
manufacturers tout glowing ("phosphorescent") background displays. After being brightly illuminated by an external light source, they give off a faint greenish light, theoretically making the screen visible later in the dive when your eyes have recovered from the blast from your dive light. In practice, though, the glow fades out after a minute or two, making the feature essentially useless (except for marketing purposes).

If you have to reenergize your display with your flashlight nearly every time you want to read it, why not just illuminate it with a low-power pen light instead? When you're dark-adapted, the last thing you need is a bright reflection from your 100,000-candlepower flashlight beam

squirting you in the eye. Besides, dive computers with phosphorescent displays are typically murky and dark, thus difficult to read even in the daytime.

Other manufacturers have tried partial backlighting (the Tekna/Ocean Edge Computek) and side lighting (the new Mares Divemate). The Computek's backlit display is actually pretty good, but it doesn't show the surrounding mask. At night all you can see is a bunch of unlabeled red numbers. The numbers are easy to read, but if you don't have the daytime display memorized, you're likely to have serious trouble interpreting the numbers in the dark.

The Divemate (which we'll review in the near future) is excellent at night when its audio

system is turned on and reading times and depths out loud, but the built-in side lighting for the visual display is essentially useless. You can see a red glow on the screen, but unless you're one of those people who can read an old, dimmed-out Casio watch after dark, you'll need a flashlight to read the Divemate's numbers. In any case, the Divemate isn't air-integrated, so even if you're listening to its audio you'll still need your flashlight to see how much air you have left.

Bottom line: The lighting system on the Eon Lux is so useful that for anyone who regularly goes night diving there's no better choice of dive computer. Two thumbs up!

Delmar Mesa

The *Lammer Law*, Galapagos

A great trip, but not perfect

Dear Fellow Diver:

It was New Year's Eve, 1985. Our little group of eight, including captain, mate, and six passengers, had just gotten off the *Trespasser*, a small trimaran, the baby of Duncan and Annie Muirhead's famous British Virgin Islands fleet. Eagerly we boarded a floating mansion to celebrate.

After a week aboard the *Trespasser*, I was intimidated by the palatial salon of the 95-foot trimaran *Lammer Law*. I peeked into the cabins -- excuse me, STATE rooms -- and was astonished. So much space, so many luxuries! This was the live-aboard I wanted to do.

Fast forward to fall 1994. Several years and many live-aboards later, I finally made the dream come true. I was going to Mecca! Imagine: the magnificent *Lammer Law* -- and now she was no longer in the British Virgin Islands, but in the Galapagos.

Our reviewer, who has dived nearly every hot spot in the world, and the Galapagos more than once, describes the diving there as exhilarating, high-voltage, intense, and unpredictable.

*But her report is not about the diving, it's about the *Lammer Law*, a live-aboard she had dreamed about diving on for years . . .*

J. Q.

Illusions Lost

Perhaps I expected too much; perhaps I remembered it wrong. Wasn't the *Lammer Law* supposed to be perfect? Well, not quite, as it turned out.

I was assigned to cabin 5, which had two perfectly comfortable twin beds, lots of storage space, my own head with shower -- and a nonstop ringside seat for the ship-to-shore VHF radio, day and night. Apparently the speaker was just on the other side of my cabin's bulkhead. I couldn't turn it off; I couldn't even turn it down.

Whose Boat Is That?

I was surprised when I received an envelope with Aquanaut Cruise Line for a return address and a brochure for the *Cuan Law* inside. Did Aquanaut Cruises now own Duncan and Annie Muirhead's boat?

The last time I heard of Aquanaut Cruises (*Aquanaut Explorer*) was when they merged with Coral Bay Cruises (*Coral Star, Coral Bay*). The *Aquanaut Explorer* was moved to Belize and renamed the *Belize Explorer*. However, a subsequent split between the two companies resulted in several divers not being allowed to board the boat, even after prepayment. The two companies eventually got untangled. Coral Bay Cruises is now doing several itineraries in the Bahamas, including humpback whales on the Silverbanks and dolphins in the wild (800-433-7262).

