
The Mares ESA Mask

A four-eyed review for In Depth

I initially thought Mares's six-lens ESA mask little more than a marketing gimmick to garner a high price: it lists for \$135. You see, besides front and side lenses, it has two small lenses below the main lenses that look downward at 45 degrees.

But a friend who owns a dive store — he can break out whatever gear he wants without worrying much about the price — said the ESA was his favorite mask of all time. Sounding suspiciously like Joe Bob Briggs, he advised me to “check it out!”

Now that grey grows in my beard, I have a hard time focusing on objects closer than arm's length, so I use +2.5 diopter reading glasses. When I dive, I nearly always carry a housed SLR with manual focus, and without a prescription mask I can no longer read the settings or decipher smaller numbers on a dive computer. I rely on corrective lenses to sort out the scene on the ground glass and to separate sharks from nudibranchs on the retina.

I ordered an ESA with +3 diopter (magnifying) prescription lenses in the two lower ports so I could read my instruments by looking down. I got flat (uncorrected) upper lenses since I have no problem with distance. Mares dealers can pop out any of the four main lenses to insert either positive or negative diopters, or a combination for people who have more complex visual needs (such as bifocal wearers).

Great Peripheral Vision

The ESA's clear skirt and the side windows yield a significant improvement in peripheral vision

over other masks I've used, although the main two lenses were fairly far from my face. The side lenses made it easy to track my buddy by turning my head slightly, even when he was somewhat behind me.

The ESA's lower inserts were in a good position for reading gauges. I could hold my console

Have It Your Way

If your vision requires frequent use of corrective lenses — say, to tell urchins from cucumbers — order prescription lenses mounted in a standard vertical position so you don't have to tilt your head back and look sharply downward to focus on nearby objects. Almost any faceplate, including the two main front lenses in the ESA, will accommodate that kind of correction.

in the normal position at my waist, glance down, and read the displays rapidly without having to bend my neck. With my other mask, I have to pull the console up in front of my face so that I can look at it through the lower half of the mask. That's much less convenient.

I enjoy hunting for little animals and taking their pictures. The lower lenses in the ESA, about the size of small, half-frame reading glasses, are more than two inches apart. Dropping a couple of small magnifying lenses into the ESA wasn't enough. It was uncomfortable to look sharply downward to see through the lower lenses, which were too small and widely separated to serve as my main viewports for more than a few seconds. I had to move my housing around to get just the right angle to read the frame counter. When looking for critters, I was conscious of the wide gap between the lower lenses; true binocular vision was difficult to achieve and more



difficult to maintain while looking downward at 45 degrees.

This mask has a relatively large internal volume and a correspondingly high profile. Its size may be an issue for serious breath-hold divers, who prefer low-volume masks that are easy to clear with minimal air. Surface snorkelers probably won't care about or notice its size, though, and will enjoy the panoramic views.

Scuba divers who spend a lot of time in high currents are concerned with drag. When I held onto the anchor line in a one- or two-knot current, the ESA lifted off my face when I turned my head unless I really tightened down on the strap.

The Bottom Line

The ESA has a soft comfortable skirt and better-than-usual

buckles. It's finished with an eye to detail, as one might expect from the premium price. It comes with a nifty inflatable bag, to protect it from bumps, and a one-year warranty. However, the ESA wouldn't be my first choice for high-current diving other than full, go-with-the-flow drifts.

Delmar Mesa

Regulator Overhauls

How much and how often?

Do you take your regulator in for service every year to keep its warranty valid? If so, you're part of a very small minority of divers.

According to several dive-store owners we polled, more than three-fourths of the regulator overhauls they do are off warranty.

Most divers pull their regulators out of their gear bags a couple of weeks before leaving for a dive trip and have them tuned up just in time to run for the plane. After the trip, they put their regulators back into storage to sit, forgotten and sometimes unwashed, until just before the next trip.

Putting it off can cost you. Many, though not all, regulator manufacturers provide free parts for regulators that are serviced annually — in some cases, forever. To collect on the free parts, however, you've got to be the original owner, and you must have the service performed every year close to the anniversary date of purchase. If you miss it once — or if you've bought a used regulator — you're on your own.

When you're thinking of buying a used regulator (or one that you probably won't take in every year), ask your regulator technician what his shop charges for labor, then add in the retail cost for the manufacturer's annual-service parts kit. This kit has the standard parts; it's free to warranty customers or sold along with the labor to put it in. The labor for annual service in most dive stores runs about \$15 per stage. One first stage and two

Victimized by Tank Quacks?

and certified look into our scuba cylinders and inspect them? Yes. Why is that?

Wildcat tank inspection stickers are continuing to be slapped onto cylinders with no response from the editorial pages of dive magazines. No cry from the consumers.

The only inspection stickers that should be recognized are those affixed by trained and certified cylinder inspectors. Untrained and uncertified inspectors aren't inspecting your tanks — they are only slapping on dive-store advertisements disguised as inspection stickers. All dive stores say they won't fill tanks that do not carry up-to-date stickers. You should be telling the general diving public that when they deliver their cylinders for inspection they should be done by inspectors who have been trained to do inspections and are certified to do inspections.

It is the duty of editorial pages to see that the day of wildcat tank inspection programs be brought to a close.

Fred Calhoun
PEW, PDIC-IT
Maynard, Massachusetts

Dear *In Depth*:

Would we let people who have not been certified and trained inspect your teeth? Of course not. Do we let people who have not been trained