° to 86°- with or without load.

In the early stages of building, the machines will be free standing but will be tied to the structure using 16m-long braces as construction develops. Final working heights for the cranes will range between 104m and 193m. To ensure crane uptime is maximized on the project, NFT is storing a container full of MR 418 spare parts directly on the job site. Also in Dubai seven Liebherr 200 EC-H machines are being used by Consolidated Contractors Company International to construct The Hills, a four tower residential and hotel development. It says this is part of a trend towards heavy lift cranes being used on sites in the emirate. The Litronic models, have a maximum lifting capacity of 10t, and with jib lengths of 55 and 60m. "Six of the cranes are 60m-high climbing units, attached to the outside of the structure," says Ahmad Hawari, CCC plant superintendent. "The seventh is due to arrive on site towards the end of the contract, where it will be mounted on a short section of rail and used to build the podium. We are a long-time user of Liebherr cranes, and so we designed the configuration and erected the units ourselves." One of the reasons for

using the 200 EC-H as standard on this site is that the crane is able to handle heavy loads at a wide radius – even at 60m it can lift 2.6t. “The site is a long and linear one, which means we need six cranes for the tower blocks, but these are all standard units and no special modifications were needed – the cranes came directly out of our fleet,” he says.

Liam Donnelly, head of sales and service at Liebherr Middle East FZE in Dubai, says that these units are CCC’s biggest tower crane lifters to date. “The 280 HC-L has a maximum lift of 24t,” he says. “There is a trend towards heavy lift cranes in this region, driven by the increasing use of precast elements.”

Richie Keating, managing director at Stafford Crane Group, which buys and sells tower cranes in Dubai, describes the market as good, but with its challenges.

“The market is in a good place. There is an extreme amount of work but it comes with its challenges. One of the biggest challenges is not getting work, it is getting paid,” he says. His firm buys and sells cranes in Dubai as well as doing repair, refurbishment, erection and dismantling.

In the US the company has moved into manufacturing tower cranes and is currently working on its fifth machine.

He says that the UAE is very price competitive and that payments can be difficult to obtain for machines sent out on rental agreements, meaning that his firm prefers to focus on sales.

Beyond the Gulf, Raimondi point to markets such as Turkey and Algeria as being relevant. “In Algeria, one jobsite boasts nine Raimondi models erected, while in Turkey, we currently have 30 Raimondi models erected on the Ankara Integrated Health Campus jobsite, an Astaldi-Turkerler joint venture. Three months ago, that site saw the total of Raimondi cranes installed and operating in Ankara simultaneously at 36,” says Alkhoshaibi.



tower cranes building “The Hills”, a four-tower development in Dubai.

Seven 200 EC-H



15 top slewing Liebherr tower cranes to Doha Oasis with hook heights between 53.5m and 169m



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