After all the trouble Aquanaut Cruises had with its last merger, had the company decided to marry into yet another fleet? A quick call to Annie Muirhead brought a resounding no. "We are not in business together. They called and asked if they could represent our boat. We said yes, they can book our boats just like everyone else does."

I called Aquanaut Cruises' 800 number and asked what dive live-boards they represented; the *Cuan Law* in the British Virgins and the *Tropic Sun* in Croatia, I was told (800-327-8223).

J. Q.

If the *Lammer Law* was perfect, why did the young couple occupying the one spacious cabin that is below decks (all the others are on the main deck) have to endure so much engine noise? Closing their door might have made it quieter, but the heat would have been unbearable, because their air-conditioning unit was unreliable.

If the *Lammer Law* was perfect, why, then, was there no safe place to store a camera? (We were told to put them on the salon floor near a busy doorway.) Why no E-6 processing of film? Why no work table?

Don't go to the Galapagos looking for great reefs or lots of macro critters. In Depth readers gave the coral in the Galapagos 1½ stars and the same for density of small creatures. However, 10 out of 10 divers saw schools of sharks and dolphins. One hundred percent also reported seeing mantas and turtles. In addition, they listed diving with sea lions, penguins, and fur seals.

J. Q.

Reading in bed is one of my favorite pastimes on a live-aboard. So why was the lighting so dim? I could neither read comfortably nor work on my camera after dark.

Good Cooks, Bad Food, Ugly Wine Prices

Our chef and his assistants were as nice as could be. No one blamed them for the quality of the food, which was generally awful; they just didn't have much to work with. Fresh fish saved the day from time to time, but there was a lot of poor-quality beef and some other things we came to call "mystery food." Our hard-working chef did make wonderful soups, which were served at dinner. Our best bet was to fill up on soup (we cleaned them out several times) and pick through what came next. Cold cereal was very popular at breakfast; I wasn't surprised when we ran out early in the voyage.

Snacks were mostly popcorn, chips, storebought cookies, and some excellent wrapped candies. Our guide thought he had a year's supply on board, but we polished them off in about five days. Following our land treks, the chef occasionally outdid himself with yummy dips served with crackers and superb cheeses.

The bar has one of those fancy gadgets the user programs to help himself to a variety of soft drinks and water. Water or seltzer would have been my first choice; I tried for them several times, but the result was a nasty-tasting beverage with a distinct salt content. Beer drinkers are in good shape at \$1.50 per can, but woe to the wine aficionados at \$20 a bottle. It was particularly insulting when at the end of the trip we found the same wine at a local supermarket for \$5.00.

Bizarre Boat Games

Our guides were well informed, friendly, and helpful. But many of us were troubled by what seemed to be a "macho" problem. One of the two inflatables in use was small, with low sides. This boat was assigned to the male divemaster/guide along with Johnny, the driver, who was a powerhouse of muscle, energy, and helpfulness. Most divers assigned to his inflatable were capable of hoisting themselves over the side unassisted, but Johnny was always ready to deal with tanks, weight belts, and cameras, and to assist those who hadn't eaten their Wheaties that morning. The larger inflatable, which had very high sides, was assigned to the female divemaster/guide. Few of us could climb aboard without assistance. For whatever reason, the driver would not help. Our tough little guide coped by standing high on the panga side, counting to three, and hauling back. Doing this for most of the passengers, plus tanks and other gear, was nothing less than heroic.

Another hard-working member of the crew, the engineer, did the best he could in trying circumstances. It appeared to me that tanks were filled directly off the compressor. This was time consuming and often delayed starting times on our dives. Days were short in November, and time was of the essence. Shouldn't the perfect boat have a cascade system or at least a much larger compressor?

... But I Like It

Having read all of the above, you may have a hard time believing me when I say that I had a wonderful time and that

In Depth readers who chose the *Galapagos Aggressor* were also pleased with their trips. They rated the accommodations on the *Aggressor* 4½ stars, and gave the service a full 5 stars. The onboard dining averaged 3 stars.

Just the right combination of land excursions and dive sites seems to be a delicate balance, with some readers saying that too much emphasis was put on land and others complaining about not enough. However, even those readers reporting that they thought some mediocre dive sites were chosen because of their proximity to interesting shore excursions agreed that going ashore in the Galapagos was well worth doing. Most dive travel wholesalers book the *Aggressor*, or you can call them direct at 800-348-2628 or 504-385-2416, fax 504-384-0817.

