# DIVER TESTS



## **Efficacy of Valves**

The neck-seal worked impeccably, provided I wasn't rubber-necking while under water. I can't say the same of the low-profile Apeks dump valve, which I had to keep shut, and open only as and when I needed to during an ascent.

If I left it in automatic mode, I paid for the convenience with a very wet arm.

The inflation valve is an Apeks rotating job. This allows you the freedom to rig the inflation hose almost any way you like, and the fact that it has a standard international connection meant that when, just before one dive, the small O-ring in the suit-feed connector failed (not the one supplied to me by Otter), I could simply use my redundant BC feed and not miss the dive.

It did mean that had I wanted to blow some air into the BC at the surface, for example, I would have had to resort to the corrugated hose and its oral-inflation valve, or swap the hose back.

## **Materials**

The upper part of the BC is made using a woven material, whereas the lower part appears to be a lightweight trilaminate. There are reinforcing patches at the knees. The legs are finished off with neoprene sockends, for use with heavyweight canvas hiking boots.

These give the benefit of avoiding floaty feet during a dive, but my size 12s so clad only just managed to get into a pair of Mares Avanti Quattros in the largest size.

The upper part of the suit is finished in a bright red material that looked rather startling in any underwater photographs.

# Durability

The Travelite had been specially made for the New Product Showcase at the London International Dive Show, so the glue was hardly dry when I took it away with me.

Some of the smaller Otter labels did fall off while I was using it, along with some radarreflecting patches, but otherwise the suit held together well, and withstood the rigours of two dives a day on a crowded day-boat continuously for a week.

I was particularly careful only with the sockended feet when not wearing the boots.

The suit looked good and I think I looked good in it. I'd simply prefer a straightforward version with less material and a standard cross-shoulder zip.

COMPARABLE DRYSUITS TO CONSIDER: Whites Fusion £859

# CAMERA HOUSING HUGYFOT **D700**

**DSLRS IN DX SIZE PRODUCE** better-quality pictures than compact digital cameras, because the sensors are bigger. That said, these sensors are generally still half the size of a 35mm frame of film, so lenses have to be of shorter focal length to give the same angle of view as the 35mm equivalent.

Why not make the sensors as big as a full frame of film? It's possible, but as sensors get bigger they get exponentially more expensive. Producing a full-frame (FX) camera costs a bomb.

I've been getting stupendously high-quality results with my DX Nikons, but I was seduced into getting a full-frame FX Nikon D700, because it can use all the Nikon lenses I have collected since 1970, and can be used at very high lightsensitivity settings (such as 1600 ISO instead of, say, 200 ISO) without any digital noise or grain showing. Well, that's the excuse I gave my wife.

Every underwater photographer has flooded a camera and lens. I've done it more than once. After flooding my first DSLR, I was so scarred that I would never risk putting my then very expensive DX Nikon D2x in a housing.

The guys at Hugyfot have convinced me otherwise, because they've done away with that

business of sealing your beloved camera into its housing and hoping it doesn't drown when you dunk it. The Hugycheck system I reviewed recently (**DIVER** *Tests*, February) tests the seal by reducing pressure inside the housing and seeking out leaks using non-damaging air rather than destructive water.

It convinced me. I dived into what Gordon Brown had left of my pension fund for £2500 to buy a Nikon D700 and 16mm Nikon fish-eye lens. (By the time you read this, both will probably be obsolete!)

Superficially, the D700 looks much like my previous D200 (and the D300 that replaced it)

except that it has an even more marvellous focusing system, and needs longer focal-length lenses.

The 16mm Fish-eye on the FX is much like the 10mm Fish-eye on the DX I had been using, but all my old lenses work seamlessly (auto-focus apart, for the manual ones) and I have a huge choice of prime lenses (from 20m to 105mm) available for surface use or underwater macro photography.

Unlike many FX cameras, this is not a bulky beast, and any housing for it is only a centimetre or so taller, so this will prove a popular choice (

# **DIVER TESTS**

of full-frame camera with underwater photographers.

What matters is that I can habitually use small lens apertures and high shutter speeds, or use my flashguns on a one-eighth power setting, so battery charge lasts a lot longer.

I can get more than 200 RAW files recorded on a 4Mb CF memory card. I should be able to leave the camera sealed in its housing all day or maybe longer on a dive trip.

