



Kiss Rebreather

WE HAVE learned that Gordon Smith, President of Jetsam Technologies Ltd. and designer and manufacturer of the Classic and Sports KISS rebreathers died suddenly on Monday, January 9 of a natural illness, not diving-related.

I met Gordon (and his wife Kim) once, over a week-long trip to St Kilda - they had travelled all the way from Canada to join the group. (an account of this trip was published in the Nov-Dec

2004 and Jan-Feb 2005 issues of **SCOTTISH DIVER**).

I had been very impressed by his humour and wisdom on the Jetsam website and the emails we exchanged before I bought my unit in 2002. This view was further enhanced when I met him in person a couple of years later and it was great to be around him for a week.

The rebreather community has lost a brilliant designer and manufacturer, with a huge

understanding of all the relevant physics and technology, as well as the needs of the diver; and the world has lost a funny, open-minded and generous individual.

We have been informed that the business remains open and staff will be available to answer any technical questions or help with any repairs.

*Alex Gallego
Grampian Branch*

Save Your Life

IF YOUR boat sunk would you know how to look after yourself and use your liferaft? Would you know how to help yourself and the rest of the crew to survive?

If you are one of the unlucky few, your chances of survival will be greatly increased if you know the various survival techniques, can use your lifejacket effectively, and are familiar with the liferaft and its equipment.

Jon Clift (Yachtmaster

Instructor for 30 years and a RYA/MCA Sea Survival Instructor) is running a Sea Survival Course in Edinburgh on Saturday, March 18. The course costs £100 including a certificate and book. It is very practically orientated and includes several hours in a pool deploying, boarding and righting capsized liferafts.

Jon will also be examining various lifejackets, flares and

EPIRBs; the contents of different liferafts; and the preparation and principles of survival and the search and rescue services.

Please contact Jon Clift for further details or to book - limited places still available. Tel: 01548 843176 or email:

jon@seasurvivalcourses.co.uk

See the full review of one of these courses on pages 34/35.

Training Success

A VERY successful training day at the 'Tearoom', Loch Fyne was held on Saturday, January 28; with some 26 dives carried out by representatives of 7 branches (East Lothian, Midlothian, Napier, Stirling, Musselburgh, Dunoon and Pentland).

The outcome was three new BI

candidates qualified and one RI open water assessment complete.

The day was conducted in full expedition fashion, with all dive details recorded by the Beach Marshal (Don Lees) and with O2 and first aid available on site.

All candidates were required to

produce a diveplan(s) and risk assessment.

In all a good day out and one which would be worthwhile organising again, as demand from the membership dictates.

*Murray MacCallum
Regional Coach*

Congratulations

CONGRATULATIONS must go to our lovely Yvonne Shaw (reports Cumbernauld SAC). Yvonne gained her Sport Diving qualification in December. Not to be out done by the girls in the club - well done to Chris Thain and David Gow for gaining their Sport Diving badge in November.

Have a great year's diving in 2006.

CONGRATULATIONS to David Campbell of Forth Sub Aqua Club for passing his Sport Diver Award, well done from all at the club. Also congratulations to David Sharp of Forth Valley

Branch on obtaining his Sport Diver Award.

CONGRATULATIONS to Craig Reid, Erik Lornie & Iain Graham all from West Lothian Branch on completing their 'Sport Diver' qualification (Gordon Young BDO)

LATE NEWS

SCOTTISH DIVER has just received the results of the leadership election. After a record turn out at the polls the following candidates have been elected to the General Committee.

It was encouraging to see such a large number of members voting and it was interesting that Marion

Brown topped the voting for the NDC, are the members trying to tell us they want more women on the committees? That's something we should welcome and encourage.

Chairman - Jack Morrison
Secretary - Andrew Murray
National DO - Kevin Miller

And on the NDC:

Marion Brown
Bert Smith
Hugh Fraser
Graeme Forsyth
Martin Henderson
Tony Carter

Sea Survival Skills

words and pictures by Alison Fish

ALL COMMERCIAL boat operators are required by law to provide safety and fire fighting equipment, including lifejackets and a life raft if they are operating at sea. Increasingly, private boatowners and many clubs are adopting similar standards – either because they want to adopt best practice, or to avoid the worst in rising insurance premiums. Each time you step on to a charter boat you'll hear the skipper give a briefing that includes safety information like where to find the life raft and jackets. All well and good, but in an emergency would you know how to fit your lifejacket properly? Say your skipper took a fall and knocked himself out, would you know when or how to launch the life raft?

