

BC Cressi Air Travel

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I SUPPOSE IT'S IRONIC that I don't often get excited about diving kit per se. I see it as something that helps me to get where I want to go under water. That's why I am rarely seen diving at regular inland sites, unless I'm doing something very specific. It's also ironic that nowadays I tend to see the initial part of going diving as a trip on an aeroplane. You can poo-poo diving abroad, but we live on an island in the north Atlantic, and it's hardly the best place to embark on the activity we love so much, because of unreliable weather and sea states. Which brings us to checked-baggage restrictions. Recently, we looked at the misleadingly named Sea Travel BC in these pages. Now it's time to look at a BC with a more appropriate name, the Cressi Air Travel. Cressi is a family-owned business. It has always been at the forefront of lightweight diving equipment, not least because its patriarchal owner Antonio Cressi loves to dive, and loves to dive anywhere in the world where the diving is good.

I often suspect that his design department works with him in mind more as a diver than as a businessman, especially now that his son Marco has taken over the day-to-day running of the business. So Antonio not only looks at the bottom line but at the Cressi product line at the bottom, so to speak.

Air Travel

Cressi sent me an early example of the Air Travel in size L . It weighed only 2.5kg, and I happily packed it for a trip to Banda Aceh, in Indonesia.

Despite its low weight, the Air Travel has the same effective integrated-weight system as most of the lightweight BCs from Cressi, and the back-mounted buoyancy cell expands to give around 16kg of upward thrust when fully inflated, yet is held neatly and unobtrusively by an elasticated lace-up arrangement that stops it flapping during normal horizontal use.

A drop-down pocket at one side is handy for an SMB and spool.

It has the usual cummerbund with 2.5cm-wide webbing fastened over it by a pinch-clip.

Another sternum-strap, closed in the same way, stops the shoulder straps from slipping off.

Comfort

The uncluttered chest area was practical, in that I didn't feel as if I was wearing much of a BC while walking about on the shore or in the boat. The integrated weights are positioned low down on the hips.

In the water, the weights and the small amount of air that I let into the buoyancy cell gently counteracted each other, so my back was not torn between strong opposing

forces. This made it super-comfortable. However, there are no trim-weight pockets. On my first dive I had to return to the boat to ask for a couple more kilos of lead, and found that I had nowhere to put them. Adding them to the drop-down pocket would have left me unbalanced. Remember that old joke about the farmer castrating pigs by means of two bricks? When asked if it didn't hurt, he replied that it hurt only if he caught his fingers between them.

I reflected on this, because I had to drop the two lead weights down the neck of my wetsuit. Inevitably they made their way down to my crotch, with the result that I had to move with a certain amount of caution during the dive.

Control of Ascent

Two shoulder-dumps are positioned at the top-most part of the rear buoyancy cell. One is operated by a long cord that terminates with a toggle that falls conveniently to hand by the right-side shoulder-strap pinch-clip. Another is operated by pulling on the rather long corrugated hose to which the direct-feed hose clips.

There is also a rear kidney dump operated by a cord threaded through to a toggle low down at the front of the harness. Jettisoning air during an ascent proved to be a routine event without any drama or difficulty. The only observation I have to make here is that I found it necessary to shorten the cords (easily done with a stopper knot) so that they were less inclined to get tangled with the straps of the harness.

Surface Support

The figures for maximum lift when fully inflated may not look to be very much, but remember that this BC is intended for single-tank diving, normally with an aluminium tank.

I found that the surface support it gave me while waiting to be picked up was more than adequate, and most of it was down at waist level, where it is most effective at this time. I was using a 15-litre tank, often with the added weight of my Pegasus Thruster. Unsnapping the integrated-weight pouches was relatively easy while getting out of the Air Travel. It was just a matter of undoing the waist and unclipping the shoulders with the buoyancy cell inflated.

Reinstalling the weight-pouches meant pushing the connectors home to a positive feeling as they locked in position. Single-tank diving in Indonesia, I had no real reason to regret my choice of the Cressi Air Travel back-flotation BC.

COMPARABLE BCS TO CONSIDER:

Mares Icon, £400

Aqua Lung Zuma, £272

Cressi Light Jac, £295

SPECS

PRICE £287

SIZES Six sizes, XXS to XL

COLOURS Blue/black or pink/black

INTEGRATED WEIGHTS Yes, with trim weights

MAXIMUM LIFT 11kg to 16kg according to size

WEIGHT Less than 2.5kg

CONTACT www.cressi.it

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