



technical matters

Leigh Cunningham

Are you really up to the job with an Advanced Open Water course?

Double standards

Leigh Cunningham is the technical manager and TDI Instructor Trainer for Ocean College, Sharm El Sheikh. Probably best known for his records - Leigh once held the record for the deepest dive in the Red Sea, and is the current holder of the record for deepest wreck dive - and attempts of reaching extreme depths, he also has a wide range of teaching credentials to his curriculum: TDI instructor trainer, DSAT Tech Trimix instructor, PADI MSDT IANTD Technical diver instructor CMAS 3 star instructor

For the last 30 years or so, dive training agencies have been certifying recreational divers as competent to plan and carry out non-decompression and no-stop dives to a max depth of 40msw. This naturally leads to a perceived level of ability, the "advanced scuba diver". But how "advanced" are they really?

The difference between the perceived level of ability and the true level of ability, directly after training is quite often too big. Divers may thus find themselves planning and attempting dives well beyond their capabilities, even when they are diving within the formal depth and time limits for their certification.

Around 70% of certified



PETER SYMES

In over their heads? Wreck diving in the Baltic, even to just 25 meters, can be very challenging

divers worldwide have been certified by the single largest training agency. A high percentage of these 70% go from being non divers to become "advanced scuba divers" in less than a week, and with under 10 open water dives under

their belt. According to the standards set forth by the largest training agencies, it's actually possible to achieve advanced diver certification from non-diver status in as little as four days.

Possibly, in this case, the terminology "advanced

diver" should be reviewed, and the number of required days, or dives, adjusted before divers can gain "advanced diver" certification. That being said, the majority of dive operators and diving instructors would not consider running open

water students through to advanced diver in four days only. Even so the system is still open to abuse, and in some cases it is.

In the modern day of diver training, fast track training draws in the package tourist who wants to complete diver training, going from non-diver through to advanced diver, within the duration of a short holiday. "Resort courses" are becoming more and more popular as time goes by.

Looking at some of the biggest diving resorts today, ten years ago they consisted of just a few makeshift bamboo huts on the beach, which are now replaced with 5-star hotels, a golf course or two and several hundred dive boats. In the 21st century, this machine needs to be fed! I hope the need to continually

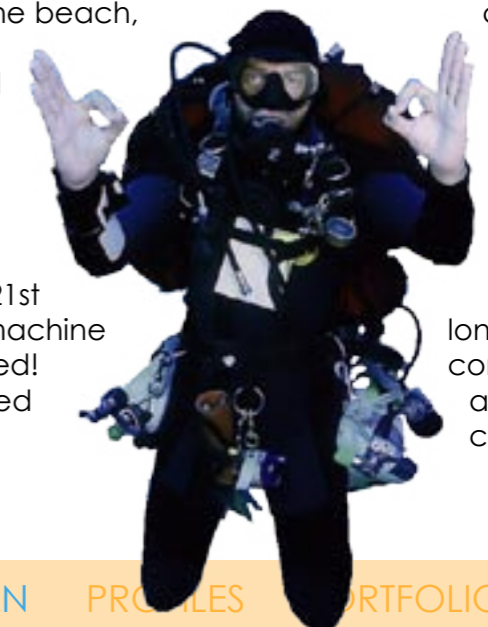
review, improve and update diving courses at all levels, has not been lost in the haze of impressive marketing campaigns.

There needs to be a healthy balance. As diving professionals, it is our duty to promote the best method of training—he scales appear to be off balance.

Room for improvement

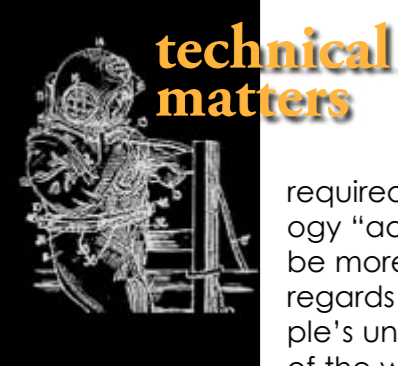
The fact of the matter is that diver training today could be better if there was a little more emphasis on diver training at all levels and a little less emphasis on developing the shortest possible course and selling it to everyone including the dog.

If more dives and a generally longer more comprehensive advanced course was



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required, the terminology "advanced" would be more accurate as regards to most people's understanding of the word. Some less popular training agencies require more dives and training in order to gain advanced diver certification. The end result in this case is a better trained diver, "more advanced".

My advice would be to consider all your options before opting for the shortest most popular course.

"Technical recreational training"—decompression/extended range/mixed gas diver training—has increased dramatically in the last five years. Due to the nature of this type of diving, the required training is more intense, more equipment is needed and advanced dive planning (deco software packages) is carried out delving deeper

into the effects of O₂, N₂ and He on the body and mind under pressure.

Due to higher a demand for diver level courses, the market for technical instructors and instructor trainers has increased. Observing the change in technical diver training in the last 10 years, I would say technical training agencies are doing a very good job bring technical training into the 21st century.

Instructors have been dragged off the soap box, and the black board has been replaced by the laptop! Outdated skills, which have no value in the specific type of technical course—i.e. skills relating to cave diving have no place or value in an open water course, have been replaced with skills that have clear values and objectives.

All good stuff

What concerns me is the introduction of the technical instructor and instructor trainer

who have not yet earned their wings as a technical diver. When I say "earned their wings", I am not suggesting technical instructors should be breaking depth records or pushing the envelope in general. But they should be throwing the twin set and stages on from time to time and making the odd deco dive or two. More and more often in recent years, I'm meeting highly qualified recreational instructors and course directors who have technical teaching status and instructor trainer ratings. Amongst their impressive array of cards (enough to wall-paper a small house) we find the technical instructor or instructor trainer card.

I'm then disappointed to discover that the instructor or instructor trainer has none of his own tech kit or equipment. Instead, he uses club equipment, owned by the dive

ADAM BUTLER



center when running courses! No need to own your own kit if you don't "dive the dive"!!

"Get out there"

My advice to technical instructors and instructor trainers who have little technical diving experience is: "Get out there." You cannot conduct technical diving courses without the teaching license, but unfortunately, you may conduct technical diving courses with very little technical diving experience.

Do the right thing, dive more! ■

Have the dive training agencies of today sold out and lost sight of safety and common sense in the relentless pursuit of another dollar?



Want to win one of these? Read our next issue!

Leigh Cunningham would certainly agree that one of the Golden Rules of technical diving has got to be: *Always analyze and label your gas.* If you're wanting a simple solution for Nitrox analysis, take a look at the compact GA-O2 Check Oxygen Analyzer from Technical Diving Limited www.techdivinglimited.com Since it's launch, the GA-O2Check Oxygen Analyzer has taken the U.S. diving world by storm. Probably because this durable splash proof analyzer is easy to use, runs on user replaceable AAA batteries and is quick responding. So, if you fancy getting your sticky paws on one, just jump onto www.techdivinglimited.com —they ship worldwide—or read the next issue of X RAY MAG in which we will have a competition you can enter to win one of these cool puppies. Safe diving!



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