

# About Equipment

## *Our tech guru answers your questions*

**Dear Delmar:** I've been looking at the Sea Quest Black Diamond BC. I've never used an integrated weight system, but I don't like weight belts anymore. I would like a BC with large storage/attachment capabilities, one that would allow what I call an "all attitude" capability without having to fight the BC. Any comments or suggestions?

Bob Stinson

**Dear Bob:** I looked at the Black Diamond at the industry trade show, but I haven't had it in the water yet, so I can't comment on its stability. I really like weight-integrated systems and prefer them to weight belts.

I have dive-tested the Sea Quest QuickDraw (and its descendant, the Zero Gravity) with drysuits and plenty of lead, as well as the USD Alcyone in warm water — both of which I have reviewed in *In Depth*. Of the three, the Alcyone is my favorite. The Alcyone does not have large weight pockets (probably limited to around 16 pounds) but it is more comfortable on me than either of the Sea Quest units.

The Alcyone has a back-mounted bladder, with all the buoyancy behind. This can cause a bit of rotation when there's a lot of air in the BC, but I usually keep my BC almost empty. The other two are rather bulky, with weight

pockets as well as regular pockets toward the front of my hips. All those pockets, chest clips, and so forth tend to get in my way in the water, especially since I'm usually carrying a couple of cameras. Check to see if that's a problem for you by doing a pool test with photo gear in hand and full (normal) weights on board.

The Black Diamond is a technical BC, covered with D-rings and other attachment points. My guess is that it's got a lot of drag in the water. Is that an issue? It's also heavy; if you travel by plane, that may be a problem. I'd prefer the Alcyone to either of the Sea Quest units for tropical diving.

In terms of quality, you won't go wrong with Sea Quest (or the Alcyone). All are well made, and thoroughly backed by their manufacturers.

Delmar Mesa

# Random Scatterings

## *News from on line and on letters*

Watch where you fly your private plane. **Jimmy Buffett's** amphibious plane was riddled with bullets by Jamaican police as it was taking off near Negril, the beach resort area on Jamaica's western end. Apparently the police thought it was being used by drug smugglers. Although the plane was hit, no one was hurt, and the song title will not be changed to "Wasted in Magaritaville." . . . A Dutch scientist sat in his underwear under a mosquito net, released mosquitoes one at time, and watched where they flew. Seventy-

five percent headed straight for his feet. If mosquitoes are attracted to smelly feet, add clean feet to the list of ways to help avoid malaria in the tropics. . . . On the subject of prevention, several islands in Papua New Guinea are having trouble keeping condoms in stock. It seems that **condoms filled with salt water** are irresistible to tuna, so local trawlers have abandoned traditional fishing methods and switched to the new lure.

Michael Fagan of Baton Rouge writes that he read "North

**to South in Yucatán" (*In Depth*, Feb. '96)** with great interest since he dives down that way once or twice a year. He adds that "the best time to see turtles is June or July. In fact, last July, besides the dozen or so turtles I saw while diving, I witnessed two turtles laying eggs on the beach. Casa Cenoté, which is about five miles south of Akumal, is a quaint little restaurant with incredible BBQ by a blue cenoté within 300 feet of the ocean. A great, out-of-the-way place to do a combination beach reef dive and cenoté dive and have lunch. The reef is far better near Puerto Aventuras than at Akumal's Half Moon Bay where Las Casitas are. Just two miles south of Akumal at the Oasis Club Resort, the Akumal Reef is at its best and closest to shore. Also great night snorkeling or diving

from the beach. Oasis Club is a comfortable, non-ritzy, all-inclusive resort (pool, dinner, nightly entertainment, drinks, two-tank dive) for about \$125 per night. Although the rooms are smaller, I think it beats the \$100 per night at Las Casitas."

David Lund of Minneapolis has been to **Villa DeRosa** on the Yucatán Peninsula twelve times since 1989. David writes, "Your perspective on the lodging, meals, diving, and diving services is accurate: day in, day out, good to excellent. Unfortunately, your experience with the aged, frail vans was also accurate."

Caroline Ryeom writes that she particularly enjoyed our piece on Grand Cayman and would like to add a dive operator to the list of preferred operators. **Scuba Cayman**, run by Clint Ebanks for 20 years and now by his son C. J., is a terrific operation that caters to individual diver desires. I have made 17 trips to Cayman and always dive with C. J. on the *Queen Angel*. While his boat can accommodate up to 25 divers, very rarely are there more than 10 on board. He will go to whatever dive site is requested by the majority, including the North Wall or South Side."

Or maybe just cruise down to Cayman. SCUBA America Tours, American Express, and Norwegian Cruise Lines are promoting luxury scuba-diving cruises starting this March. The **Dreamward** includes dives in Grand Cayman, Cozumel, and Cancun. Where else are you going to find gourmet meals, 24-hour room service, midnight buffets, Broadway-style shows, full-service casinos, and live entertainment on a dive boat? "Divers can even opt to bring a tuxedo for formal night(s)," says the literature. . . . Cruise ships need somewhere to dock. Several ecology groups have filed complaints with the NAFTA Environmental Cooperation Commission charging that the Mexican government violated its own zoning and environmental laws by approving

a cruise ship dock over Cozumel's **Paradise Reef**.

The press release says you get it all for \$795 — airfare from Miami, transfers, seven nights accommodations, six days of two-tank diving, meals, house-brand booze, and — get this — cigarettes, too! It's the 304-room **Morrococoy Reef Hotel** in Venezuela (305-267-6644). I'm mildly curious; it's close to Bonaire and the price is right — but then I thought there might be diving on Isla Margarita to the east of Bonaire before I checked it out. Not far away, Los Roques does have good diving. . . . Since we reviewed Los Roques (Feb. '95), a new 85-foot live-aboard, the *Antares III*, has shown up (Tropical Adventures, 800-247-3483).

You've all seen the photo of the barracuda snapping the fish out of Captain Slate's mouth, but have you seen the one where the 'cuda is snapping his head off? It's the cover of the second edition of **Sort of Diver** (the first one was in 1988). The full-length slick mag parody (\$14.95) covers live-aboards ("Phelony of the Seas") and landbased operations ("Port Macho"), equipment tips (how to turn your BC into a microbrewery), and safety issues (a revolutionary Bends Free Patch that absorbs nitrogen to let you dive deeper and longer). Contact New World Publications (904-737-6558). It may be eight years before you get another chance.

Just who are **Scuba Diving's** readers? I was a little confused when the Rodale readers chose Cozumel, with its ripping currents, as the number-one place for underwater photography in their poll last year. After reading this year's results, I think I understand. Their number-one resort this year is Club Med Columbus Isle, their top live-aboard is the *Caribbean Explorer*, and the restaurant at Bruce Bowker's Carib Inn rated 3.5 out of a possible five. Not bad, considering that the Carib Inn doesn't even have a restaurant.

J. Q.

**In Depth** is the consumer newsletter for sport divers that reviews scuba destinations and equipment. We accept no advertising. Subscriptions are \$60 a year (addresses in Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean, add \$15; other foreign addresses, add \$30).

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