



by George Irvine

# Do it Right, Or Don't Do it!

A dive instructor I know recently had a student show up for a cave diving course with a rectangular dive light, a scooter cage, a helmet, and a convoluted independent doubles rig. This student already knew what he wanted from his cave course presumably from reading the advertisements. His first comment to his amused instructor was that he was not quite ready to try a 1,000 foot penetration dive, but his cave diving merit badge would be a good start. He never once asked for his instructor's opinion. And his instructor happens to be one of the most experienced cave divers around. Unfortunately, much of the day was spent teaching buoyancy control to this new "tech-diver."

On the technical diving discussion groups, that are popular on the internet (techdiver, cavers, etc.), I routinely see recommendations for gas mixtures known to cause seizures and heavy narcosis by people who boast every qualification except having been there or done it themselves. I read comments from people who claim to have the ability to dive deep-on-air and "handle" the narcosis. I read justifications for dangerous gear configurations under the guise of personal preference. I read report after report of deaths of "tech-divers" who apparently believe that technical diving means depth. I read about training agencies who sell certifications for asinine specialties, like "technical deep air", or "advanced technical nitrox." Especially insidious are the rebreather pushers, who offer the desperate techdiver the diving equivalent of a cure for AIDS, but like the elixir salesmen of the wild west will leave death and destruction in their wake and leave us with regulation from the likes of the FDA. If people really

understood these devices, they would run screaming from the room, and would certainly not take instruction on so sophisticated a device from someone with no engineering or technical background, let alone the cadre of under educated instructors who apparently don't understand high school math judging from their performance in teaching dive academics.

Diving is a wonderful sport that can be enjoyed your whole life. Why not just do it right? It is a physical activity that is best enjoyed if one is in good shape. After all, the finest piece of dive gear you own is you! Get in shape, get a physical, and have your doctor check you for predispositions to DCS and other dive related problems before you dive.

When the time comes to gear-up for a dive, remember that less is always best. Why encumber yourself with excess underwater baggage. Less gear is more streamlined, more comfortable, more effective, and therefore more safe. If you don't need it, don't take it. Keep it simple. There are no unseen demons in diving. Rigging your gear to prevent non-problems is counterproductive. For example, independent valves are an attempt to avoid a failure in the manifold. Manifold failures seldom, if ever, occur. Independents add complexity and risk due to the air management rules required to use them effectively. Not to mention the difficulty in sharing gas with another diver in an emergency. Remember the buddy system? Remember the basics? When the shit hits the fan, they're the only thing that will save you, so you had better get them mastered.

I am fortunate to be the director of a research and exploration organization called the Woodville Karst Plain Project (WKPP). Our group conducts research dives around Tallahassee, Florida. One member of the WKPP, William Hogarth Main, happens to be the person for whom the Hogarthian system of gear configuration is named.

The Hogarthian system has a few simple tenets and principles. It relies on simplicity and skill rather than complexity and equipment. The primary piece of equipment is the mind and body of the diver, which must be in excellent condition. The next most important piece of equipment is the buddy, who must likewise be fit and configured the same, since it is the buddy's job to provide redundancy.

The Hogarthian diver's gear is in perfect condition from maintenance and is clean and streamlined, with no elbows, swivels or convolutions of hose routing or anything else that is not absolutely necessary. It is proven gear of the highest quality with no consoles, computers, gadgets, widgets, or dangling nonsense of any kind. There is nothing in front of the diver. Everything is hidden away neatly. All of the diver's motions are unencumbered and his solutions to every contingency are simple and straight forward.

With all of the macho deep-air divers and officious nouveau techies running around, it is easy to lose sight of the basics, and the objective, which is to have fun. If it doesn't feel like fun, then it's not. If it's not clean and simple, it's not Hogarthian. If it's not Hogarthian, it's not right. If you're not doing it right, don't do it at all!