

What Equipment is Hot and What's Not at DEMA

Attendance was light and the action tepid at the 23rd Annual Diving Equipment & Marketing Association's trade show, held this January in New Orleans. Exhibitors griped about no growth in the fragmented and fractious dive industry, and the nearby diversions of Bourbon Street may have contributed to the subdued atmosphere. Still, some interesting trends did emerge. And, of course, there were a few of those Dumb and Dumber inventions for divers who want to scream to the rest of the world, "Don't buddy up with me!"

Kicking Back

Underwater efficiency and comfort seemed to be the focus of most new products. Split blade fins based on "propeller technology" were offered by Apollo and Force Fin. Force Fin's irrepressible Bob Evans also proudly showed off his new variable-thrust Extra Force fin and Excellerating model (designed for frog kickers and scullers), each retailing for \$475! Ocean Master's Art Fin and Seac Sub's Pinna Vela version are both designed to prevent unwanted torque or side sliding. If even that sounds like too much work, you can just mount the Aquanaut Self-Propulsion Unit (SPU) on your tank and putt along at up to 4 knots with hands-free operation.

In the Big Easy, comfort seemed at least as important as performance. Neofin and Zeagle both promoted tropical fins with fully adjustable Velcro foot enclosures and lightweight blades for easy packing. Hopefully, they'll perform as well in the water as in a suitcase.

Zeagle had a winner with its imaginative Snorkel Holster, a mesh pouch that Velcros the snorkel to a BCD shoulder strap. The pouch retains the mouthpiece within easy reach on your shoulder, not in your face. After hassling for years with a useless snorkel hanging off my mask strap while scuba diving, I bought one, and I'm eagerly awaiting my first sea trial. Seac Sub and a new outfit called Air-Tech both offered double-valved snorkels that promise more fresh, dry air with easier clearing. And we all know that two valves are better than one, right?

Heat loss was addressed in a variety of interesting ways. Squid-Wear featured a baseball-style

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neoprene cap meant to be worn both below and above the surface. (Tell the world you're a diver!)

Henderson revealed a new line of wetsuits and neoprene accessories with a Gold Core lining that's reportedly warmer as well as faster-drying and easier to get on and off. Mobby's Twin-Shell dry suits utilize a reflective inner shell that provides "the strength of ceramics, warmth of aluminum, and flexibility of polyvinyl" (sounds like the copy was written by Captain Marvel: SHAZAM!). For seriously shivery

divers, there's the Aqua Heat line of personal wet or dry suit heaters, with sport, technical and professional level models.

Taking It Easy

Out-of-water gear transportation aids were widely displayed this year. Tank Tub and Scuba Shuttle both store tanks, BCDs and other gear while capturing runoff water before it soaks your boat or vehicle. The Tank Bank from Mako Gear mounts on your vehicle's door to support your tank and other gear waist high for easy donning. Looks like you drove off with the curb service tray from the local drive-in, but, hey, if it relieves back strain and keeps regulators out of the dust, shore divers might learn to love it.

Say Again?

Underwater communications and navigation aids were another hot trend. The Sonic Seeker system includes a beacon, which is placed wherever you wish to return, and a locator which guides you back to it. Dive Link Explorer is a voice-operated transmitter/receiver with a strapless mouthpiece that's adaptable to full face masks.

Those of us who still prefer the Silent World might go for the Night-Writer, a battery-lighted underwater slate which can also be used for signaling or to illuminate gauges. My personal "Pest of Show" award goes to the underwater laser pointers offered by Trident and Miracle Beam. Imagine the scourge of movie theaters and freeways everywhere now intruding on your favorite reef. It could probably even double as a tank banger.

Innovative Scuba Concepts, creator of Slap Strap, the neoprene mask strap that opens up to double as a soft mask case, has added a removable marker light; or you can get a Versa Light which

attaches anywhere and emits either a constant or flashing beam. (Following a buddy with one of those must be as distracting as following a car with its hazard lights on.) Mask Marsoops has a similar strap/case product that floats and comes with a reflector strip. (What, no Nike swoosh?)