I Will Survive!

OK, most of you are thinking Gloria Gaynor, 'First I was afraid, I was petrified' and all that, but what we're talking about here is positive thinking and knowing what to do when your charter boat threatens to turn itself into a dive site.

One of the first things you learn on a Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Sea Survival course is that positive thinking is vital, the second, third, fourth and fifth are don't get into the life raft unless you really, really have to! In between there are a few good tips on avoiding the situation in the first place, when exactly is a good time to launch the raft and how exactly to go about it.

Saturday morning and a mixed group of divers and yachties (divers 4, yachties 12) are stood around the coffee machine at the Royal Commonwealth Pool trying to look alert. Jon Clift of SeaSkills Training, our instructor for the day, is meeting, greeting and generally guiding folks in the right direction.

The Voice of Experience

Jon is probably the perfect person to deliver this course; he's enthusiastic and has been at sea in some capacity most of his life whether in the merchant navy, skippering an Atlantic class lifeboat, crewing a Tyne class lifeboat or delivering expensive yachts to far flung exotic locations. Despite all that experience Jon was keen to point out that he hasn't ever climbed into a life raft for real - only in training.

The Sea Survival course aims to provide knowledge and practical experience of personal survival principles and technique for anyone who goes out to sea in ships, or boats in this case. From the start it was clear that Jon prefers an audience participation model of teaching, and contributions were positively encouraged. The first part of the day was given over to talks, discussions and demonstrations of kit including correct fitting of life jackets, getting to know the life raft and equipment packs.

Sadly there are many examples of things going horribly wrong at sea, and how a hasty decision to abandon ship can cost lives. During the 1979 Fastnet yacht race 24 vessels were abandoned and tragically 15 people lost their lives. 19 of the abandoned yachts were found damaged but afloat in the

days after the storm, suggesting that the crews may have fared better had they remained with their craft.

By comparison Tony Bullimore was rescued after spending almost five days in the upturned hull of his racing vessel, the *Exide Challenger*.

The vessel capsized during a ferocious storm in the Southern Ocean whilst Bullimore was taking part in the 1997 Vendee Globe single-handed, non-stop, round-the-world race.

Extreme examples to be sure, and unlikely to happen here in Scotland under normal diving conditions, but that's the thing about the unexpected - it comes out of the blue and surprises the best of us. The trick is to be prepared.

Driving at speed over a partially submerged rock, or the Port Napier at high tide, could easily hole a RIB or damage the sponsons; leaving you and your crew with that sinking feeling. As Jon pointed out a collision at sea can ruin your whole day, as can an exploding gas cylinder, a carelessly abandoned dive knife or severe weather. We like to think we are in control but it isn't always the case.

Unfortunately we could all imagine dangerous situations that might creep up on us unawares and we went on to discuss strategies for keeping the vessel afloat, preparing to abandon ship and letting the world know where we were and that we need help.

Simple things can make a huge difference when everyone on board is starting to panic. An idiot proof guide to using the radio for instance, if you've only occasionally used a VHF set it's easy to forget the press button to transmit, release button to receive part of the instructions! Modern DSC (Digital Selective Calling) radios with a 'One Button Mayday' might make the initial alert very simple - but what happens after that? Surviving an incident is only the start, you need help to get home again, and being able to operate the radio properly can save lives.

Practice Makes Perfect

To some extent the yachties were in a better position than the divers. Sailing the same boat with a regular crew gave them the opportunity to get to know safety equipment on board, to make sure their lifejackets fit properly and discuss in advance what actions to take in an emergency. Divers on the other hand may use a different charter boat every week, which puts us at an immediate disadvantage.

Deploying a life raft is simple in theory but in filthy weather, when everything is happening at double speed, would you even remember where to find it? The RYA Sea Survival booklet, which accompanies the course, recommends being able to find and don your lifejacket within a minute of the alarm being raised – something to bear in mind next time the skipper says 'the lifejackets are under seats in the galley' - you know, the place where everyone throws their dry gear, sandwiches, flasks, waterproofs, spare masks, camera kit ...

Life rafts on commercial boats carry an



how to fit a lifejacket



believe it or not - there's 8 people in there



Jon demonstrates correct towing procedure - volunteer goes to sleep

equipment pack which contains a long list of useful items from bailers and sponges to inflation pumps and leak stoppers. (Leak stoppers are threaded cones made of moulded rubber and are extremely effective for plugging a hole in a RIB's sponson - at £4.99 for a pack of three; every RIB owner should have them on board).

