



EXPLORING THE SHALLOWS

Here's a new way to experience the pleasures of scuba diving, without having to go that deep.

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Photographs: Courtesy Mini B Ltd

There is a whole world under the surface of the ocean that the majority of us miss out on. So far, to gain access to this colourful realm, one needs to be a qualified scuba diver. Acquiring the necessary certification to dive safely is not only time consuming, the required equipment and courses also are quite expensive. This is why most avid snorkellers hesitate to cross over to full-fledged scuba diving; after all, who other than the hardcore diving enthusiast or professional would desire to explore the murky depths for which an intensive scuba diving course prepares you.

There is a lot to be seen in the first few metres under the calm surface where it is warmer and brighter and the multi-hued marine life is more prolific. Microdiving, a new activity that provides a crucial step between snorkelling and conventional deep, open water scuba diving has been



gaining popularity over the last few years. This form of underwater recreation is perfect for those who wish to learn how to dive safely to shallow depths; the maximum permitted depth for a certified microdiver is nine metres.

Experienced sailors and boat owners know their vessel intricately and can self inspect most areas if necessary; however, all exterior parts below the waterline are out of reach. The hull, propellers, rudder, thrusters, inlets, keel and anodes can only be inspected by professional divers. If car aficionados know what's happening under the hood, shouldn't keen sailors know what's happening under the boat? Boat owners trained and equipped for

microdiving have easy access to the underside of their boat to perform tasks such as freeing a fouled propeller, checking for keel damage, unblocking an inlet or freeing a trapped anchor, without the need of a professional diver. Situations like these can be major inconveniences if they occur away from port and nobody on board is qualified to get under the boat to rectify them.

The system

The Mini B microdive system was invented by Robert Hart, a highly experienced diving instructor who has logged over 6,500 dives totalling 109 full days underwater. He developed the system specifically for people

attracted to scuba diving but who prefer to remain in shallow water. This safer environment also requires less intensive training, so boat owners are now able to become qualified microdivers quickly and inexpensively.

The microdive training programme has been developed in affiliation with the UK Health and Safety Executive which recognises that anyone completing the training successfully will be fully competent to dive safely in shallow water using Mini B equipment. The qualification procedure starts with the purchase of a training pack that contains a training manual, a DVD that shows diving techniques, a logbook and all the necessary

Need to know/**Microdiving**

instructional and registration papers needed for the course. Trainees can take their time with the study material, although an eager student could go through it in just a day, and then complete a quiz comprising 95 multiple-choice questions. After this, any qualified dive instructor can review the quiz answers and, when satisfied that the student is competent to enter the water, the training can proceed to the pool session.

In the water

The pool session will enable the novice to experience the Mini B microdive equipment and to practise various essential diving techniques such as controlling buoyancy and clearing a mask of water. When the instructor is satisfied that the student is ready, the pool session will be followed by three accompanied dives in open water. The course pack also contains the necessary guidance for instructors who are unfamiliar with microdive training to ensure that they are fully competent to take on the student. Once the instructor is satisfied that the student is capable, he or she can send a formal approval to the microdive headquarters in the UK from where the student is issued a certificate and card confirming the qualification.

The Mini B microdiving equipment has been developed specifically for shallow water scuba diving; it is much less expensive than conventional scuba gear and also a lot more compact and practical. The fully assembled system along with a buoyancy control device is contained within a cordura backpack. The standard five-litre air tank enables around 20 minutes of diving, and



models with larger tanks are also available. Unique features include the horizontal mounting of the air cylinder within the pack to eliminate the problem of 'tank roll', and the one-size-fits-all harness that makes the gear easy and comfortable to wear. The Mini

B gear is certified for use as deep as 50 metres so microdivers who want to move on to a full-fledged diving course that will qualify them to explore deeper and more challenging waters can continue to enjoy its advantages over conventional gear. **IB**

