

## The Correct Way to use Diver Propulsion Vehicles: August 2013

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Hearing a harried parent's cry 'Stop playing with that! It's not a toy!' Evoked childhood memories for me and I'm guessing, now I've mentioned it, for you too! I'm getting older and lately the very definition between toys and tools seems to be blurring...

It can't just be me. Can it?

And no, I'm not being wowed by the new lawn mower (although she is cute as a button!) or being charmed by the presser-washer. Nope, I've treated myself to some super cool and very exciting dive tools. **Scooters**. Oh yes! 'Tools' which, in addition to

significantly extending my diving, are proving to be huge amounts of fun. I'm not alone either. The instructor training I completed earlier this year made me acutely aware there's a fast growing global group of divers 'playing' with these fantastic tools on, pretty much, a regular basis. Cool. Very cool indeed.



However, before I launch into talking about the scooter classes I've been running recently, I'd like to offer up a few of the reasons why a DPV **really is** a very useful tool for divers. (In case you're one of the uninitiated still convinced that scooters are barely disguised 'toys').

Using a DPV increases the distance you can travel. This opens up great dive possibilities well beyond those you'd achieve by swimming. Instead of worrying about long distances, possible currents and maybe even CO2 build up, you can head off and cover very large distances quite comfortably and confidently with a good scooter. Also, importantly, your gas consumption is reduced giving you more time to enjoy the underwater world. Additionally your capacity to manage equipment e.g. cameras or stage bottles is significantly increased, making otherwise impossible technical dives quite manageable.

There are a growing number of scooter divers in NZ which is awesome! In March this year I went to Australia to complete my GUE DPV1 Instructor training and in August ran my first two DPV1 classes here in Auckland. Conducted over a (very intense) 3 day period, this class teaches students everything they need to know regards safely using a scooter in an open water environment. (An additional course covers the overhead environment.) Starting with the basics of how to set up and prepare your scooter for diving, the class progresses to riding and manoeuvring techniques, planning dives and finally how to deal with emergencies. Over the course of 5 dives students learn a variety of different skills, from speed matching to crash stops, towing to ascents, diving as a team and gas sharing. It does sound like a lot to cover in 3 days, but the aim is to allow students to become confident and safe using the tool. The scooter is then a real asset to their diving rather than a hindrance.

To give you an idea of just how comfortable you can become using a scooter underwater think back to when you learned to drive a car. In the beginning it takes almost all of your concentration to change gear without stalling (hill starts and traffic lights are the stuff of nightmares as I vividly recall) but having learned, most of us happily drive our cars without thinking much at all! We navigate our way around town whilst humming to the radio and chatting merrily to our passengers. The goal of scooter training is much the same. We want you to be equipped to use the scooter competently enough to keep almost all your focus on the environment around

you, your equipment and your team. For example checking your spg or adjusting your buoyancy should be no harder whilst scootering (although as everyone discovers there is a degree of practice required!)

We live in the land of “She’ll be right!” A classic kiwi comment. Part sanguine acceptance of the vagaries of life and part naïve optimism? I can’t help wincing when I hear that particular term applied to diving, especially more complex or deeper dives, or worse when it’s regarding leaking or badly maintained equipment. ‘Just a few more dives and I’ll get her serviced...’ Arrrgghh!

So. Scooters. Do you really need training in how to use one safely? Hell yes!

I laid out a ton of cash to go to Australia and become a DPV Instructor so clearly I believe you do need training and my reasoning is as follows:

1) Whilst it is relatively easily to just take a scooter and start riding you are unlikely to get the best out of it without some tips. You wouldn’t dream of heading up the slopes without having had at least a few lessons with a ski instructor. It’s not safe and you’d look like a donkey in front of your mates.

2) Taking a scooter and riding without any planning is like going for a drive in a car without a fuel gauge. How far can you go? A prudent user would limit themselves to only areas which allowed for a swimming return to the exit point but if you do this you will never get full use out of your DPV.

3) What happens when things don’t go to plan? In May, a group of us were scootering together in the Adriatic when we were forced into sudden crash stops to avoid a monofilament fishing net which would have snared us all. And that’s a simple problem compared with having to scooter a long distance whilst sharing gas if you’ve never done it before!



I’m trying not to sound like a doom monger but if used incorrectly you and your scooter could face very real hazards. Without proper planning it’s possible to find yourself stranded when the DPV runs out of power far away from your boat or the shore. Used carelessly your scooter could churn up the bottom destroying visibility or damaging the wildlife. Used inappropriately a scooter will take you down at a rate too fast for you to equalise your ears, or worse up far quicker than the recommended safe limit for off gassing. On my second scooter dive I lost track of time because I was enjoying the ride so much! This alone could quickly separate you from your team, or worse still you’ll run out of gas. Not cool.

These problems are simply managed with the right scooter training.

Just as parents worry when their son or daughter first gets behind the wheel of a car I find myself worrying when people start to ride scooters, particularly if the thinking is indeed ‘toy’ rather than ‘tool’! DPVs do offer another level of opportunity and excitement underwater and the sensation of riding is fabulous, but they can also carry you into situations far more complex than swimming alone.

Be smart. Get trained.