



# Peak Performance Buoyancy

First in a new series focusing on the PADI Specialty of the Month, which in April is Peak Performance Buoyancy. Newly minted Open Water Diver **Matt Griffiths** (Sport Diver art director) is our 'guinea pig' trialling the different courses

Photographs by **Frogfish Photography**

Obtaining neutral buoyancy can be a difficult skill to master and I will be honest, I couldn't help but think 'how will two dives dramatically improve my buoyancy'? As I found out, I was proven completely wrong.

The first part of the course requires you to estimate the desired amount of weight you will need for any given dive. This is dependant on a number of factors - fresh/salt water, what style of suit you will be wearing, and if you are using a steel or aluminium tank. Pre-dive day, I had figured out using the PADI weight chart found in the Peak Performance Buoyancy manual that I would need between 8-10kg as a starting point.

After a cold and wet kit up myself, my instructor Andy and cameraman Nick headed into the water leaving Caroline and dog 'Paddy' as surface support. I donned my fins and made my way out away from the shallows into water too deep to stand to complete my pre-dive weight check. This is achieved by holding a

normal breath at the surface and, if your weighting is correct, you should float at eye level. As I held a normal breath, I found myself floating at eye level first time - result!

As we started our decent down to the 6m deep shallows, I was making small and frequent adjustments to my drysuit and, after a couple of minutes of playing, I was neutral. Andy noticed I was still a little bottom-heavy, so he handed me a 2kg weight to hold at arm's length in front of me. Once I held the weight, I levelled out horizontally even though I started descending due to the extra weight. With a slight drysuit adjustment, my only movement was through inhaling and exhaling. I was neutrally buoyant - this was already a massive improvement over previous dives I had done and I was really chuffed. This made me realise that I did have the correct amount of weight to start with, but I needed to look at re-positioning my weight more towards the front and spreading it more evenly. Obviously every diver is different and finding what

works for you is the key to great buoyancy. With hover skills completed, we went for a short swim and headed back to the surface for a well-deserved coffee break.

For the second dive I discussed with Andy about re-distributing the weight around me. I aimed to get more weight higher up my body to help offset my legs sinking and I also moved my tank up very slightly. The biggest difference came in putting a 1kg block on my weightbelt right at the front and moving two 1kg weights out of the front BCD pockets into the back pockets, close to my tank near the top of the BCD.

As we descended down to the plane at 15m, I was much more balanced in the water and I felt more confident that I had got my weight and distribution all but perfect. I also noticed how my breathing was more relaxed, thus using less air and allowing me to enjoy more time underwater. Dive two requires the student to complete a 90-second hover in either the vertical or horizontal position, which I was a little apprehensive about before the dive. As it turned out, with my new

## PADI say...

What is neutral buoyancy? Scuba divers like to be neutrally buoyant so they neither sink nor float. It can be a tricky thing. Divers who've mastered the highest performance levels in buoyancy stand apart. You've seen them underwater. They glide effortlessly, use less air and ascend, descend or hover, almost as if by thought. They interact gently with aquatic life and affect their surroundings minimally. The PADI Peak Performance Buoyancy course refines the basic skills you learned as a PADI Open Water Diver and elevates them to the next level. You'll learn how to trim your scuba gear so you're perfectly balanced in the water, nuances in determining weight so you're not too light nor too heavy by even a slight degree, how to streamline to save air and move smoothly through the water, and how to hover effortlessly in both a vertical and horizontal position.

For more information about the PADI Peak Performance Buoyancy course, visit [www.padi.com](http://www.padi.com) or contact your local PADI dive shop or resort.



weight set-up, I was able to hold a neutral position with ease.

After the training dives were complete, I was able to go through the plane fuselage without touching either the top or bottom - something I had not been able to achieve before. It just goes to show that spending a short time making sure your kit is streamlined, and your weight is sufficient and positioned correctly, can make a huge difference.

If you are a novice diver like me, I cannot recommend this course enough. I have learned that neutral buoyancy is a skill that comes with a lot of practice and time spent in the water, but once mastered it will make every dive more fun. This course will give you a huge leap forward in making the transition to 'experienced diver'. ■

**NB: Matt's continued PADI education has been supported by PADI EMEA, Mares, DiveLife, Suunto and and Fourth Element.**



### PREREQUISITES

- Minimum age: 10
- PADI (Junior) Open Water Diver or equivalent qualifying rating

Next month: **PADI DRIFT DIVER**