

# The HangLine

Issue #00-02

Posted March 2000



## Cheap Parachutes and Bad Haircuts!

By Bill Nadeau

### **For Sale - Cheap Parachutes!**

Not an appealing ad when you think about.

Would you go to a lawyer who earned their degree from a correspondence school found on the back cover of a pack of matches?

How about the doctor that advertises;

### **2 for 1 Open Heart Surgery - Hurry In!**

When you look at all of these advertisements you do not really see any deals because discounting products or services that our life depends upon suggests that somewhere along the line our personal safety has been compromised.

The difference between the dive retail industry and other types of business is the intimate maintenance that dive shop owners must maintain with their diver clientele. This begins with diver training, carries on with equipment sales and is completed with a gear servicing and air fills.

If you were to learn about skydiving and you had a choice between two skydiving schools, one with a 3-hour course and one with a full day course, which would you choose? I personally would be asking what is being taught in the full day course that is not in the 3-hour program and how it is going to affect my ability to jump from a plane safely. Unfortunately at the technical scuba diving level there exists the same type of offers - cheap training involving very little academic or practical instruction.

Divers are often sold on the premise that longer courses add 'more stuff you don't need to know' or 'that you don't need to go through all of those steps to dive deep'. Divers can also be sold the 'quick and easy' by having their egos stroked, it is an attempt to justify that complete training can be waived based on the student's previous experience or history. If you have ever received a certification card for any level (be it an Open Water Diver or a Trimix Diver course) after putting in less than the required time, then you have been cheated. I have taught a lot of individuals at the technical level, many of them extremely experienced and competent divers yet all of them have profited from completing the





entire program. Technical instructors that do not provide a comprehensive course usually are not very experienced or knowledgeable about that level of diving and unable to teach a complete program or really do not care about supplying you with the complete program. Either way you do not want to take a course from this individual.

Next comes product. The dive shop has a responsibility to provide good service and product to their divers. They are in fact vending life support equipment - not car stereos or personal computers. Asking a dive shop for a deal means that you are asking them to work less yet provide the same commitment and service. Sure we all look for deals but keep I mind that if you cannot afford the equipment technical or sport diving requires, you probably cannot afford the training or maintenance for it.

Every year new dive shops open while others close down. The reason for shops closing can usually be traced back to a lack of profitability. It goes like this - a new shop opens and offers great deals to attract new clientele, usually clientele from other shops. They sell a large volume of gear and courses at discount prices but find that they have inevitably fallen short of meeting their overhead. Within a year or two they cannot meet their expenses and close their doors for good. Like any retail industry a buyer will get better service from the shop they do business with so it makes sense to do business with a store that will be around for awhile. In the long run paying a little extra for equipment that has not been discounted will save you money, time and a piece of mind because that same shop will be around to take care of your needs and provide follow up service.

I read an interesting story about a perplexed barber who had been cutting hair for decades in his little family shop. For years this professional offered quality cuts and good conversation for a reasonable price. One day he called his friend and asked him to visit as he was very troubled about the competition that had moved in across the street. He told his friend that other shops had come and gone over the years but this new shop was aggressively trying to attract customers by offering cheap haircuts. "Look!" the barber said to his friend, "Look at the sign in that new shop's window." The barber's friend looked at the sign across the street that read;

**'WE OFFER \$7 HAIRCUTS!'**

The poor barber told his friend that he could not compete with such a low price and did not know what to do. His friend looked long and hard at the sign and then left the shop. Later that day he returned with a new sign for the old barber to hang in his window. The sign said,

**'WE FIX \$7 HAIRCUTS!'**

This is so typical of any service and true to the word that we really do get what we pay for. For scuba diving and especially technical diving this approach can be seriously hazardous. We are wearing life support equipment, gear that we count on not to fail or have a problem. As the complexity of our dive increases so must our attention to detail and quality.

Also keep in mind that a facility needs to maintain its responsibility to the diver by providing a complete range of services including air and nitrox fills. The cost of





providing air and nitrox is expensive and never marked up. Shops must maintain meticulous standards to air quality and safe operating procedures which is not always so easy.

Ever felt ripped off because the last fill you got came back 100-200 psig short? Divers have to understand that every tank is stamped with a working pressure and legally dive shops cannot exceed that pressure during a fill.

The Transport Commission or Department of Transportation can, have and will levy fines and confiscate any tank found filled beyond its working capacity. A cylinder short a few pounds of pressure has likely cooled in the water and still maintains a full fill. The difference of 100 or 200 psig is not a significant factor in dive planning so divers who are concerned about short fills should seriously consider bigger tanks or work on improving their air consumption rates. Over-pressurizing tanks is not only illegal but compromises the safety of all involved.

equipment, diving courses and service. As divers we need to support that process by providing a commitment of our own, one that involves a willingness to pay for excellence and a respect for safe operational procedures. Interestingly enough the technical community helped set that trend because technical divers traditionally understood the importance and value of quality. Perhaps as technical diving enters a new era and generation of divers it can motivate a renewed attitude towards that same level of quality and service..

~Safe Diving



**Top Left:** An aluminum tank with current VIP and hydro exploded into three pieces tearing apart this dive shops fill station. The tank was being filled slowly and appeared to be in excellent condition.

**Below:** After ripping through three walls one piece of the tank destroyed this bathroom. This tank blew under regular working pressures accentuating that overfills are unacceptable.

Photos courtesy of Beaver Aquatics, Vancouver Island

The retail facility is the driver of the diving industry. It is backed by manufacturers and training agencies to turn out quality