#### Access

The Hugyfot housing exudes good quality in the way it is manufactured from aluminium. Open it up and you'll see a lot of electrical components that enable it to be set up with different makes of flashgun in TTL mode.

It is slightly tedious to open, because a hexagonal wrench is needed. It won't get unlatched accidentally in the freshwater rinse tank, but you will need to search for the right tool each time.

The camera slips onto its mounting-plate to be held in place by a conventional tripod screw and a second screw-in locating pin.

You have to ensure that the camera and housing switches are in the "On" position, and that some other rotating switches are corresponding, camera to housing.

You then connect the flash lead to the hot shoe, being careful not to damage the two little LEDs of the Hugycheck system. With the battery previously installed under the camera mounting-plate, these will be flashing red.

The back of the housing is then dropped onto the front half of the clamshell case so that the two hexagonal-ended bolts locate.

The O-ring that makes the seal looks skinny but the Hugycheck leak-testing system provides peace of mind.

I did notice that it was possible to tighten up the two bolts further once it was under water, but you would need to have that hexagonal wrench with you.

## Controls

You then check that all the controls function properly, the camera's design dictating the position of the camera controls.

The Hugyfot housing uses very nice-looking buttons, but I have a couple of reservations. With many functions, you need to press in a particular button and, at the same time, rotate the command dial, which translates into a



rotating knob at the back of the housing. However, as with many other housings, this is very difficult to do while holding it under water.

Another camera housing I have allows you to lock in the main button, then use the same hand to rotate the command knob while you take the weight of your rig, complete with flashguns, in the other hand.

Not so this Hugyfot. The designer has made the housing very anatomically, but then added the necessary handles. I think they need to be about a centimetre closer to the housing to allow easy use of the controls.

The wheel for the lens-aperture control sticks out some distance away from the housing on a long stalk. It's as if the designer was uncompromisingly pursuing a nicely rounded housing, with this as an afterthought.

On the other hand, the shutter-release has been designed to merge with the line of the housing to such an extent that I often missed a shot while fumbling around for it after adjusting the aperture wheel. This might be less of a problem without the right-side handle.

The camera and housing did feel a little negatively buoyant in the water, and that was enough to make my arms feel tired once I started to get cold.

## Attachments

Having two bulkhead connections for the flash is very useful, though I tended to link my second flashgun by photocell slave, rather than have an extra wire.

I was hoisted on my own petard when one of my flashguns decided to cease working from its cell. The problem was solved before the next dive, by making the other the slave and swapping the cable around.

I liked the way my flash-arms mounted

directly to any of three ball-mounting points, including one on the optional extra handle.

I used the 16mm Nikon fish-eye and a 20mm Nikon rectilinear wide-angle lens behind the Hugyfot acrylic fish-eye dome port.

Ports are mounted using a bayonet system, but there was no tendency for the big dome to rotate undone by accident.

I can't say it was a good test of sharpness, because I was working in quite poor conditions of visibility, in very cold water in which thermoclines caused some refraction.

When it's time to retrieve the camera, the Hugycheck valve is unscrewed, accompanied by a satisfying inrush of air. The LED lights up red.

#### A POSTSCRIPT TO MY HUGYFOT EXPERIENCE

occurred at Zagreb airport, where the security people, unperturbed by cameras and diving equipment, spotted the Hugycheck pump and its 9V battery by X-ray in my luggage.

"Vot eez zees?" they asked.

Be careful how you say the word "pump" to airport security people. It can so easily sound like a B-word!

Whatever my criticisms of the Hugyfot housing, I wouldn't risk such an expensive camera and lens in one that didn't have a nondestructive leak test system - so I'll have to learn how to use it.

# 

PRICE >> FX Nikon D700 with 16mm Fish-eye lens, around £2500; Hugyfot housing with fish-eye dome port and Hugycheck system for around 3000 euros CONTACT >> www.hugyfot.com 



Travel for Diver Tests is arranged by courtesy of Scuba Travel Worldwide Holidays, the DIVER Award-winning UK tour operator. Many of John Bantin's dives this month were made with the help of the crew of the liveaboard Royal Evolution, during a pioneering trip to the dive sites of the Suarkin Islands in southern Sudanese waters.

For information on this and please visit the website



