WELL AND TRULY TESTED

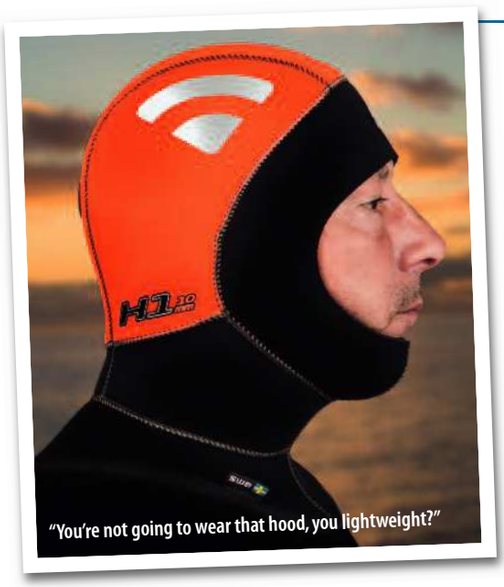
A knife and a hood – this month it's the accessories that come under NIGEL WADE's gimlet eye, and in the case of a dive-reel, he even has a go at refining it!

HOOD

WATERPROOF H1 5/10MM HI-VIS POLAR EVO

"ARE YOU REALLY GOING TO WEAR THAT HOOD TODAY? You lightweight!" My buddy's disparaging remark came as we kitted up for our first dive of the day. I didn't have the bottle to tell him that it was a really thick, coldwater model, because the sea temperature was a balmy 18°C, and I didn't want to take any more stick.

The H1 hood is clearly designed and built for more "frigid" conditions by that Swedish exposure-suit master Waterproof but, undaunted, I wore it on more than a few of our temperate-water dives to check it out.


"You're not going to wear that hood, you lightweight?"

layering is the key to a comfortable outcome, especially when wearing drysuits, and fortunately there are a lot of available solutions to consider.

A dive-hood is a different proposition, because there are few variants from which to choose, and it's difficult to layer. So we need to get our hood requirements right from the outset.

Scientists tell us that, contrary to popular belief, the head area transfers no more heat than any other part of our bodies. Still, there's nothing scientific about freezing ice-cream headaches when first entering the water, followed by a cold, miserable dive that needs to be cut short.

Neoprene dive-hoods seem to have been around forever, with the most-used thicknesses 3 and 5mm, although last year I started to experiment with a wonderful 7mm version from Dorset neoprene whizz-kids O'Three.

I hadn't heard of 10mm hoods for anything but commercial diving in sub-Arctic conditions until this Waterproof number arrived at the office. Why would we ever need such an item?

The answer was found on Waterproof's website: "*During our numerous Polar trips with Waterproof Expeditions, we learned that new technology such as rebreathers enable divers to make longer, deeper dives, and with this the hypothermia factor enters the equation.*"

Those clever Swedes accordingly created a series of accessories tagged as "Polar Evoluted", including the H1 5/10mm HAVS hood.

In use

I had expected to feel as if I was wearing a full-face steel helmet, restricting my jaw movement and crushing my head, but the first thing I noticed was how flexible the neoprene used in the H1 hood was. I found it very comfortable, and the 3D anatomical sculpting seemed custom-made for my own cranium.

Under water, the hood felt a little positive in the buoyancy department at shallow depths, but this feeling soon disappeared as I descended and the increase in ambient pressure crushed it down a little.

Any air that found its way inside the hood from mask-clearing or equalisation was released instantly by the one-way valves in the HAV system. These gave the added advantage of making water-exchange inside the hood non-existent, and assisting thermal retention.

Was it warm? Obviously yes, and in temperate waters the 10mm of neoprene was overkill, but it didn't bake my bonce as my buddy had expected. Instead it kept it at a comfortable temperature – toasty, but not once did I feel I had to remove it to cool down.

Our boat crew easily spotted my bright-orange-clad head at the surface. I'm sure the colour scheme is an advantage, but I wouldn't rely solely on it to be conspicuous at the surface, and will always have a deployed DSMB as my first choice for that purpose.

The Design

The H1 hood has a bright orange I-Span superstretch Nylon outer surface with reflective patches. The colour scheme has been selected for its visibility at the surface in choppy sea conditions.

The hood uses the maker's 10mm twin-layered neoprene in critical heat-loss areas, with strategic panels such as the throat section made from flexible 5mm neoprene. Smooth Glideskin is used for the internal seals around the neck and face.

It also features "3D Shaped Anatomical Sculpting", with a generous yoke and Waterproof's Hood Air Venting System (HAVS). The latter employs one-way valves to stop air building up annoyingly in the hood, and giving the wearer that familiar 1960s beehive-hairstyle look.

All the seams are bonded and blind-stitched with high-quality Nylon thread.

Exposure Protection

I'm reliably informed that divers tend to under-estimate their exposure protection requirements. For "divers" read Nigel Wade, as my personal learning curve in this area has been steep, embarrassing and vividly shared on these pages of DIVER.

What I've learned so far is that in general

Conclusion

Extreme coldwater diving is becoming more mainstream, embracing destinations such as Iceland, exploring the Polar regions or diving with orcas in the Norwegian fjords. In these conditions a 3, 5 or even 7mm hood may not be enough.

Technical divers in particular, with their extended decompression stops, may have to deal with the problems associated with hypothermia, and this is the domain of Waterproof's H1 10mm hood.

With the choices available, there's no longer any excuse for choosing the wrong hood and freezing our noggins off. ■

SPECS

COST ›› **£60**
MATERIALS ›› **10mm twin-layered neoprene, 5mm neoprene, Glideskin**
VENT SYSTEM ›› **Yes, one-way valves**
COLOURS ›› **Orange/black only**
SEAMS ›› **Bonded, blind-stitched**
SIZES ›› **S, M, L, XL and XXL**
CONTACT ›› **www.cpspartnership.co.uk**
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