

GUE Tech 1 – March 2014

Jamie Obern

The beginning of March this year marked the end of a long and very involved instructor training process for me. For a couple of years I have been working towards my GUE Tech 1 Instructor rating and on the 14th March, just as cyclone Lusi arrived, I achieved my goal. For those of you who are unaware of the class or the instructor training process here is a brief summary.

The course

GUE Technical Diver Level 1 begins where the Fundamentals class finishes and introduces students to the use of trimix and a single stage of decompression gas for dives up to a depth of 51m. The theory section of the class covers all the additional required equipment, plus goes into depth in the following areas: gas planning calculations, gas dynamics and physiology, decompression theory and practical decompression strategies. The practical part of the class covers all the additional in-water skills: gas switching, valve failures, sharing decompression gas, staged ascents etc. The aim is to ensure students are fully prepared to safely and enjoyably conduct technical dives with decompression obligations of up to 30mins.



However, unlike the Fundies course this class is intentionally designed to be a little more 'aggressive', or to put it another way, the problems introduced by the instructor happen in a more unpredictable and far less scripted way. Every skill is briefed, practised as a dry-run, run through slowly in shallow water and then added to the 'play-list' of potential problems which can be introduced during every subsequent dive. It may sound a little stressful, but in truth it usually generates plenty of laughter from everyone. The pace at which problems are introduced depends entirely on the capacity of the team and the individual students, and the number of problems the team faces generally increases each day. The class

ends with three experience dives in the 40-50m range, all with actual decompression as planned by the team.

Additionally following the successful completion of the class and some more experience dives, students can apply to do a 1-2 day upgrade class, Tech 1+, which allows them to dive to a maximum depth of 60m, utilising an additional stage bottle of trimix and with up to 45mins of decompression. Given the diving possibilities at the Poor Knights and the Bay of Islands in particular, the T1+ class really opens up a huge range of exciting opportunities.

There is also an intermediate step which students can take if they don't feel completely ready for Tech 1. Recreational Diver Level 3 (Rec 3) introduces trimix and a deco bottle, but to a maximum depth of 40m and without the unscripted/aggressive scenarios. This class is well suited to students who want to take more time to build their experience of deeper diving.

The Instructor Training Process

To become a T1 instructor I first had to be an experienced Fundamentals Instructor and also an experienced Tech 2 diver, comfortable with extended decompression dives in the 75m+ range, using bottom stages and

multiple decompression gases during ascent. I have been a Fundamentals Instructor since 2009 and completed my T2 class in 2010, so I have had lots of time to build my experience.

Additionally to become an instructor you also need to intern on T1 classes taught by other instructors, so you become familiar with the entire content of the class. I worked with 3 other instructors and interned on classes in NZ, Australia and Croatia. In May last year I also did a 5 day T1 Instructor training class in Croatia in order to get fully prepared to sit my final exam. (For more details on this course check out the report from the 2013 Q2 Newsletter).

And lastly there is the final exam, which involves arranging and successfully conducting an entire Tech 1 class, whilst under the watchful eye of an examiner. I invited Rich Walker, GUE's Head of Technical Training, to New Zealand to be my examiner. I have worked with Rich before - he was my Fundamentals Instructor back in 2005 - so it was a nice symmetry for him to see how far one of his former students had progressed.

The March '14 class

I had two students for my exam, Russ and Lou, who had previously done the DPV1 class with me so I knew them well. We booked ourselves in at Northland Dive for six days, with the first two days set aside for shore-diving and the remaining four days all being boat based diving. During days one and two I covered all the equipment, all the dry-runs and all the various in-water drills and procedures, with everything being completed in the 6-10m depth range. We also covered a large section of the theory content.

For days 3 and 4 we chose to dive on the Canterbury wreck and we practised all the same drills and procedures, only this time at 25-30m depth. We also practised lots of ascents, starting with simple ascents without any problems and building towards out-of-gas ascents leading into problems with one of the deco bottles. Happily for me as the instructor one of the core values behind the class became very obvious during the deepest section of these dives - the narcotic effect of the chosen gas mix. The drills which seemed straightforward at 9m and which were completed without error by Russ and Lou now became far slower at 30m and errors started to appear. If I needed another reason for why we chose to use trimix when we dive deep then this is it.



Rich Walker

Finally for days 5 and 6 we started to use trimix, selecting 21/35 for our dives. We did two dives on day 5 and then raced out very early on day 6 to get in our final dive before cyclone Lusi hit with full force. Reaching a maximum depth of 48m Russ, Lou, Rich and I were treated to stunning visibility (25m+), vast amounts of fish and some great topography. And we knew Rich was enjoying himself when Russ tentatively gave the thumbs up/end of dive signal and Rich got out his slate and 'demanded' another 10 minutes of bottom time. It was a fabulous dive to end the class. Given all the great diving Rich had it's no surprise he wants to come back again.

What now

So now for the first time it's possible for students to take T1 and T1+ here in New Zealand, as opposed to taking expensive trips abroad. My first T1 class is scheduled for September and I'm really looking forward to it. I can also promise anyone who is thinking about taking this class that their experience dives will be spectacular! Congratulations to Russ and Lou for successfully completing their T1 class; thank you to Rich for being such a great examiner; thanks also to all the other instructors who helped me prepare for the class: Liam Allen, Kirill Egorov and Hassan Adly.