



2 JUNE 2025

SMART CAPITAL IN ROUGH WATERS

Rethinking Venture for Maritime Transformation

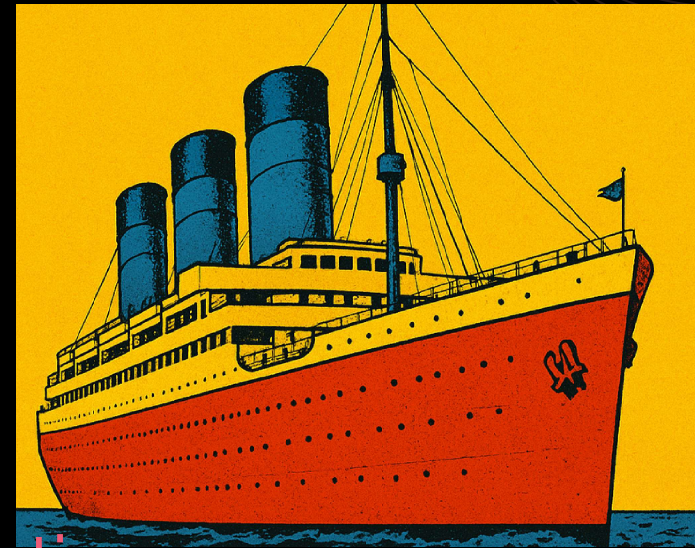
Researched, Written & Designed by Investment Analysts & Designer:
Ayush Deb, Weiyu Chen and Jovan Sim





Table of CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Reframing the Venture Fit in Maritime	5
The Fundamentals Still Hold	6
Misalignment can Undermine Outcomes	7
To the Investors and Founders Out There	9
About ShipsFocus Ventures	10
Contact Information	11



Executive Summary

Maritime is entering a decisive period of digital and operational transformation. But unlike traditional venture markets, progress here moves on trust, integration, and precision, not speed. As venture capital evolves into multi-asset, multi-stage models, the opportunity in maritime becomes clearer: it is not a niche play, but a globally critical, under-digitised sector with unique scaling dynamics and defensible outcomes.

This paper explores how capital and product must align to unlock value in maritime. Through case studies of companies like ORCA AI, Seadronix, Nautilus Labs, and Windward, we examine how timing, design choices, and market fit shape outcomes, whether through integration or disruption. Success in this space requires more than capital, it demands fluency in complexity, and clarity in execution.



Introduction

The tide is changing

Rethinking Venture Models

The traditional VC model focused on early-stage equity, placing high-risk bets in search of outsized returns. This approach worked well in fast-scaling sectors like software and consumer tech, where funding and exits could come quickly.

That model is now evolving. Leading firms are shifting toward multi-asset, multi-stage, and multi-region strategies. Maritime is also transforming, but on a different cadence, one shaped by precision, interoperability, and operational fit, not speed.

Aligning Capital with Cadence

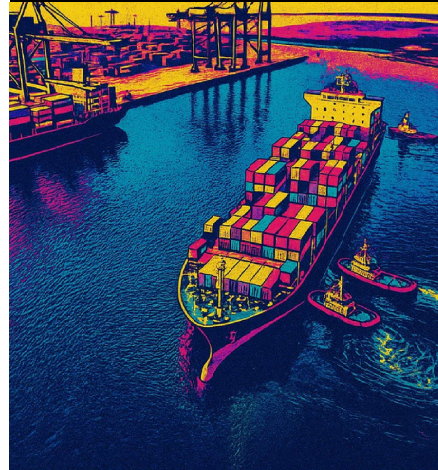
As digital adoption accelerates, the value of a solution becomes its own form of validation. Capital is expected not just to back ambition, but to align with outcomes grounded in real-world complexity. However, not all innovation will come through incremental integration. Disruption may also emerge from solutions that break with the industry's structural norms, introducing change that succeeds because it challenges how the system currently operates and covers gaps stakeholders miss.

This paper examines how startups gain traction in maritime, and how capital must align, or risk misalignment, with the industry's rhythm. Using ORCA AI and SEADRONIX as case studies, we explore how timing, product strategy, and stakeholder readiness shape funding outcomes, even when ambition and technical strength are present on both sides.

Scaling to the Tune of Maritime

Maritime challenges conventional VC expectations. But when capital is recalibrated for sector fit, core fundamentals still apply, retention, scalability, ROI. The difference lies in how and when value is realized.

