



# Tested

From useful diving gear to cosy clothing and an innovative spout, we test a range of gear this month

## Diving gear in a backpack

**The Microdiver kit is full-on but affordable diving gear in a small backpack. It's ideal for underwater boat maintenance and inspections, retrieving fouled anchors and generally having fun.**

Aimed at boat owners, the C-Pro model includes a 3lt or 5lt air cylinder, providing enough air for half an hour at depths up to 9m. The kit includes regulator, pressure gauge, pockets for weights and a buoyancy chamber, all in a backpack that's easy to stow and carry.

Historically many boat owners have been discouraged from using scuba equipment by the large amount of training needed. Until now even beginner courses qualify you for depths down to 18m, a depth at which you need to know about decompression. But as Microdivers only go to a maximum of 9m the training can be completed in a couple of three-hour sessions.

It starts with looking at basic techniques and safety

**PRICE:  
FROM  
£459**



The Microdiver C-Pro diving kit is ideal for underwater operations such as dealing with tangled ropes

information on a DVD supplied with the equipment. The second part is a two-hour practical pool session. Mine started with a briefing by Dave Crockford of PSAI (Professional Scuba Association International), under whose auspices the course was run.

He kicked off by highlighting how simple diving in shallow waters is, saying the key thing to remember is: 'Breathe in, breath out... and repeat as necessary.'

Next was a familiarisation with the gear. Thanks to the system's neat integrated design this was quick and easy - it took only a couple of minutes to carry routine pre-dive checks and don the backpack, ready for the water.

The single most important skill is probably mastering buoyancy - to glide up and down to different depths divers

need to make themselves positively or negatively buoyant. This is achieved by a combination of wearing weights on a belt (to give negative buoyancy) and inflating an air bladder in the backpack to give positive buoyancy. You'll stay at a constant depth if you achieve neutral buoyancy, which is ideal for working underwater - to free a fouled prop, for instance. The pool session also includes standard safety procedures such as clearing a mask of water and replacing the regulator in the unlikely event of it being knocked out of your mouth.

### Open water training

The open water part of the training reinforces the techniques learned in the pool. I'd recommend boat owners choose a salt-water environment for this, simply because salt water has more buoyancy than fresh. I completed my training in winter, so elected to

go to the Red Sea, rather than the cold UK coast. It was not long before I was confident of my new skills, and my ability to stay within safe limits exploring the reef.

As the top 10 metres of any reef receive the greatest amount of sunlight it has the greatest concentration of colour, life and activity. As well as vividly coloured coral, I saw an amazing variety of fish, moray eels, and turtle.

Overall, this is a great piece of onboard kit that is practical from a maintenance perspective and offers potential for a lot of fun. It's small and light enough to fly with, so can be taken on charter holidays, where it would certainly add a different perspective to snorkelling over coral.



Rupert Holmes