

patent infringement case. Dennis Bulin, president of Zeagle, told us, "The suit was against Dura Bag/Dura Pro for using our patented ripcord weight-release system." Dennis Foster, president of Dura Bag, said, "We used the weight release system in one of the BCs in our line and dropped it from the line after the agreement.

"We are mainly in the OEM business," said Foster. "Some of our sales come from products we design and build and sell to other companies to take to market under their brand. In Europe we have four customers selling the same product but with four different brand names. We also build products to a customer's specifications. We have built for US Tek, Performance, and

Sandals. None of the OEM products used the ripcord weight-release system, so only our product line was affected."

Here's what this means to you as a consumer: when you buy a Scubapro BC (or any other BC, for that matter), you really have no idea where it was made or by whom. Those with the strong brand names — those marketed by the guys who spend big advertising bucks to get their name out there — always cost the most money, but then, you usually get better warranty service from the big names. So when you pay twice as much for a Scubapro or a Zeagle as you would, say, for a US Tek, consider it warranty insurance — but damned expensive warranty insurance.

Battle of the Titans

Who's the king of the food chain?

Who might win in a fight between an orca and a great white shark? No one knew, because marine biologists simply assumed the two giants at the top of the food chain avoided each other.

But then, wildlife watchers on an October Oceanic Society cruise near San Francisco caught a matchup on video. What a surprise!

Mary Jane Schramm told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that "We were on our way to the Farallones when a fisherman called and told us he saw two orcas kill a sea lion. By the time we got there, the sea lion was gone." But the orcas — a 20-foot female and a 10-foot youngster — were still there.

"Then we noticed this dark shape moving in the water, giving the orcas a wide berth," Schramm said. "The female orca suddenly veered off, on an intercept path." She surged to the surface with a 10-foot great white in her jaws. "We were stunned," Schramm said.

The whale swam away from the boat and thrashed the shark on the surface of the water, a practice orcas typically employ with their prey.

Peter Pyle, a great white shark expert stationed on Farallon Island, raced to the scene in a Boston whaler. He got within five feet of the orcas and began shooting underwater video. Schramm said "The female apparently killed the shark, but she didn't eat it — she was encouraging the calf to feed. [The calf] especially liked the liver."

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