Floating dock heads for Durban

LATE in June, readers should look out for an unusual sight at the entrance, channel to Durban harbour. This will be the port's third floating dock, which left Japan under tow about a week ago on a two-month voyage via Singapore and the Indian Ocean for Durban.

The floating dock was bought at a cost of R38 million by Southern Africa Shipyards, to be used as a launching mechanism for the new tugs now under construction at the shipyard. Previous tugs built at the shipyard were launched using a sheerlegs-type crane specially manufactured for the purpose, but with the cancellation of further contracts the crane owner removed the giant apparatus.

Faced with the challenge of placing five new tugs in the water (since increased to seven), SA Shipyards management came up with the idea of importing a small floating dock that could be floated alongside the launch quay and on to which the tugs could be rolled, with the floating dock then flooding and submerging to let the tug float free.

An existing floating dock was identified in Japan, so Louis Gontier, managing director of Southern African Shipyards, recently flew overseas to supervise the sale and departure two weeks ago.

It would be possible to lengthen the dock which is otherwise ideal for ship repair work on tugs and workboats, fishing vessels and other small craft as well as being a launch platform.

DURBAN'S new floating dock under preparation for the long voyage from Japan.

PICTURE: LOUIS GONTIER