J. Q.

The Galapagos Aggressor

Most dive travel wholesalers can book or provide information on the *Lammer Law*, or you can call direct, 800-648-3393 or 809-494-2490. Six nights/7 days, \$2,050; 10 nights/11 days, \$2,929; 11 nights/12 days, \$3,221 (10- and 11-day trips visit Darwin and Wolf Islands). Low-season prices are \$200-\$300 cheaper (the water's cooler). It's one of the world's best for big-creature action, schooling hammerheads, swirls of jacks, big tuna, wahoo, and Galapagos sharks. Not a place for beginners; currents and surge can be strong and the water can be cold. The rainy season is from January to April when water temperatures average around 70° and visibility tends to drop. The water is usually in the mid-60s the rest of the year. Best times for diving are December and January, then again in May and June. The most wind is generally in October. Bring thermal protection all year just in case.

Ditty Bag

... You may have a hard time believing me when I say that I had a wonderful time and that the Lammer Law is a magnificent vessel.

the *Lammer Law* is a magnificent vessel. For the most part, the crew did whatever they could to make our trip as pleasant as possible. The passengers were a fun-loving group, and the guides pulled everything together nicely. Of course the diving was five star, but the *Lammer Law*, the grand old lady, could do with a bit of troubleshooting to bring her up to the five-star class she absolutely deserves.

G. S.

Hanging by a Thread

Hookers on the reef

In our March issue we printed an article by an In Depth reader who described his method of dealing with the strong currents in Palau — by hooking himself to the reef with a hook and line. Is it safe? Is it ecologically correct? Is it crazy? Other readers respond:

Dope on a Rope

Dear Editor:

I'm shocked and outraged that any responsible diver (or dive newsletter) would recommend using a hook rather than let a diver be swept away into the blue clutching handfuls of sea fans, coral, and sponges torn from the reef in desperation. Why? Because

1) Some enterprising soul (probably not a Palauan, unfortunately) will try to patent and package the hook idea as the latest whizz-bang: "Diver Kite — you too can fly like Superman! Only \$99.95!" [Ed. note: They're already on sale at the Palau Pacific Resort for \$18.]

2) Everyone (and his dog) will buy and try to use the hook without having had the (consider-

able) current experience necessary to deal with the multitude of possible "bad trips."

3) PADI will seize on the idea to market yet another "merit badge course."

However, having used a hook for many years in strong currents, especially on exploratory dives, if anyone is foolish enough to use a hook, I suggest the following:

1) Get a small shark hook, file off the barb and blunt the tip (so you don't hook your BC or something more painful as you try to unravel doing 3 knots down the reef). Get 15-30 feet of prepackaged spear gun line, which is stiffer and doesn't turn into a fishing line death knot.

2) Don't use your BC waistband or weight belt, but rather a separate belt, and use two (not one) quick release mechanisms (such as stainless snap link and a plastic quick release) — just in case!

3) Hook on to a DEAD coral head (which, unfortunately, is getting easier to find). Find one that projects up or out from the

reef so that when you have finished your "Man of Steel" demonstration, you will be able to duck into the lee and retrieve the hook and line for another dive.

Summary: Hook? What hook? Seriously, it's probably better to keep it that way so we don't have to read about "The Hook" in your "Accidents and Incidents" column.

P. J., aka Captain Hook
Jakarta, Indonesia

Asleep at the Hook

Dear Editor:

I just returned from Palau, where I used a reef hook for the first time and I loved it! I've been diving for 23 years and the only contact I have had with the reef in the past 15 years has been a gingerly placed fingertip. But when the current is ripping and you want to stop and take in the action, the choice is a reef hook or wholesale coral death.

I never felt any risk of entrapment, disengagement from the reef was simple, and having two hands free for photography was great! A puff of air into the BC, cross your arms, and current surfing is so relaxing you could fall asleep. I'm toting my hook with me everywhere! It's definitely a better mousetrap!

Scott Seidman, M.D.
Livermore, CA