The equipment pack also contains flares, drinking water, food, a first aid kit, thermal protective aids (TPA's – a bit like a zip up survival bag) and, possibly most important of all, anti-motion sickness tablets. The pack doesn't contain personal or expensive items such as dry clothing, GPS, VHF radio or an EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon).

One instance where the divers came out on top was clothing - hypothermia is a year-round threat in British waters. In the water drysuits and thermal undersuits provide optimum protection against the cold if you end up in the water. Yachties (and divers who have changed out of diving kit) can only pile on warm clothes and keep cuffs and collars tightly fastened to reduce water ingress – a poor second to a trusty drysuit.

Moving on we talked about what to take into the raft and last minute actions on the boat, such as picking up water and food supplies, life raft grab bags and useful electronic equipment. Which brought us to the very point

of abandoning ship; metaphorically we were teetering on the edge before taking that final fateful step into the raft.

Splash In

So onto the pool session; this turned out to be great fun and probably more comfortable for the divers since we used our drysuits. The poor yachties had full wet weather gear, including boots.

Our first task was to get into the water without damaging ourselves or anyone else. It's easy for divers to forget about cold shock; perhaps because we regularly launch ourselves into the sea and our suits provide excellent thermal protection. But without our cosy suits the symptoms of cold shock develop within minutes of entering the water. Rapid breathing rate and increased blood pressure can lead to heart attack or stroke.

If that doesn't get you the rapid, deep breathing makes you more susceptible to drowning, trying to swim during these first few minutes in cold water increases the risk of drowning still further. Thankfully there are a few things you can do to decrease the risk; lowering yourself into the water gradually and staying in the HELP position until your breathing rate has settled will reduce the effects of cold shock.

The HELP position (heat escape lessening posture) does what it says on the tin. To adopt the HELP position cross your legs, tuck your elbows into your sides, hold the life jacket down and place your hands across your face. In this posture your feet act as a sea anchor

and keep you face to wind – putting your hands over your face means you can breathe even if there is a lot of spray. Jon went on to teach us how to huddle together in groups of two or more, how to tow casualties and to swim together as a group. Group swimming was a challenge!

At long last we got to launch the life raft and practised getting into it from the side – to simulate stepping from a vessel – which went without a hitch. The difficult bit was getting into the raft from the water on your own – an eight man raft looks pretty small from the edge but the sides stand a good couple of feet out of the water. Climbing into the raft was tricky even in the flat calm of the swimming pool; I can't imagine what it must've been like for sailors in the Fastnet race who had sea temperatures of 5°C and 40ft breaking waves to contend with.

Jon took us through the procedure for getting the whole team into the raft from the water – much easier with two burly blokes to help you in – and how to right a capsized raft. At the very end of the session we had a race, in two teams of eight we had to locate the raft, swim to it as a group then get seven able-bodied survivors and one unconscious victim inside. I doubt our team got any points for style or efficiency.

Rescue Me

Great, assuming we've collected our party together, managed to get into the life raft, sorted out the casualties and started the bailing out and keeping watch – what next?

Getting rescued is the next step, simple you might think, but no! There are still loads of things to think about such as who's likely to rescue you? Can you communicate with them? And how exactly do you get from sea level to the deck of a trans-Atlantic cargo ship with cold hands? Perhaps it's better to get picked up by the RNLI or a helicopter at least they know exactly what to!

It was a long day, we started at 9.30am and finished around 6.30pm, but everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. The course was very well presented, great fun and gave us lots to think about. Sitting in a life raft with 7 other people feels claustrophobic and unstable on a swimming pool, I'm sure it would be a lot worse in real life.

So the moral of the story is that the life raft is a last resort and should be avoided if at all possible – but if you do need to use one make sure you know where it is and how it works.

SeaSkills is a specialist powerboat school based at North Berwick, near Edinburgh, and is an accredited Training Centre for the Royal Yachting Association (RYA). They run all sorts of courses around the country – they bring the training to you.

Jon will be running an RYA Sea Survival course at the Royal Commonwealth Pool, Dalkeith Road, Edinburgh on Saturday, March 18th, for more details or to book a place visit the SeaSkills website <http://www.seaskills.co.uk>.

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