

GUE Fundamentals Course Report: 18 – 22nd August 2010

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Part of the online registration process which all students have to complete in order to attend a GUE class is a very thorough questionnaire. If you've been through this process you'll remember it well – it takes a long time and normally I recommend you have a cup of tea ready before you start. What you may or may not remember is the question about why you want to take the class. Although it seems like just another question it can make a huge difference to how I prepare as the instructor, especially when I have very experienced students. For this particular class I had such a group, with one Extended Range Diver, an Advanced Trimix Diver and a Rebreather Diver. Even though I knew them all well, I still took the time to completely read their profiles.

The reason for such careful consideration is that the GUE Fundamentals class is conducted in the 6 – 10m range, involves no decompression, no stage bottles and no complex gas management. It is exactly what it says – a fundamentals class – which might leave you confused as to why such seemingly well qualified and accomplished divers had decided to take it in the first place. In fact when you start asking such questions you sometimes find the attendees equally confused! Amazingly this isn't such a bad thing.

For this class my students were Tristan, Christian and Cam, with a combined total of well over 1,400 dives between them. I started as usual, by posing the same question they had already answered: 'Why are you here? What do you hope to learn?' Their answers were symptomatic of the underlying confusion – "To see a different type of diving." "To fill in the gaps from other courses." "To improve my skills." I played devil's advocate: How would the diving be different? What gaps? What skills? As usual for this course no one seemed certain, they'd all just heard it was a really good course and everyone else who'd done it had learned lots. Again this isn't such a bad thing, as usually it means students listen to everything you have to say. If only all classes could be that way...

With these introductions left unresolved we plunged into the course properly, starting with an introduction to the GUE organisation. This was followed as usual by a discussion of buoyancy and trim techniques and then we watched videos of some of the skills each student has to complete during the class. Less experienced students sometimes criticise these videos, finding minor faults in the demonstrations – (strangely they are less keen to criticise once they've tried them for themselves) – but within this very experienced group I could see some very furrowed brows. Everyone appreciated the high level of technique and ability on display and they all wanted to know how to be as good. If only all classes could....., oops sorry, I've said that already.

The focus of our second evening was kit configuration and given the group I did a far more in depth and comprehensive session than normal, covering all aspects of the GUE configuration. I've found that experienced divers have usually experimented with many different set ups over the years and normally have their own preferred methods – changing to something new



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requires good reasoning and persuasion. We got most of the way there on this first session and whilst I didn't say it, I was quietly confident that one in-water session would result in the final tweaks I wanted to see.

Friday morning we all met early at the Olympic Pools in Newmarket. As well as completing the swim test we would also do our first water session and dry runs for all the kicks and basic 5. Also joining us for this session was James who would be doing the videoing, fresh with instructions from Tom about how to use the camera. Unfortunately the instructions didn't include checking to see if the battery was flat so unfortunately we weren't able to get any video footage of the session. The pool session is always interesting – with no currents, no lack of visual references, no cold fingers, in fact virtually nothing to use as an excuse, students soon realise where they are at with their skills. As expected this group was very comfortable in the water, although we still spent a lot of time playing with weighting and shifting harnesses and backplates to improve trim. It was a good session and after 2 hours we were all tired. It was time to drop our cylinders off at Global Dive, grab a quick lunch and then head back for lectures.



Saturday morning most of us met at Global Dive to collect the tanks, although Christian being a North Shore resident had arranged to meet us at the lake. I decided to see how well the group was functioning as a team and told Cam and Tris that the group needed to nominate a team captain for the first dive. Cam had no hesitation – “Christian” – I guess the teamwork wasn't all there yet! At the lake I gave Christian the good news and we prepared for another 2 hour in-water session. (Just a side note for people thinking about doing this course – have good thermals, wear a hood and don't think about leaving your gloves behind to make it easier. By the end of the session you will have numb hands – as Cam discovered.)

The lake session was productive as always and we managed to run through all of the skills from the pool again so we could video them properly, plus did valve drills, s-drills, ascents, out-of-gas ascents and a few other bits. The main outcomes were that everyone realised how important the positioning kicks were – helicopter turn and back-kick – if they wanted to stay in formation. They also realised how difficult team diving is if you don't control your buoyancy and remain at the same depth as your team. Was this the different style of diving they were all expecting? After the session we returned to the classroom for a review and debrief of the video and more lectures – there's nothing like gas management calculations late in the afternoon to keep everyone awake.

For our final day we again met at Global Dive to collect tanks and then moved to the lake. The plan was to complete the skills still outstanding, mainly unconscious diver recovery and SMB deployment and then to go through all the other main skills again, particularly valve drills, s-drills and ascents. I was the video diver for the start of this session as James had to spend a little time with his better half and for the second part of the session Tom joined us to do the videoing.

Again everyone worked hard, although it became clear that Christian was struggling with his trim more than the others. For this final day he had changed over to a different type of wing, as his usual diving wing was causing problems - something we discussed during the equipment session. After one hour he decided to end



his diving to allow Tris and Cam to complete the skills before the team ran out of air – which I think was an admirable call – especially as it meant he would not complete the class.

After another hour in the water we completed the dive and I congratulated Tris and Cam on their performance. Christian was waiting for us, keen to hear how they had done. Once all the gear was packed away we headed off to the classroom for the final time, ran through the video, did a quick lecture on situational awareness and then started the exam. With only a few errors I'm pleased to say everyone passed.

So the outcome of the course – 'Tec' passes for Tris and Cam – very well done guys. As for Christian well he's going to be doing a few more dives in the lake with the new wing and then he'll be completing the course with me – and I have no doubt he'll do well. As for the confusion about why to do the course – well if you want to know why these guys did it I think they have a better understanding now. They definitely all learned heaps – which if I continue to do my job properly should always be the outcome.