

FREEDIVING IN THE FLORIDA KEYS

Freediving and Peace of Mind



Julie Richardson is the founder and Executive Director of DiveWise, a non-profit organization that seeks to further freedive safety education. For more information on DiveWise and dive safety, visit www.divewise.org.

BY JULIE RICHARDSON

MANY OF YOU know that three years ago I nearly lost my sons, Robert and David, as one tried to rescue the other on a 90 ft freedive. Both boys suffered a near-fatal blackout involving CPR and a MedEvac under life support. Thankfully, they made a full recovery from this event.

I met Terry Maas soon after the accident and learned of his Freediver Recovery Vest (FRV) project and followed the development process with great interest. On the day before the 2011 Blue Wild I

functionality with them in person. David, 19, found the 45-minute DVD helpful and said it comprehensively explained the functions of the vest and the dive computer. He commented that informational DVD "made sense to me and was very logically presented." Once on the boat, David said the FRV's design and function were so intuitive he didn't really need further instruction. He slipped into the vest with no problem and easily adjusted it to fit comfortably. He quickly scrolled through the computer and set it to his preferences. David

has a D4 dive watch and said that compared to his D4 the FRV display had more information available on the single screen and that it did everything his D4 does and more.

Terry and I heard David let out a big whoop and looked over to see he had accidentally exceeded the depth setting on his first dive.



took Terry and several selected freedivers, including my two sons, out to test the FRV.

It was interesting to observe some of the top freedivers in the world experiment with the vest. We had world record holder Martin Stepanek from Freedive Instructors International (FII), US record holder Erin Magee with Performance Freediving International (PFI), owner of the magazine DEEP Worldwide, Dimitris Kollias, and well-known spearfishing athlete, Brandon Wahlers. I was pleased to observe the divers' enthusiastic reaction to the FRV.

Before giving the FRV a test drive the boys and I reviewed the instructional DVD for the vest and then Terry reviewed the

On the ascent it inflated very quickly and he had a fast ride to the top that he described as fun. David also set the FRV off intentionally by staying down longer than his preset dive time and the vest deployed the second he exceeded this, as expected.

David reported that wearing the vest did not hinder his diving at all. He did adjust the wire leading from the main unit to the wrist unit so that it was loose enough for him to be able to pull back his Hawaiian sling comfortably. This was easily accomplished and he had no further adjustments to his normal dive/hunt routine. He was aware the unit was on his back but

it didn't slow him down. David was not wearing a wetsuit and thinks that if he were he would definitely have forgotten he was even wearing the vest. Since he accidentally deployed the FRV on his first dive I think there's a good chance he's right about this.

Twenty-three year old Robert felt confident he knew how to operate the vest after listening to Terry explain how it worked. It was easy for him to learn the function of the buttons on the display although he felt the display was too high up on his arm and adjusted this to suit him. Once he was in the water Robert said he quickly forgot about the vest. He manually set off the FRV which is achieved by pushing the middle button first and then the top and bottom button in random succession. The vest instantly deployed, spinning him around and delivering him face up on the surface. Robert enjoyed the ride and said he'd like to set it off at about 100 ft just for the fun of it.

Robert found the repacking of the deployed unit very easy to accomplish. He

simply tucked the deflated bladders back into their respective pouches and refilled the bottle from a scuba tank. He was soon back in the water for more diving. Robert liked the dive computer and noted the larger display was a little more convenient than his D4. The FRV dive computer stores 8000 dives and has a backlight, which makes reading it a bit easier.

Both boys are looking forward to using the FRVs while spearfishing. Yes, I purchased one for each of them. After suffering the trauma of nearly losing my boys to blackout, I know just how essential and valuable a life-saving device can be to a freediver. If it sounds expensive to you, consider this: the price tag of \$2870 each is far less than their father and I paid for their MedEvac and hospitalization subsequent to their blackout experience.

I have worried a lot in the three years since the accident while my boys were out diving. But I have now purchased something invaluable: safety for my sons as they pursue their passion for spearfishing and peace of mind for myself.



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TOURNAMENT WINS 2010

Key West Navy Dolphin Derby 1st place - Don Hollendonner 44#

Reef Light Dolphin Tournament

1st - Thomas Fricke 51.5#, 2nd - Tim Fricke 30.5#

Cudjoe Gardens Tournament 1st - Charlie Fricke 40#

Big Pine Dolphin Tournament 1st place wahoo - Tom Fricke

2009

Key West Charter Boat Tournament - 1st place - Martin Alsobrooks

Key West navy Dolphin Derby - 1st place - Tim Sullivan 40.1#

Cruz Dolphin Tournament - 1st place - Brian Rundio 44#