



Kit Cat Tips on a catalogue of kit

BCD

Kit List:-

Mask ✓

Fins ✓

BCD ✓

Weight Systems

Regulator

Exposure Suits



Your BCD (Buoyancy Control Device) or BC (Buoyancy Compensator) or Stab (Stabilizing) Jacket performs three main functions. Firstly, as its name suggests, a BCD allows you to control your buoyancy in the water. Secondly when fully inflated acts as a floatation aid. Lastly it's a convenient and comfortable way to carry your air around.

It's simply a bag that can be inflated or deflated depending on requirements during descent/ascent. To descend you deflate your jacket but as you get deeper and get increasingly negatively buoyant and will need to put air back in. Conversely as you ascend the air (and your exposure suit) will expand creating more buoyancy so you will vent air from the jacket.

Most modern BCDs can be inflated either automatically or by blowing into them or. To automatically inflate your BCD, you simply press a button and use the low-pressure air from your tank that flows through the low-pressure hose connected to the first stage of your regulator. Opening the oral inflation valve and placing the inflator hose at the highest point possible above your head, the BCD should deflate easily.



There are a few considerations when choosing.

- Size, Comfort and fit - Your BCD needs to be the correct size. If it's too big it may cause the tank to move around on your back. If it's too small it will be uncomfortable to wear and could make breathing difficult when inflated. The more slim-line the BCD, the less drag you have swimming through the water. But make sure it provides enough lift to keep you buoyant at the surface.



The majority of manufacturers make BCDs especially for women which offer increased comfort and a much better fit. Key features are a reduced back length so the cylinder doesn't rest on the base of your spine. Integrated weights save your hips from the bruising sometimes suffered by using a conventional weight belt. Often the chest straps are removed on a ladies BCD to avoid constriction across the bust. (I adore my SeaQuest Diva!)

- Adjustability - Your BCD size will stay the same over time, but you may not! Get a BCD that you can adjust to save buying a new one sooner than necessary. It will also help if you are going to dive in both warm and cool waters so you can adjust for different exposure suits.
- Lift - A lot is said regarding the lift capacity of a BCD however it should not replace proper weighting. As with all diving you should ensure you are correctly weighted and avoid being over weighted. With this in mind, all BCDs offer plenty of lift. The exceptions come when you start to carry multiple cylinders or extra tools which will increase your need for extra lift.

But remember never use your BCD as a lift bag. It's true that some BCDs have more lifting capacity than others, but using them as lift bags can be dangerous. If you drop what you are bringing to the surface you will find yourself with too much buoyancy, which could lead to an uncontrolled ascent.

- Inflation - BCD inflation can either come from the traditional over the left shoulder inflator/deflator hose or from "air trim" or balanced power inflators that are located lower down in a more natural hand position.
- Dump Valves - Generally speaking, the more dump valves on a BCD the better. Usually located on the rear right shoulder area and rear left hip area, most BCDs have two and sometimes a third built into the inflator/deflator mechanism on the left shoulder. You should learn where these are by feel.

- Integrated Weights - Weight integration built into a BCD can mean you won't need to wear a weight belt. However, most systems available today will not necessarily hold enough weight to totally remove the need for a weight belt when worn with a dry suit or thick wet suit. However for warm water divers (and especially ladies who are fed up of having bruised hips after diving), weight integration should seriously be considered. The weights that usually fit on the belt are now stored in special removable pockets. These pockets can be dumped in an emergency or easily released and passed to the boat crew when exiting from deep water



- Other features - Make sure that your BCD has enough pockets and D-rings for the kind of diving that you are planning to do most. Often D-rings are pre-bent to flare outwards towards the bottom which makes attaching clips much easier than with flat D-rings which tend to lay flat against the BCD. In tropical waters, only one or two small pockets will suffice useful for carrying things like your Fish ID slate. For UK and cold water diving, you will probably want to carry more equipment such as a DSMB and reel or spare mask. Get a BCD with a secure and user-friendly backpack and tank buckling system.

- Integrated Regs - There are a few BCDs on the market with the regs integrated into the jacket (like the Mares HUB). These provide a very streamlined jacket, with the first stage at the neck and the hoses running inside the spine and out through the pockets. Most users love them but they are heavier and can be awkward when it comes to rinsing.



And lastly a few tips:

- Inflate the BCD fully when trying it on to see how comfortably the BCD fits and how easy it is for you to breathe while wearing the BCD.
- Store your BCD partially inflated. This helps prevent the internal bladder walls sticking together. It also helps to stop creases turning into splits or holes.
- Protect your BCD from sharp objects. Its function relies on the ability to hold air and holes tend to diminish performance...
- Wash your BCD inside AND out. Water will always get inside the BCD during use. Salt crystals can build up and force seams apart, causing leaks.
- Drip-dry out of the direct sunlight, it will increase the life of your BCD.

As with all equipment you want to find the right one for you – try on as many as you can, look at what other divers are wearing and ask them about it. And of course your friendly local dive shop will offer good advice and be very happy to help.