

The large grab-loop on the pliable plastic heel-pad was very easy to locate, as it protrudes at a 45° angle, making donning and doffing the fins a simple task.

Back in more sedate conditions, I lent the fins to my guide Ravin for a few dives to get some photos of them in action.

Did he like them? The fact that I caught him surfing the Internet the following evening to find out whether he could buy a pair locally answered that question.

Conclusion

I was surprised and delighted with these Cressi Ara EBS fins. After all, these were said to be a soft-blade version, but they performed in a similar way to some of the rigid-blade hi-tec fins I've worn in the past (I can't imagine how powerful the HB versions are going to be).

Using bungee-straps isn't a new idea, and other fin-makers successfully employ the same concept. Indeed, the Cressi mounting system is now standard fare, with rounded pegs moulded

into the sides of the foot-pocket, meaning that the straps are easily removed and could be replaced with generic stainless-steel spring-straps if that's the wearer's preference.

I think the larger foot-pocket is going to appeal to the Hobbits among us, or coldwater drysuit divers and those who wear thick neoprene boots.

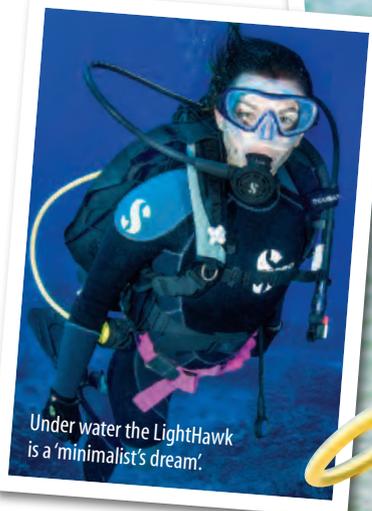
Add this to the fins' outstanding performance and the Italians seem to have a worthy successor to their famous Master Frogs. ■

BC SCUBAPRO LIGHTHAWK

NOWADAYS IT SEEMS THAT EVERY maker of dive-kit has a lightweight travel BC in its range, and rightly so. Divers flying to tropical destinations sometimes have to deal with an allowance of only 20kg of hold baggage, and some BC models eat up more than a quarter of that weight.

These meagre weight limits make stark choices inevitable – do we sacrifice clothes and toiletries to enable us to take the same BC with which we would dive in the North Sea, or keep the essentials in the bag and pack a lighter compensator?

Scubapro has added a new version of its LightHawk wing-style travel BC to the growing market of travel-friendly dive gear. I put one in my bag for a trip abroad to try it out.



Under water the LightHawk is a 'minimalist's dream'.

The Design

The LightHawk is a back-flotation BC designed for the travelling diver. It is made from durable 420-denier nylon and has a progressively shaped rear air-cell that's claimed to increase the wearer's range of motion and decrease drag under water.

External elastic bungee cords help to compress the air-cell when it's partially inflated, ensuring a low profile and assisting deflation. The harness has an adjustable belt-style

webbing waist-strap with a nylon buckle.

Shoulder-straps are padded at the top and have rotating quick-release buckles that swivel, allowing the wearer to route the straps under the arms.

A two-position sternum-strap is included, and this keeps the harness from slipping from the shoulders.

There are four aluminium D-rings, two at the shoulders and two on the waistband.

The backplate is flexible and padded and is fitted with a low primary tank-band with a cam-style fastening, an intermediate support-strap with Velcro closure and an adjustable yoke-strap.

Three dump-valves are fitted, one on the right shoulder and one on the right lower inner surface of the air-cell. Both are actuated with a toggle-pull and the third, on the left shoulder, is a pull-dump built into the power-inflator.

Small utility pockets are included, their closures secured with trident clips and webbing.



The LightHawk is available in three sizes, all with a lift capacity of 13.2kg in a black and grey colour scheme with white embroidered livery.

The size M/L LightHawk (excluding the supplied medium-pressure hose) I had for this test showed a total weight of 2.4kg on a set of digital scales.

In Use

My first impressions were that this BC was a minimalist's dream. The shoulder-straps pulled under my arms as they articulated on the rotating buckles, creating an uncluttered feel at the front of my body. The webbing waist-band snugged up nice and tight, with the weight-belt-style nylon buckle locking everything in place. 🐉

SPECS

PRICE ▶▶ £259

TYPE ▶▶ Back-flotation

SIZES ▶▶ XS/S, M/L, XL/2XL

LIFT ▶▶ All sizes, 130N, 13.2kg

D-RINGS ▶▶ Four, aluminium

DUMP VALVES ▶▶ Three

COLOURS ▶▶ Black / grey

CONTACT ▶▶ www.scubapro.com

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★☆☆



The LightHawk's rotating chest buckles.

The padding on the shoulder-straps and backplate felt soft and forgiving, something I now find essential for BCs when I'm wearing a 3mm exposure suit or rash guard (my personal comfort is paramount!).

The tank-securing system held everything in position, with the two upper straps pulling the steel cylinder in line with my body.

It was interesting to note that Scubapro has deviated from its standard stainless synch-clip in favour of a nylon cam-buckle on this BC, to save weight.

Under water, the wing-style air-cell held me

in a balanced horizontal position, slightly heads-up when finning forward and comfortably vertical when hovering midwater to take photos.

Air migrated around the cell unhindered as my orientation changed. The dump-valves were perfectly positioned and the toggles were easy to find, making deflation a doddle in any position.

The elastic bungee-straps that fitted around the air-cell kept everything nicely compressed and streamlined, and helped to expel air from the dump-valves quickly.

On the surface the progressively shaped wing kept the bulk of the buoyant air-cell under water, with a smaller portion above. To my delight, this seemed to have a stabilising effect, and didn't push me forward, face-first.

The utility pockets were too small to accommodate a spare mask or a DSMB and spool. Instead, these had to be clipped to the lower two D-rings with double-ended snap-clips, my pressure-gauge and octopus-holder occupying the two on the chest straps.

Conclusion

The LightHawk is a lightweight, slimmed-down BC solidly built with good-quality materials, and at under 2.5kg it was never going to prove a problem with restricted baggage allowances.

The padding on the shoulder-straps and backplate seemed substantial, making the

whole wearing experience a joy. Couple this with the ergonomics and minimalist design concept and it all added up to a fantastic travel companion.

The lack of storage options was more of an inconvenience than a problem. I could still accommodate my standard safety kit, although it was left dangling from D-rings instead of safely nestling in zipped-up pockets.

If desired an optional set of integrated weight and rear trim-pockets is available, as is Scubapro's own combined octopus and power inflator, the Air2. ■



Small utility pockets.