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In the last KitCat we discussed DSMBs. All very well but not so useful without something to attach them to. (Ron?) Whether you are deploying the buoy at your 5m safety stop or from deeper waters for example on a drift, you need a convenient way to store that much line without it turning into a tangled birds nest. So this time we take a look at reels. They come in all shapes and sizes for a variety of reasons - here are a few key basic things to consider:

- **Ease of use:** You want a reel that is easily stowed during your dive, staying neatly wound either in a pocket or on a d-ring, and equally easy to hold when you need to let the line out.

There are two basic forms of latch/release. The most simple is a friction wheel. That is a knurled nut which when tightened holds the bobbin secure but when loosened lets the bobbin spin freely allowing the line out. Another friction release is a button you press with your thumb. Bear in mind you'll need both hands to operate. This style is often sold as a wrecking or jump reel (see below)



There is also a selection of more complex ratchet mechanisms. One design has a lever held by a spring which locks it into one of a series of slanting notches round the bobbin. When you hold the handle you can easily operate the lever with your thumb. When depressed it releases the ratchet letting the line run free. Conversely when you want to rewind the line, the locked lever allows you to turn the bobbin in the other direction without it letting it go in the other.



Another design has a ratchet release operated by two fingers of the hand holding the handle. Pulling the lever releases the ratchet and the reel is free. This lever can be locked in three positions. One way locks the ratchet in rewind mode, clicking as you turn, turn through 180o and the ratchet is reversed to unwind only but still clicking, set in the middle position and the ratchet is completely free allowing the line in or out but never locking.



Both these ratchet design allow single handed operation for release but with all reels you'll need both hands to wind it back.

- **Size:** You want to think about where you dive and whether you'll be wearing gloves. Even a 3mm pair of gloves will impair your dexterity, and the cold can affect things even more, and then you can get mitten style gloves without individual fingers. So if you are going to be using your reel with gloves take them with you when you make your selection. Check that you can still use whatever buttons, knobs & levers with them on. Several manufactures make the same design in different sizes. If you are a warm water only diver you can consider a compact reel for travelling enough with smaller controls.

● **Length of Line:** You can choose how long you want the line, and they tend to start at 30m going up in 10-20m, increments. I would recommend you buy one with at least 50m. So, you say, many places abroad limit the depth to 30m, as do many insurance policies and the recreational limit is 40m, why would you want 50m. You need to remember that the line will very rarely be vertical, the buoy will be subject to current and wind so you'll need a lot more line than simply the depth you've deployed at – think in terms of 50% extra.



● **Construction:** And what should the reel be made of? If it's metal make sure it's marine grade, the last thing you want is rust. If it's plastic ensure it is tough. Your reel is going to be subjected to a lot of force; there's you at one end being tugged along by whatever the elements throw at the buoy on the surface. You want the confidence nothing is going to snap at the first tug.



Handles - a matter of personal choice & comfort. Could be a simple Velcro strap, or an "L" or "S" shaped bracket, or a complete rigid loop. Try a few see which you prefer.

● **Purpose:** Primarily we think of reels for DSMBs but you may also be thinking about getting seriously wrecked or venturing into other overhead environments such as caves. In these cases you need to be thinking about buying a separate reel suited to laying out line.



Remember never dive in an overhead environment unless you have been trained to do so safely.

Maintenance: As with any piece of dive equipment, take good care of your reel and line. Rinse it after every dive whether you actually deployed it or not - it still got exposed to the elements. And rewind it after use. When you wind the line up on ascent it's under a lot of strain and not always evenly as you bob up and down. Once you are back on board or on land unravel all the line then carefully and at an even but not too much tension, wind it back. (Another good use for a buddy – they can help) This should avoid the danger of tangles and snagging when you use it.

Finally a little tip: mark your line. I have 5m, 10m 20m and 30m marks on mine created with a combination of small knots and indelible marker pen. They help me with my everyday diving to measure distances and depths, they are invaluable for some of my teaching exercises and would be useful should I ever have to carry out a search – thankfully I've not needed it for that yet.

As always my advice is ask everyone you know what they use, why they like it and if not why not – your needs may be different from theirs. If you can, try before you buy – we have reels and buoys to hire from the club (full "kit for hire" list published further down). And of course see your local dive store who should give further guidance before simply taking your money!