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Cummins power dominates in Malaysia's largest vehicle ferry operation.

CUMMINS BUOYS SARAWAK FLEET

Rivers are the lifeblood of Sarawak, and it is on these rivers that BSL Navigation has built its reputation as a frontline vehicle ferry operator.

In fact, BSL Navigation has become Malaysia's largest vehicle ferry operator, moving more than three million cars and trucks a year across the Sarawak river network.

Based in Kuching, the company was established with one ferry in 1991 by husband and wife team Liew Shark Sen and Christina Kong but it wasn't until 2010 that the first Cummins engines went into service in a BSL vessel.

Today, Cummins is the preferred engine brand at BSL which operates 20 RoRo ferries – a mix of 36.6, 43 and 55-metre units – and has two new vessels under construction. Close to 50 Cummins engines are installed for propulsion and electrical power generation.

Cummins' dominance.

BSL general manager Christina Kong responds concisely when asked the reasons for Cummins' dominance: "Product reliability, aftersales support and parts availability," she says.



One of the 20 RoRo ferries operated by BSL Navigation.



BSL Navigation founder Liew Shark Sen (seated) with, from left, Fong Kee Onn (Cummins Malaysia), Peter Kong and Christina Kong (BSL Navigation) and Michael Kee Ong Teo (Cummins Malaysia).

“We can’t have a ferry stopped for even one hour,” she states, pointing out that such a delay could create a huge backlog of vehicles waiting to get on the ferry. “We’re providing a government service to the public, so the pressure is on to operate 20 hours a day, seven days a week – without delays.”

The longest ferry crossing is the 5.2 km Triso-Sebuyau service on the mighty Batang Lupar river which requires three BSL vessels operating at any one time and four during festivals when vehicle numbers are highest.

Reliability, robustness.

The Cummins propulsion engines in the BSL fleet are a mix of 14-litre NT855 and 19-litre KTA19 units – two of Cummins’ longest established engines, both renowned for their reliability and robustness.

The newest ferry, launched in July 2019, is a 43-metre vessel powered by four Cummins KTA19 engines, each rated at 500 hp. Two gensets rated at 40 kW are also part of the Cummins package.

The two new ferries currently under construction are 43 and 55-metre units, each with two Cummins KTA19-500 engines powering Schottel pump jets that provide full thrust in all directions for excellent maneuverability.

First-rate service.

Christina Kong points out that the simplicity, renowned reliability and performance of the big 19-litre KTA19 are ideally matched to BSL’s requirements in providing a first-rate public service. Cummins’ presales and aftersales support through sales engineer Michael Teo is also noted by Christina Kong.

“Our mission when we started in 1991 was to grow the business. We had one 30-metre ferry and 11 employees back then. By the end of 2019 we will have more than 20 ferries and 150 employees,” she says with a definite tone of pride. “Perhaps we’ll get to 30 ferries in the next five years.” ■