I cracked up at the I Sea U rear-view mirror, which fits all masks. But several DEMAnS, evidently obsessed with keeping an eye on their buddies, seemed to think it was a great item. Just beware of kelp and remember, sharks in mirror may be closer than they appear!

Let There Be Light

Bigger, brighter, longer-lasting: those were the keys to the 1999 underwater lighting introductions. PATCO Service Inc. showed off a series of 6 to 12-volt Aqua Lite halogen lamps connected to battery packs with 2,000-4,000 hours of operating life. The HID-1 High Intensity Discharge Arc Lamp supposedly produces 3-6 times more light than halogens running at the same power level with true color level and balance. It could probably create its own plankton bloom.

The SHC Underwater Video Diver Cam can be mounted on your head along with an optional lighting system for hands-free operation. The diver who straps this rig on better add one of those rear-view mirrors, because no buddy will dare get face-to-face with him. For a lower-tech approach to hands-free illumination, the \$17 Limb Lite Holder fastens most small- to medium-size lights to your wrist with Velcro straps. Practical and cheap: that's the ticket.

Can You Spare Some Air?

Alternate air sources got lots of attention this year. The Air Buddy allows a diver to breathe

Just Drop It

It's no secret that occasionally a diver in an emergency fails to drop his weight belt because he doesn't want to lose it — it's valuable and, most often, rented. This thrifty thinking has led to death. In a twist on this sad tale, a British soldier died while sport diving on a wreck off Cyprus in January. He lost his fin, made a desperate attempt to retrieve it, and ran out of air. The moral of the story: save yourself first; you're worth more than a \$50 fin.

from the BCD's quick connect hose, and at only \$60, it's about half the price of an Air II or competitive products. You can also connect it directly to the low pressure port of a pony bottle first stage. Aquavit Inc.'s new X-tra Specialized Pony Bottle automatically fills from your main tank, and comes in sizes from 6-30 c.f. To help attach it, you can try the Pony Bridle from Engineered Inspection Systems, which easily clips onto your tank straps. For greater versatility, the Integrated Rapid Attachment Mounting System (IRAMS, for the acronymmally-challenged) is a line of detachable devices for mounting single or double tanks to BCDs and various size pony bottles to tanks.

Dive Deep and Prosper

Tekkies found plenty of new toys. Draeger brought out its Dolphin Nitrox semi-closed circuit rebreather and Cochran debuted a closed circuit model with open circuit bailout, both retailing around \$10,000. An intriguing alternative is the new CCR 2000 modular rebreather. The company plans to sell the hygienically isolated breathing loop separately, as open circuit regulators are sold today. The rest of the apparatus (cylinders, case, computer etc.) will be marketed to resorts and shops as rental gear. For \$1195 you can buy the breathing loop and a training session to 100 feet. Then you'll need to find an operator who rents the rest of the package. Or

buy the whole kit and kaboodle, including bailout second stage and BCD, for \$8160.

For those who like to go either way, Cochran offered a pair of computers with air or nitrox functions. The Nemesis+ is air-integrated; the Commander+ is not. Sartek Industries featured its RSV-1 redundant supply valve which allows a diver to switch between breathing gases in less than a second while wearing a full face mask.

In the buoyancy control department, Sherwood brought out the back-inflated Trek BC with integrated weights. But the most intriguing weight system came all the way from South Africa. Bright Weights are distributed along the back of the tank as well as on the waist and ankles. Tank weights can't be ditched, but when your BCD is inflated, they'll help control your ascent, and they're designed to help you float upright. Ankle weights are no-slip, thanks to Velcro closures.

Which leads to the cosmic question: how did the dive industry survive all those years before Velcro? At next year's DEMA in the diving hotbed of Las Vegas, I expect to see PADI and NAUI offering a "Velcro Diver" certification. After being trained to use every easy-fastening product in the shop, divers will be awarded a certificate and (what else?) a removable patch.

— D.L.