This is not a niche opportunity. It is global, under-digitised, and structurally primed for transformation. Venture can thrive here, whether by funding systems that integrate seamlessly or by backing solutions bold enough to redefine them.



Signals from the sector

Adoption Realities

Maritime tech adoption is shaped by long operational cycles, safety mandates, and incremental trust-building—not consumer-style disruption. Products must embed within existing workflows to scale.

When capital misfires

In maritime, misaligned capital can introduce risk. Venture models that push for rapid scaling without regulatory or operational awareness often falter before traction takes root.

Slow is fast

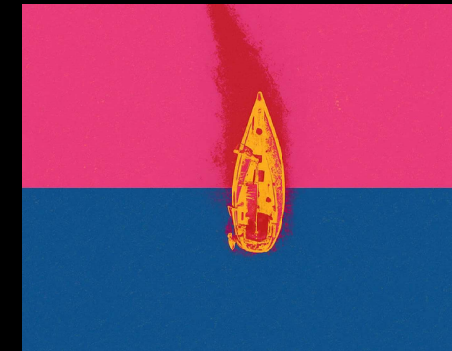
Deliberate adoption in maritime reflects risk management, not resistance to innovation.

Reframing the Venture Fit in Maritime

The debate often centres on whether capital should follow the solution, or the solution should follow capital. In reality, neither should lead in isolation. The ultimate driver must be the customer, whether that's the operator, the supply chain stakeholder, or the global trade system at large. When capital or innovation becomes self-serving, the broader value is lost.

Maritime operates with layered decision-making, long adoption cycles, and little room for error. Capital and product have adapted to serve these realities, but if that's the extent of the ambition, then the sector risks undershooting its transformative potential. In an AI-driven era, sectors that fail to attract both top talent and capital don't just fall behind, they get disrupted.

If maritime is to evolve, it must become a destination for both: capital that understands how to scale responsibly, and talent that sees opportunity in complexity. Disruption starts when smart, bold capital meets serious talent. That's how maritime can lead the next industrial revolution.





Fundamentals still hold

Translators wanted

The risk is overplaying the insider advantage and deterring outside talent. Maritime's digital transformation will depend on contributions from AI, product, and engineering leaders, many of whom come from beyond the industry. As digital adoption accelerates, the value at stake is significant. This sector needs more than capital, it needs sharp, cross-functional talent from tech, venture, and operations. The opportunity is not niche. It is global, multi-faceted, and suited for those who can translate complexity into value.

Complex but valuable

Such complexity often raises doubts about venture capital fit. But the startups that can successfully address these fundamentals: market opportunity, innovation potential, scalability, capital efficiency, burn rate management, etc. and create platforms to link data silos, provide visibility, and cut waste will find immediate rewards waiting for them.

Getting them to Fit

Beyond the old playbook

Recent shifts in VC appetite have triggered a flight to resilience. Maritime tech is benefiting, particularly for startups with lean models, recurring revenue, and automation leverage. What's required now is smart capital, capable of navigating sector-specific due diligence. Not over-specialization, but fluency in context.

Long timelines, lasting value

Metrics like CAC and retention remain relevant. What differs is the execution environment: slower timelines, deeper integrations, and systems where software embeds at the infrastructure layer. One deployment can trigger fleet-wide adoption. Once in, startups benefit from long contracts, high switching costs, and defensible, networked data. Scaling takes time, but stickiness is strong.

Opportunity in structure

Outcomes in maritime tech aren't solely shaped by capital strategy, they also depend on how startups position themselves against the sector's adoption realities. Alignment is mutual. The responsibility lies with both investors and founders to define not just the opportunity, but the tempo and pathway to reach it.



Capital can land differently

Nautilus Labs offers a cautionary case. The company raised over \$50M but exited for under \$5M, a result likely shaped by multiple factors, including a potential misalignment between capital expectations and the pace of sector adoption.

In a market shaped by long sales cycles, relationship-driven procurement, and regulatory sequencing, traditional venture speed can become a liability. When diligence misses these dynamics, risk compounds and value creation stalls.

Windward.ai provides yet another model: a company that took an unconventional path, focused on maritime intelligence, built a differentiated data product, and achieved both traction and trust.

