

Big Al

'Big Al' handles a range of heavy lifting at the Port of Mobile, AL.

D. Ann Shiffler reports

The barge-mounted crane lifts a lot of undersea umbilical reels from ships onto barges that take them out to the oil rigs in the Gulf



Barnhart's barge-mounted 'Big Al' lifts a lot of equipment used to upgrade the port cranes at the Port of Mobile in Alabama



A couple of years ago, officials at the Port of Mobile State of Alabama docks approached Barnhart Crane & Rigging about how they could encourage more project cargo into the port. The problem was the port was not equipped to handle cargo that weighed more than 110 tons, which was just not adequate for a port as big and busy at the Port of Mobile.

Barnhart's management team thought the idea had merit and began engineering a plan to rig a crawler crane to a barge that would allow Barnhart to become the port's chartered heavy lift company.

Barnhart chose a Liebherr LR 1700 for the work. The crane, which had been in

the Barnhart fleet for about five years, was rigged with 184 feet of main boom and 126 feet of super lift mast. It was lashed to a 212 by 68 foot barge.

Paul Reynolds, branch manager of Barnhart's Mobile, AL branch, says the barge crane was put into service about two years ago.

"We brought the crane from Memphis where they engineered it to the barge," says Reynolds.

The crane has always been known as "Big Al," named for both the State of Alabama and after Alan Barnhart, president of the company.

Instead of having a superlift buggy like a land-based crane would be configured, the

crane's counterweight is the barge. As well, the crane does not swing.

"In the case of this crane, you move the barge, not the crane," says Reynolds. "You position the barge where you need for the pick."

For the past two years, Big Al has worked at the Port of Mobile, lifting all sorts of cargo.

"If the cargo weighs more than 110 tons, and the ship it's on is not geared to lift that much, we usually lift it," says Reynolds. "Sometimes we will take the cargo off and set it on a railroad car, or sometimes we lift it down to the dock, and sometimes we set it on another barge."

Much of the work of the crane is centered on the offshore oil business, Reynolds says.

"We do a lot of service for the offshore oil production companies," he says. "We are called on to lift a lot of undersea umbilical reels. Ships bring in these big spools and we will load them on to barges that take them out to the oil rigs in the Gulf."

The capacity of the crane is 400 tons. It has turned out to be a successful venture, Reynolds says.

"We've had a lot of customers that in the >44



past had to do things elsewhere or had to move cargo to their dry docks,” Reynolds explains. “We can service those customers now. There’s also a lot of upgrading of the shore-based cranes going on, and we are able to help with the assembly of those shore-based cranes with the barge crane.”

Several coal-handling facilities in the Port of Mobile area have undergone upgrades and Barnhart’s barge crane has been instrumental in those projects,



The barge serves as the counterweight for the crane, which can lift up to 400 tons. The Liebherr LR 1700 is rigged with 184 feet of main boom and 126 feet of super lift mast



Big Al launches a small jack up boat at the Port of Mobile. The crane is lashed to a 212 foot by 68 foot barge.

according to Reynolds. The crane often launches boats as well.

While the crane motors up and down the port helping various customers, Reynolds says its home port is the Alabama state docks.

To run the barge crane operation at the port, Barnhart has assembled a specialized crew that includes two barge superintendents, two barge crane operators and a crew, depending on the nature of the lift.