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Video: Port of Charleston Sets New Record for Largest TEU Containership



With boxes stacked nine high, OOCL Iris created images of a tight fit under Charleston's Route 17 Bridge (SC Ports - Matthew Peacock photo)

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SC Ports and the Port of Charleston, South Carolina set a new record on Tuesday, February 18, receiving their largest capacity containership to date. The new *OOCL Iris* (16,868 TEU) while a smaller vessel by dimensions, surpassed the capacity record set four years ago highlighting the benefits of investments the state is making in its ports and advancements in container shipping.

The *OOCL Iris* was recently delivered as the second of a class of 10 new NeoPanamax containerships Orient Overseas Container Liner (OOCL) is putting into service. The ship was named on December 3, 2024, at the Nantong COSCO KHI Ship Engineering Co. (NACKS) as the first of the class completed by this yard and the second overall as Dalian COSCO KHI Ship Engineering Co. (DACKS) is also building half the class.

OOCL highlights it is their first new NeoPanamax class in more than a decade with the prior vessels entering service in 2013 and 2014. Starting in 2023, the company also added a class of ultra-large container vessels, the industry's first 24,000 TEU ships.

Representing the next generation of NeoPanamax containerships, OOCL Iris, along with NACKS-built sisters *OOCL Bauhinia* and *OOCL Sunflower*, not only comply with the latest environmental regulatory requirements, but also set new benchmarks in areas such as environmental design, energy efficiency, digital intelligence, safety, and onboard comfort by incorporating the latest technological innovations and intelligent solutions. These vessels feature an advanced energy efficiency system that provides

recommendations for speed optimization and trim adjustments. The system monitors real-time fuel consumption and power usage of the main engine, generator, and boiler, offering valuable optimization suggestions. Additionally, the OOCL Iris has received three "Smart Ship" notations, as well as the Enviro-friendly notation (ENVIRO) and Sustainable notation (SUSTAIN-1) from the American Bureau of Shipping (ABS).

For Charleston, it means the vessel which is 1,204 feet in length (367 meters) has a rated carry capacity of 16,868 TEU surpassing the *CMA CGM Marco Polo* which at 16,020 set the previous record in May 2021. The CMA CGM vessel was the largest containership in the world when it was introduced in 2013 with an overall length of 1,299 feet (396 meters). Advancements in loading and stacking permit the new OOCL vessels to carry five percent more boxes (TEU) on a smaller-dimension vessel.

The height of the new vessel made for some interesting images as it passed under Charleston's Arthur Ravenel Jr. roadway bridge (Route 17). The bridge is listed with a clearance of 186 feet (57 meters).

The ship proceeded to Charleston's Wando Welch Terminal as the last stop on its U.S. rotation. The port emphasizes its capital investments meaning a ship of this size has any time access regardless of tides. The berth now has a 54-foot depth and a 52-foot channel. The *OOCL Iris* has a design draft of 47.6 feet (14.5 meters).

"SC Ports' strategic infrastructure investments allow us to continue welcoming the largest ships calling the U.S. East Coast," said SC Ports President and CEO Barbara Melvin. "Charleston's harbor depth and widened turning basins, taller ship-to-shore cranes and highly productive terminals and maritime community all work together to provide fluidity to our customers' supply chains."

SC Ports highlights an investment of nearly \$3 billion to modernize port infrastructure, expand cargo capacity, and build rail infrastructure. Last year, it reached an agreement with its unions after a standoff that had delayed the use of its expanded terminals.

The *OOCL Iris* and her soon-to-be-introduced sister *OOCL Sunflower* will be taking advantage of the NeoPanamax sizing on a route from China and Far East ports to New York, Savannah, and Charleston. The first ship of the class, *OOCL Bauhinia* is on a different Pacific route calling at Long Beach, California in the U.S.