It eventually listed on the London Stock Exchange, a rare outcome in this space. Windward's case shows that disruption is possible, even in complex sectors, when timing, product relevance, and execution converge.

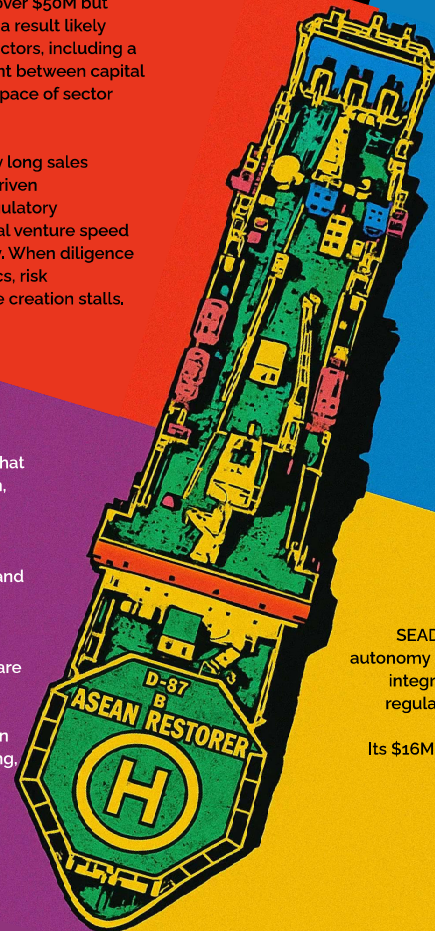
By contrast, ORCA AI and SEADRONIX may illustrate different forms of alignment. Both address navigational awareness through modular AI.

ORCA focused on today's fleet needs, compliance, retrofit friendliness, and near-term ROI, resulting in \$111M raised.

Its go-to-market strategy prioritised integration over disruption, embedding within existing workflows rather than replacing them.

SEADRONIX is building for long-term autonomy infrastructure and public-sector integration, a deeper arc that requires regulatory and institutional readiness.

Its \$16M raise reflects a different market horizon, not lesser ambition.





to our bright **Investors and Founders**

BUILDING OR BACKING A MARITIME STARTUP IS NOT UNLIKE PLAYING A HIGH-STAKES HAND OF POKER. IT DEMANDS INTENTION, FORESIGHT, AND CONVICTION, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE THE FULL TABLE.

Building or backing a maritime tech startup often means operating without the luxury of fast feedback or clear signals. Valuations are harder to justify when customer adoption is slow and sales cycles are prolonged. In these cases, follow-on funding becomes contingent on visible ROI, something that may take years, particularly in domains like chartering or bunkering.

Few sectors are as global, under-digitised, and structurally ready for transformation as in maritime commerce. When sharp products meet clear pain points, the results can be significant, if founders can demonstrate clarity in execution, timing, and value creation.

Maritime doesn't move at venture's usual speed. Structured for pace, VCs may disengage when growth lags, leaving even promising startups stranded mid-cycle.

But as valuations compress elsewhere, capital is rotating toward resilient verticals with long-term defensibility. This is where investor fluency in sector pacing and product fit matters most.

This isn't low-risk capital. But it is smart risk. And when founders show a clear path forward, and investors are calibrated to the rhythm of the sector, the upside becomes both credible and compounding.

THIS ISN'T LOW-RISK CAPITAL BY ANY. BUT IT IS SMART RISK, AND FOR THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND THE GAME, THE POT IS WORTH THE PLAY.



about **ShipsFocus Ventures**

ShipsFocus Ventures wasn't started as a fund, we built it as an operating answer to a set of problems we knew intimately.

Since 2016, our team has functioned as founders, venture builders, and startup partners across the maritime stack. We've seen how manual workflows, fragmented data, and system inefficiencies stall not just operations, but innovation.

Rather than import models from elsewhere, we built new ones, shaped by Maritime's pace, trust dynamics, and regulatory rhythm. Capital here must move with the industry, not against it.

At ShipsFocus, we back two kinds of builders: those who work with the grain of the industry and those bold enough to challenge it. We know this sector rewards operational fluency. But we also know disruption has a place. We don't just invest, we help translate complexity into clarity, and potential into performance.

For us, maritime isn't a bet, it's a calculated decision.
These are waters we know how to navigate.



+65 6470 9167



www.shipsfocus.com



fund@shipsfocus.com