



Why I Dive Sidemount

Text by Olgo Torrey
Photo by Peter Symes

“Long dives, no pain” was the main reason for me to learn this configuration. I have been using sidemount for nine years now, and I still think it is the best approach to prevent the deterioration of one’s neck, shoulders and back.

As divers age, it is important to prevent injuries and dive without pain. Diving off a boat is different than from diving in caves. Bad weather, limited space, small entry and exit doors, the crew’s knowledge of sidemount and poorly designed ladders are the challenges sidemount divers face. Caves do not have these issues. Nowadays, dive boats on the US northeast coast let

more sidemount divers on board and are not as hesitant about it as when I started.

In other parts of the world, sidemount is still new to boat diving. Last year, I was diving off a live-aboard, and I was not allowed to dive sidemount, despite my nine years of experience and certification card. The main reason is that these boats cater to single-tank, no-decompression divers and lack understanding of the sidemount configuration.

Also, some captains feel sidemount has no place on boats. They think that if the seas pick up while sidemount divers are underwater, using an equipment line or handling tanks up could be dangerous. In this situation, a sidemount diver does have to be ready to climb the ladder wearing their tanks. Despite this, I think the sidemount configuration is safer due to the close proximity of tank valves, hoses and regulators.

Photography

Underwater photography with sidemount has its challenges. Once, I tried to take a photo of a seabird sitting on the water’s surface, and the bird was looking down. Being underwater, it was not easy to turn on my back because

the tanks prevented me from easily rolling over. Backmount is better suited for getting into this position. Otherwise, sidemount does not affect the way I shoot, but it does allow me to fit into tight spaces to get different compositions.

Advantages and logistics

Trim and swimming are more comfortable while using sidemount. Transporting single tanks used for sidemount is less weight to carry than banded, double-backmounted tanks. After diving, coming back on the boat, tanks can be hung on an equipment line and pulled up onto the boat. Also, tanks can be removed from the harness, when coming up the ladder and then handed up to a crewmember.

All in all, the benefits of using sidemount outweigh the challenges, and I will continue to use this configuration on my dives as an underwater photographer. ■

Olga Torrey and Larry Cohen are a well-traveled and published underwater photographers based in New York City, USA. They offer underwater photography courses and presentations to dive shops, clubs and events. For more information, visit: fitimage.nyc and liquidimagesuw.com.



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