

## Course Report: Auckland University Open Water Course – “Tec Style”, 10-28<sup>th</sup> March 2010

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According to the latest advertising from my gym it only take 21 days to start a habit, which begs the question – how long does it take to break a habit? When it comes to diving I know from bitter experience that habits built up over many years are incredibly difficult to break. I know because after 15 years of successfully diving in a BCD I found moving to a backplate and wing very frustrating. Nothing was where I expected it to be, all the D-rings had moved and even the rear dump was different. I had to change how I got in and out the harness, my position in the water was different and I went from being completely comfortable in the water to fighting with my kit like a newbie diver again. Yes this phase did pass and now I would never go back to a BCD, but at the time there was a lot of foot stamping and pouting – or so says Jamie.



Of course if I'd learned from day 1 in a backplate and wing it would have been different. New divers accept that they have to learn how everything works and somehow learning is much easier than re-learning. Without habits to break new divers just watch how something is demonstrated and copy it. They don't expect the D-rings to be anywhere else or have any preconceived idea of how to get in and out of kit. In short having watched now my students learn from the start in a backplate and wing I wish I'd learned that way from the start too.

The Auckland University Diving Club first approached me last year to see whether I was interested in teaching open water classes. Initially I was reluctant as teaching standard open water classes to individuals whose sole aim is to 'get a feed' had become a bit stale for me. However, when the Uni club said that what they wanted was to teach from the very beginning in a backplate and wing, emphasising the importance of foundational skills, I decided that maybe I could teach open water again. At the very least it would be interesting to see if teaching in a backplate and wing was any different from the other classes I have taught.

Teaching the theory part of the course was the same as it always is, the only slight difference being that I combined two classes together, but it was the pool work that I was most interested to do. I spent most of the day before the first pool session setting up the regs so that everyone had long hoses and checking all the gear and then Astrid and I headed to the Olympic Pool in Newmarket to start teaching. As expected the students didn't notice anything odd, but the other classes that were also using the pool were clearly very intrigued. It wasn't long before the first DM from one of the other classes walked over to ask what I was teaching – only to walk away somewhat confused when I said 'open water'. He was followed by one of the other instructors who asked the same question, which he then followed up with 'But this kits a bit fancy for open water isn't it?' To make matters worse the Uni class then confounded the others further by perfecting their hovers (horizontal) by the end of session 1 in the water. Of course I'd like to think that it was the result my great teaching rather than the kit....

In short all the pool work was easy, even teaching the students how to manage the regulator on the long (2m) hose posed no problems. In some ways I wish we could have videoed the whole process to show experienced divers when they start to whinge about 'new' kit on their first technical diving course sessions! Then again I'm

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not sure if I would have appreciated seeing a diver with no dives making me look bad when I already had 800+ dives under my belt.

For the open water sessions we did a mixture of dives at Lake Pupuke and Jones' Bay. Again the students made the skills look no harder in 'technical' kit than it is in normal 'recreational' kit and again all the other classes that were running at the same time eyed the Uni students with a mixture of fascination and envy.

Which leaves me unsure of what else I need to say. The conclusions should be obvious to everyone!

Teaching students from day 1 in a backplate and wing was easy, both for me as the instructor and the students. It doesn't add any extra burden or stress and in fact made certain skills like sharing air and buoyancy control far easier. In fact if you want the best idea of how successful it was ask the students themselves. We did – straight after one of them had completed the AOW course, this time using a BCD. Their first comment: "I want the backplate and wing back."



Given that I now dive exclusively in a backplate and wing and promote them as the best way to dive it is reassuring to know that new divers with very few dives also prefer backplates and wings. It was the same when BCDs were first introduced – the established idea was that everyone had to learn in a front inflation system (ABLJ – adjustable buoyancy life jacket) – and it took a while for everyone to change. I'm now certain that everyone will change again. Before long all students will learn from the start in a backplate and wing and what was once seen as technical diving gear will become the new 'recreational'.

