

## GUE CCR class

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*It is easy to forget, once you become an instructor, that taking a dive class can cause a little stress or anxiety. It can also be exciting, tiring and inspiring, but only if your instructor is passionate and remembers their own student experience. So to ensure I never forget what it is like to be a student I always sign up for at least one dive class every year, sometimes more if the opportunity arises. In May I found myself doing exactly what many of my GUE Fundamentals student do, signing up for a class which on paper gave me nothing more than I could already do – but of course paperwork is not what diving is about!*



Regular TDNZ newsletter readers will hopefully remember that back in November last year I did the IART JJ rebreather class with Paul Trainor, an instructor based in Wellington. This class was a great introduction to rebreathers and although Paul had to answer a lot of very awkward questions from Mel and myself, it proved to be a lot of fun and a very valuable experience. Paul has a wealth of knowledge on rebreathers and following the class Mel and I were able to build up lots of hours using the unit in the standard straight-out-of-the-box configuration. However, even in November I knew I was planning to change the configuration of my JJ to more closely match my GUE background, hence why I was taking the second JJ class in May.

Day one of the class was a slightly weird experience. We started fairly normally, running through introductions, basic rebreather concepts and specifics about the JJ rebreather – and then after lunch we got to the meaty bit, reconfiguring the unit from the standard factory configuration into the GUE configuration. I had thought this section of the class would be one of the highlights, but by the time we were halfway through I had a horrible sense of “be careful what you wish for”. For five months I had been enjoying diving with my factory-spec JJ – it was light-weight, streamlined and simple – now after several hours of butchery my unit looked messy and complicated, and it was getting heavier by the hour. Instead of two 3 litre bottles (one O<sub>2</sub>, one DIL) I now had two 5.8 litre bottles of DIL plus a 3 litre bottle of O<sub>2</sub>. The two DIL bottles were connected by a flexible manifold and had regs attached in the same configuration as my standard doubles open circuit set up. The end result of these changes was a unit which was far heavier than before - a pain on the surface, but a good fit for my diving plans.

*To explain the logic behind these changes – firstly by having all the DIL back-mounted I can dispense with the 80cf stage I have been carrying as bailout. So yes, as a single unit my JJ is now heavier and bulkier, but in terms of total equipment weight it is about the same - and once in the water it is far more streamlined. Secondly I can more easily dive with open circuit teams as I now have almost the same configuration – long hose on the right post etc. Thirdly bailing out is simple – no grabbing for a stage reg, which will make life far simpler once I’m carrying multiple stages. And finally as I have no plans to use the unit for shallow shore dives I’m not trying to get the unit to be as light-weight as possible.*

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Day 2 and we finally got into the water. Suddenly everything felt familiar – I was wearing my standard backplate, had regs and hoses in the normal places and as we do on all GUE classes we started by doing nothing. No skills, no drills, just playing with our buoyancy and trim, aiming to find the still-point where our focus can change from ourselves to the team and where stability and control are at their maximum. As usual it takes a while, but it is well worth it. Richard our instructor explained it perfectly – the few drills we did, including the ascents and descents, were purely introduced to try to distract us from maintaining our stable platform.

Day 3 saw us back at the lake again, this time focusing on skills and drills. We did everything you'd expect on the CCR class – bailout drills, DIL flushes, running the unit manually using the MAV, simulated solenoid failures, simulated controller failures, flooded loop recovery etc. Throughout it all Richard demanded we maintained neutral buoyancy, trim and our focus on the team. (FYI – Like most GUE classes you cannot do this class 1-on-1 with the instructor.) During this day it was clear the slightly different emphasis GUE has when it comes to failures on the unit. Previously we had been taught that when a failure occurs there are several courses of action, depending on the failure. Bailing out was always an option, but so too was staying on the loop and attempting to fix things, for example by doing a DIL flush. GUE's approach is to bailout first and attempt to fix second – that way you have plenty of time, especially as we are carrying so much insurance (bailout gas).



Following this session in the lake we drove directly up to Northland Dive, our home for the final 3 days of the class. The focus for these 3 days was to do real experience dives, dropping to 30m, exploring the Canterbury, doing blue-water ascents and all the while practising and perfecting the various skills and drills. During our afternoon theory sessions we covered all the remaining material and went through a complete strip down and rebuild of our units – learning how to trouble shoot and fix typical problems. As all of us on the class were cave trained we even got to do a couple of dives inside the Canterbury – which is always fun!

So what did I take away from the class?

Whilst I'm still grumbling a little about the heavier weight of my new set up I'm happy with the reasoning behind it. I need to put in a few more hours to get comfortable, but trimix/decompression dives are beckoning. I'm loving not having to carry stages for bailout and I'm definitely starting to feel the same stability and control underwater as I usually have diving open circuit. Assuming everything goes well over the next 6-9 months and we manage to get in plenty of dives I'm looking forward to bring Rich back to do the upgrade class so we can start diving to the depths the unit is really built for. Watch this space!