

## Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right.....

*Jamie Obern*

I'm watching Kirill like a hawk. Truth be said I should be watching Marc as well, but I know Kirill is going to cause all the problems. I've already corrected his trim and sloppy fin kicks; told him to slow down and pay more attention to his buddy; pointed out the contents hanging from his pocket, picked up the bits he's 'mistakenly' dropped and stopped him waving the light back and forth as he reels – so what's next? Buoyancy – firstly he's doing everything on his dry-suit, then he's breathing too deeply, finally he's doing too much fiddling with the



JP Bresser & Rich Walker

wing inflator – eventually he settles down, giving me enough time to introduce a valve failure scenario. Marc calmly deals with the post failure and signals Kirill to come and help out. Again I'm ready for Kirill's antics – I stop him from shutting all the valves, stop him from switching Marc onto the dead post 'by mistake', get him to manage his light better and stop shining it in my face and finally ensure he turns the isolator back on. Phew – maybe I'll make it to the end of this session in control.

We start our ascent at the shot line – there is a current running and I'm working hard to stay in a position where I can see everything the students are doing, provide feedback and keep them from drifting away from the line. We have a few buoyancy wobbles on ascent but nothing major and at the 6m stop Marc and Kirill start their gas switch. Kirill is confusing things by trying to get out his SMB mid-way through and not paying attention. Suddenly he's got his back to me and has done the gas switch in record time, preventing me from checking all the steps. Dammit – I need to get him to do it again, but now the SMB is up and the dive continues – oh well – something to catch in the debrief. I look over at Rich who is acting as examiner and see him chuckling to himself. I think I've done OK, but I'm tired.

Mario Arena teaching a Tech 2 class

At the surface I slide back into my normal debrief mode, running through the dive like a story – only to realize this habit is exactly what Rich has been trying to break all week. I stop and focus on the three key points from the dive – the three most important areas for Kirill and Marc to fix for the next dive. I finish and breathe a sigh of relief – now I just have to listen to Rich and Kirill's debriefs. Oh yes and then we do the whole thing again, only with Marc teaching instead of me and Rich causing all the problems whilst Kirill watches. If you're wondering what's going on this is my GUE Tech 1 Instructor class - and it's hard!



However, there are some upsides to this class. Firstly I am in warm southern Europe in the summer, Croatia to be exact, which makes a lovely break from Auckland in the winter. Secondly I'm working with Rich Walker

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(UK), GUE's head of Tech Training and Kirill Egorov (Russia) another hugely experienced GUE Tech Instructor Trainer. Also on the class is Marc Hall (USA) a GUE instructor based in California. And prior to the class I've been diving with Mario Arena (Italy) one of GUE's Training Council members and JP Bresser (Netherlands) another very experienced GUE Instructor. Getting to spend time with these guys, pick their brains about what's new in the diving world and gain a few good ideas for teaching, marketing and motivating students is invaluable.



Andras, my Hungarian dive buddy

In addition to the in-water sessions the class also covers all the lectures and dry-runs, plus everything else you would expect and as well as getting a chance to present and be examined on all the sessions myself, I also get to watch Marc present everything. I also see Kirill and Rich demo some stuff – all of which provides me with some new ideas for improving my own teaching. It is of course not without a certain amount of stress and midway through the class I can't help wishing it was over, but by the end I know I'm a better instructor and ready to teach my first class.

When I sit down with Rich and Kirill at the end of the 5 days to do my formal debrief their feedback is very positive. They are happy to award me the first signature – meaning I am ready to teach a full class – and then they drop an unexpected bombshell – could I stay on in Europe for another 3 weeks and join the GUE Instructor Trainer class? I know I'm in trouble – not with GUE but with Mel. My one month Europe trip is going to turn into two months – and I'm going to miss our 10th wedding anniversary.

Derk Remmers teaching a Tech 2 class

After three weeks of visiting family and friends in the UK and France I return to Croatia for the IT class. The class is being taught by JJ and Panos, respectively GUE's President and Head of Quality Control. I'm joined on the class by 4 other experienced instructors, Derk (Germany), Bruno (Italy), Gunnar (Norway) and Gareth (UK). Together we will be going through all the standards, teaching techniques and how to grade prospective instructor candidate, before finally doing the most stressful part - a skills demonstration with JJ. And I mean stressful. Usually when you are examined there might be one or a maximum of two examiners, but for this session everyone in the water is an examiner. One person films whilst the other 4 take notes on your technique – ready to rip you to shreds at the surface. And of course everyone has superb skills, so the slightest fin out of place or other wrinkle will be spotted. And I thought my sigh of relief at the end of the T1 ITC was a loud as it could get.



# TECH DIVE New Zealand

However, the experience again proves invaluable, with all of us getting some tips for improvement and the reassurance that our fellow instructors are as good as we would expect. As the class draws to a close JJ confirms all of us have passed and finally we enjoy a well-earned beer - or two.

Happily my Croatian experience is not quite over as I've tagged on a few extra days to simply go diving and enjoy the many world class wrecks the Adriatic has to offer. I continue to enjoy the truly Global nature of GUE, diving with experienced divers from yet more varied nationalities - Hungary, Switzerland, Portugal, Bosnia, Croatia and Poland. I also get to meet another 3 GUE instructors - Jesper (Sweden) and Dorata and Bartek (Poland). On the surface communication is sometimes a little hard, but underwater everything works perfectly and I happily enjoy scooter dives and wreck penetration dives at 60m+. The geographical isolation I sometimes feel in NZ is completely forgotten.



Panos looking relaxed

So after two months enjoying southern Europe in the summer AND missing my 10th wedding anniversary, what do I have to show for it all? Firstly I can now confidently recommend Croatia as a dive destination - full details of which I have provided on the following pages. Secondly I can now start working with anyone who wants to become a GUE Instructor and when ready I can provide the first signature towards the following ratings: Fundies, Rec 1, Rec 2 and Rec 3.

And finally I can now start teaching Tech 1 classes in NZ. My first full class has to be overseen by an examiner - which will happen in Feb - but after that I can run them whenever anyone wants. So who's keen?