

The HangLine

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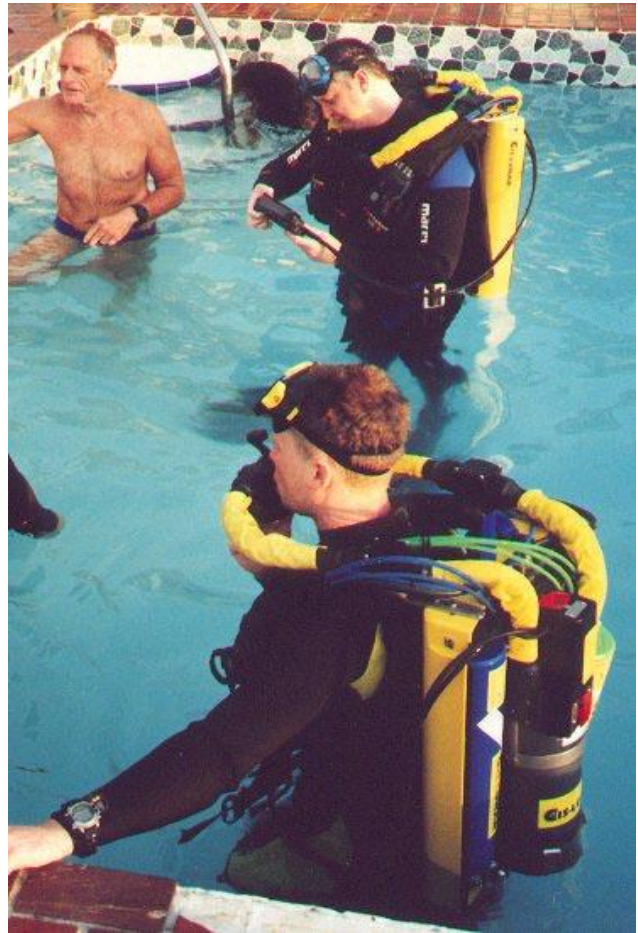
Peering Through the Looking Glass

By Bill Nadeau

And so passes the last day of the final year of the millennia and with it a generation of diving technology and ideology so dynamic that it's changing face creates controversy and inhibits acceptance.

No one can walk backward into the future. J. Hergesheimer, 1917

The single high pressure hose, the buoyancy control device, the dive computer, Nitrox, and Rebreathers; all have been met with resistance as traditionalists maintain that the old way of doing things should not be messed with – especially if it works. Those who dare to venture beyond conventional practices are labeled as cowboys taking on unnecessary risk or using things 'they don't need'. Yet time passes and we eventually accept the change (some earlier than others) and evolution continues to keep the world spinning. Ironically the latest in dive technology includes mechanisms (like Nitrox and Rebreathers) that have been around for over a century and were the birthing parents of the very same activity of sport diving we do today. I am often asked



My first Rebreather course was with Tom Mount in his back yard pool. He warned us that we would be regarded as 'cowboys' yet believed Rebreathers would eventually become the norm.





what I foresee in the future for diving technology. We are seeing the future today yet I believe some have turned their back on what will inevitably become tomorrow's standard – and this includes Nitrox and Rebreathers.

Some people peer through the looking glass and see a future with unlimited boundaries; a part of the underwater world that can now be safely explored using modern diving technology. This is a world that includes caves, deep walls, extended bottom times and shorter decompression requirements with far less equipment than we use today. They understand the human desire to explore, grow and change. They evolve and embrace the new era with open arms.



Others stare through the looking glass and only see their reflection. It is a comforting familiar image and therefore they are content with what they have. Unfortunately the world around them is quickly changing. For them Nitrox, Rebreathers, DPV (diver propulsion vehicles), communications and

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multi-functional computers are nothing more than novelties, fads and not where diving is going. Those who only see the present lose because diving is evolving, with or without them. They are history.

When people ask me what I see in ten years I describe the future diver as follows;

“An average individual with a small, light compact unit that delivers an optimal gas mixture containing oxygen, helium and maybe nitrogen for the depth he is diving at. Despite the small and weightless features of the unit the gas supply will be 5-10 times that of a standard 80cutf aluminum tank. This diver will have the capability of diving deeper and longer than the presently prescribed recreational limits of 100-130fsw (30-40msw). A small computer that not only tracks his depth, time and decompression requirements but the fraction and partial pressure of the oxygen that he is inhaling as well will continually monitor his dive statistics. His allowable bottom time will increase exponentially and the equipment he will use will provide him enough redundancy that he will be totally self-sufficient dramatically decreasing the level of risk for both he and his buddy.”

Yes and how many thousands of dollars will this cost? Consumers have a tolerance to what they will pay. Value, need

and want all contribute to a complex relationship that is recognized by manufacturers and retailers. The above





product is already available. As the demand increases the production numbers will match and soon exceed that of open circuit systems forcing prices to drop. They have already. My future does not see anything new in diving technology – just a take-over of the market. People are explorers by nature – which is why they took up diving in the first place. When they discover what new worlds can be safely reached with stuff like Nitrox, Rebreathers, and DPV's they will invest in this new technology. Technical diving will no longer be seen as a remote and shadowy arm of the sport.

There are still dive shops that do not have Nitrox available. And there are still a lot of instructors who cannot teach Nitrox or Rebreathers. They are staring at their reflection. The rebuttal; *'Oh I don't see a demand or a market for it.'* Too bad; for you are walking into the new millennium with your back to the future – and while your back is turned you may lose your clients. Why? They see the future is already here, the millennium is 'a comin' and they want to see what kind of exploration the new technology brings. Dive shops: if your customers and instructors don't see it, they will not ask you for it, they will go somewhere else and you will never see the market.

Stand today's diver side by side with the diver of tomorrow I described earlier. They are both outfitted in an equally priced set-up. Once today's diver compares the functionality and comfort of his unit with that of my diver of tomorrow – how long do you think it will be before today's diver will change his traditional approach to diving? I don't see too many old double-hose

regulators around anymore. Happy New Year!

~Safe Diving

