

Course Report: GUE DPV course, May 2011

Rob Wilson

I have always felt a little envious when looking at my TDNZ and GUE t-shirts as both have images of a technical diver in the tow of this ominous looking Gavin DPV. Having never actually seen one of the proper technical DPVs, I felt a little out in the cold on this one.

This must be rectified, I thought, so for weeks I mulled around the idea of trying to get a ride on a X Scooter with a crew down south. Then a sneaky thought crossed my mind about my up and coming trip to the land of the rising sun, Japan, which had previously been my home for over 6 years.

I knew for a fact that there was a GUE instructor in Japan, Thomas Jonsson, that he was close to Tokyo and that he and my Technical Instructor Jamie Obern were friends. I had also seen on the Internet that Thomas was regularly running DPV 1 and Fundies courses. Without a second thought, I was straight into harassing Thomas via Face book and asking if, within my very narrow window of opportunity, Thomas could work out a DPV 1 course. I thought the possibility of it all coming off was next to nothing.

Within hours, the course was organized and I was registering on the GUE site. I was overjoyed; as usual, with any GUE course, everything went like clockwork.

Shortly after I arrived in Japan I was on a couple of local trains and then a ride on the fantastic Kodama Shinkansen bound for Nishina, all of which brought back memories of another life when I had previously lived in Japan. After a somewhat emotional journey through my memories and across the expanse of land between my drop zone and my destination, I arrived at a place called Numazu. Thomas was already there waiting patiently and waving from beyond the automated gate exit from the trains.

Numazu had a fairly warm but comfortable climate. Thomas was talking to me like an old friend rather than like a complete stranger and it was great. We talked diving and life as we drove towards our target destination, a coastal town called Osezaki. Osezaki was warmer but had a forgiving cool breeze which washed from offshore, ebbing with the tide. I had dived in Japan before and I knew that it could be fabulous. I had high hopes.



Day one for me was a typical GUE course, I just wanted to run away and hide! I was buddied with two TECH 2 qualified divers which was intimidating enough for a Fundamentals diver like myself and these guys were good!! S-drills, valve drills, everything was slick. And both of them had previously done scooter dives with these Dive-X units.

Me, as usual, I was like a fish out of water. I was struggling with the skills that I knew I had already done and now I also had the task of managing a DPV, which I had only just seen for the first time.

TECH DIVE New Zealand

I was embarrassed and in awe of these guys at the same time. My first dive was a mess as I hadn't weighted myself correctly and I later found out that, no matter what gear I was in, the 'Cuda' wouldn't go anywhere. Thomas kindly explained that my prop blades were in fact zeroed and, of course, without trimming them up, they would provide no forward thrust.

I left the water with my head down apologizing and waited for the hilarity at my obvious lack of skills.

To my surprise neither Kato-san or Mike offered any snide remarks, in fact they both took it in their stride and never even batted an eyelid. In actual fact, they just laughed it off with comments like "We have all been there". This and the fact that I would let my team down even more by not being there, were the two deciding factors for me not to drop out on day one.

In the water again, with the prop trimmed up, the 'Cuda' threw me forward at a surprising rate and that was only in 3rd gear out of an incredible 8. Although I had instantly gained respect for the 'Cuda 650, I was all over the place. I found that the 'Cuda' always seemed to plane upwards no matter what the grip. Thomas mentioned that it was not my lack of skill but, more likely, it was due to the DPV tow leash being too long. Once I had adjusted that, I started to slowly but surely work through the issues.



Thomas, as an instructor, was incredibly patient with me, constantly encouraging me and curbing my self destruction by guiding me towards the proper skills and requirements that I would need to pass this course. The thought of the graduation dive of 4kms and 80min run time seemed like an absolute impossibility at this point.

I got to know my team pretty well during the course. Mike Depaula and Eiichi Ray Kato AKA "The Mexican" were both blokes of the finest calibre and skill. I was again, as I was with Mike and Tom on my Fundamentals Course in NZ, lucky to have such a strong team. Thomas put us through the drills and skills with the certain sangfroid of an old hand. Watching GUE instructors in action, for me, is always an impressive and inspiring sight.

I was improving with each dive and gaining confidence slowly as the mortar of my skill foundations started to set. I now had time to take in some of the sights of the dive site. There was everything from schools of large Jack Mackerel to Lion fish and the sea life was really flourishing. I banked left and right and

followed my team through various terrain, not even realizing that I was using skills that I thought I hadn't even grasped. It all seemed so natural once I was relaxed and focused.

