



Text and photos by Steve Lewis

Being swept along on this technical diving thing, has been a long, somewhat twisted, but definitely entertaining journey. If you and I had met when the whole affair started, we could not possibly have envisioned how directly and pervasively, what were then radical activities, like cave diving, trimix diving and rebreather diving, would influence the mainstream dive community. Watching the evolution of technical diving, and being able to observe the changes it's wrought on all aspects of recreational scuba, has been a true privilege—and great fun.

But perhaps, evolution is too soft a word to describe what's happened. So many things have changed. Gear, training, the places we visit to dive, how we exchange information, even what form dive magazines and textbooks take: case in point with *X-RAY MAG* for example. I'm not particularly nerdy or wired but "traditionally printed" magazines and books no longer figure very prominently in my professional or personal life. I still do carry a notebook and pen in my backpack, but there's an iPad, iPad mini, and two smart phones in there, too. I really



Why you should never go diving with an idiot

—and how to avoid that happening to you

have more than the proverbial "1000 songs in my pocket". And I am typical rather than an exception.

However, some things have not changed. Especially good advice.

A while back when the tech diving revolution was first building up a head of steam, one piece of advice that created some controversy came from the politically incorrect keyboard and mouth of a character called George Irvine III.

He told anyone who would listen, not to dive with "strokes." The shortest possible explanation or definition of Stoke is someone who is unsafe and unaware. "Don't dive with strokes" was Irvine's corruption of much earlier advice from cave dive training manuals to not dive with folks whose skills and mindset were unknown. And that little gem—as light its impact was compared to Irvine's version—had its Genesis in the caution from open-water

training to be mindful when diving with an "insta-buddy".

Personally, I opt for the middle ground: You should never go diving with an idiot. Let's explore that statement.

What is a stroke?

One of the most controversial things about Irvine's don't dive with strokes advice, was the definition of a stroke itself. The actual guidelines describing

where strokery began and ended varied depending on who was supplying the definition—the most radical being a form of tribalism that I found reminiscent of the gang mentality I saw as a kid on the terraces of football grounds in London's East End—a sort of modified, "We're Millwall. Nobody Likes Us and We Don't Care!"

My definition of the sort of idiot who should be avoided when diving is easier to draw a box around... and I believe





tech talk

less tribal... but perhaps no easier for some of us to accept.

Complacency, for me at least and in the context of defining a diving idiot, is a solid starting point. If I wanted to build a monument to diving idiocy, complacency would be my cornerstone.

Complacency is sneaky, and the more skilled we become, the sneakier it gets. Regardless of how detailed and comprehensive our dive plan, it will be completely negated by complacency. Moreover, rather like a virus, once complacency gets a foothold in one's pre-dive process, it can spread and infect others. I believe it is a strong contender for top-spot in the list of things to avoid if we don't want to dive with an idiot.

So, a simple technique that can help us side-step complacency is what I'd like to make a case for.

Again, back when the tech diving revolution was tearing down limits imposed by the PADs and NAUIs of the dive industry, a pretty smart guy with more than a few dives in his log-book and a political incorrectness all his own, told me that complacency kills experienced divers.

His was not a quick and cursory sidebar conversation, but a week-long rationalisation that was part my first technical instructor program. It was Bret Gilliam, founder of TDI (Technical Diving International) who formalised for me the essential process of self-assessment, and reinforced for me the value of self-assessment as part of the prelim for each and every technical dive. It was, he

Complacency kills experienced divers.

insisted, self-assessment that could help an experienced diver avoid the Siren-call of complacency. Therefore, self-assessment was held up as a good habit to cultivate, and not a bad barrier to raise between you and a huge mistake.

The self-assessment process

Self-assessment begins with the quiet and reflexive process of providing oneself with honest answers to a series of simple questions.

- Does my training and experience match the needs of the team on this dive?
- Do I understand what's meant by the phrase "most skills are perishable" and have I recently practiced the skills needed to perform this dive?
- Do I have fluency in the distinct and particular skills needed to get me and my mates back to the surface in one piece should the crap hit the fan during this dive?
- Are the other team members ready for this dive, and in the event of a catastrophe, can they save themselves and me without submitted themselves to an unacceptable risk of injury or death?
- Is the gear my team and I are using appropriate and does it meet or exceed the requirements of this dive, and is it fit for purpose?
- Is there more than enough gas for everyone, and is it the right flavour or flavours?
- Do I feel confident, comfortable and capable to complete this dive safely, today?
- Does our dive plan cover our arses

Self-assessment [can] help an experienced diver avoid the Siren-call of complacency

and our assets?

- Are the environmental conditions here at the dive site less challenging, as challenging or more challenging than we planned for and how does that affect the answer to the next question?
- Is there is ANYTHING at all about the plan and intended execution of this dive that is outside the security of best practice? If so, has every one of us and our loved ones signed on it?

A lot has been said and written about the promotion and use of checklists in diving—especially rebreather diving—of late, but I believe that the self-assessment checklist needs to be adopted as part of the pre-dive protocols for ALL divers.

Actually, I feel strongly enough about the point to tell you that if you and your buddy do not engage in any form of structured self-assessment as part of your pre-dive routine, you are diving with not one, but two idiots... and so is your buddy.

And just to be clear, diving with an idiot can get you killed.

Steve Lewis is a diver, instructor, dive-industry consultant and author. He teaches and lectures at home and abroad. His main focus is to increase safety and point out ways to make us all better divers than we are now. His latest book, Staying Alive: Risk Management Techniques for Advanced Scuba Diving, is a best-seller, available at Amazon. For more information visit: Techdivertraining.org. This article is based on a presentation first made by Lewis at Beneath the Sea in 2013 and 2014.

Where modern technology enhances old fashion diving

W4 5mm



STYLISH SILVER DESIGN LOADED WITH FEATURES.

W4 is the latest back-zip wetsuit from Waterproof. After nearly 30 years of experience of making wetsuits we have put all our knowledge into this high-quality suit with an eye-catching retro-futuristic design.

The 3D anatomical design, with pre-bent arms and legs with stretch panels and gender specific construction ensures a comfortable fit and a relaxing body position in the water. 3D-moulded real rubber kneepads are perfect for the diving instructor who spends a lot of time on his/her knees in the water while teaching.

Double smooth-skin seals at arms and legs, adjustable neck and a 10mm spinepad, with an extra seal at the backzipper work together to keep the cold water out. Seals are designed to fit WP boots and gloves.

All zippers in top class Vislon from YKK. The Bronze slider in the back zipper ensures trouble-free function for many years. ToughTex panels at elbows and knees, Bonded HiQ Nylon Thread and 100% CR Neoprene in all panels - quality in every detail.

The W4 also features double computer strap anchors with anti slip, comfort front neck zipper, inner plush lining, seat and shoulder anti-slip reinforcement.



The WPAD™, or the Waterproof Personal Accessory Dock, is a soft artfully constructed docking station located on the right thigh used for attaching our expandable pocket.

www.waterproof.eu