Thomas tested us at various points in the course and with me involved there was some hilarity but at the end of the day we all knew what we had to work on and practice. Thomas also highlighted mid-dive just how useful the scooters were against an underwater current by stopping us and turning us into the current, which we had been returning to shore on, just to feel how tough the dive would have been if it hadn't been carefully planned and executed. With the DPVs dis-engaged, we were literally going backwards on full fin strokes

TECH DIVE New Zealand

forward..!! I was no stranger to current after Africa or the South coast of New Zealand but the scary thing was that I hadn't even realized that we had been fighting current, due to the ease of the 'Cuda'.... I remember Thomas's words at that point: "Always watch the Wire Coral as a guide to when the current is running around here, the lower the degree to the sea floor the worse it is...!" Today the Wire Coral was pretty low and again I was in awe of the might of the DPV.



Graduation day was upon us and Thomas, straight off the bat, told me, "Rob, you are dive lead on this. I also want you to navigate us out and back so, when you are ready, let's get started". Horrified I stammered..."Ok, errr...Equipment checks...!" That day Mike and Thomas's lovely wife were joining my team. Eriko started to organize their kit and get ready for the Pre-dive checks and drills. Oddly enough things, although rough, seemed to go ok.

In the water again, we completed our checks and descended down into a 5m pre-dive holding position as I double/triple/quadruple checked the out bearing and, in doing so bumped straight into

Eriko who was actually completely oblivious to my mistake.. "Sorry Eriko!!". Anyway the obligatory "ok" was given and we were off on my lead.

We had a run time of 80mins and an average depth, to be controlled by me, of 18m and an out bearing of 30 degrees for an amazing range of 4kms. Giving the team the "Ok" and signalling "1 Gear down" we set off into the Osezaki Bay. I was soon overwhelmed by the sheer awesomeness of the whole thing. For me 'this was diving' and all the work had paid off. I felt confident that I knew what I was doing. There was a real feeling of satisfaction. I excitedly swung to my right and flashed my HID across the nose of Eriko's 'Cuda'. She snapped a look at me instantly and I signalled, "Ok?" which was followed by a big "Ok". Then I looked right towards Mike and he was, perfectly in formation, cruising at 18m. I repeated the same question and he answered with another big "Ok" I was on a high, it was a really awesome moment for me. Here I was navigating an 80min dive traveling on a scooter out for a distance of 4kms whilst holding team position, trim and depth, and absolutely loving it.

The land rose and fell and sometimes it was like a 45 degree drop on my right. In my "moment" however I had dropped the entire team down to 20m so signalled my team to rise up and level off again at 18m. The team effortlessly rose into position as we wove our way out to sea.

Nearing the turn point, Thomas swung ahead and took the lead to drop us down to the deepest part of the dive at close to 30m where we could see some of the Gorgonian fans which resided in the deeper waters of the bay. I had seen them before but these were impressive. One purple one, in particular, was just sublime. We slowed down and admired these 'frozen in time' aquatic fireworks. Again I was just in awe of the whole dive.

We all signalled and confirmed that our run time was up and that we were right on target with our gas calculations, times and navigation so we swung around and once more Thomas handed me the reins and we were off. The previous days had been dogged by other divers silting the hell out of the place but today we were

TECH DIVE New Zealand

well out of the range of the average diver and the visibility was positively tropical as was the lovely warm 19 degree water. For a Wellingtonian, these were luxurious conditions. I was loving it.

This time I noticed that we could roughly follow the lay of the land to re-trace our tracks but staying on the bearing would bring us back into the actual bay so I continued religiously on that bearing as we made the sad return home. On the way home, I was wondering if Thomas would notice if one of his 'Cuda's' went missing, ha ha ha...

Back on shore, it was all smiles. The dive was spot on, all our plans had panned out correctly and we had safely executed our trip and really enjoyed it. Thomas strode over and shook Mike's hand and said, with a broad grin, "Congratulations Mike, you have passed!" He then said the same thing to me....I was beaming and the only thing for it was a quick dip in the hot pool followed by one of Thomas's trade mark vanilla ice cream's topped with fine ground coffee....

What a course...

And in the immortal words of Hannibal (The A-team):

"I love it when a plan comes together..."

