

Twin set Familiarization, is it worth it?

A number of instructors (including myself) now offer a twin set familiarization course. What is the point of these courses? I didn't do one of these courses when I started to dive a twin set and many other divers have also just bought a twin set, strapped it on and gone diving. For this reason many old timers discount the value of these courses.

So why do I think they are a good idea? The first reason is that although it is certainly possible to find out everything you need to know about twin set diving by just doing it this is not the most efficient way of learning. You don't have to make all the mistakes yourself but instead can learn the lessons from others. There is a saying that "Experience is a good teacher but a fool learns from no other".

As I mentioned above I never did a twin set course, when I started using a twin set there was no such thing. So I had to learn by trial and error. As a result it has taken many years to build up the knowledge of the pros and cons of various setups, the reasons for certain configurations and the secrets to a successful shutdown.

There is no reason why a diver new to twin sets can't go through this same process but what is the point? Why not learn the lessons from others and save yourself all that time and effort. If you learn from someone who has already made these mistakes you can get a suitable setup, learn the essential skills and then go diving instead of spending all of your time adjusting your kit.

The second benefit of a twin set familiarization course, especially for those who have not yet bought their own twin set, is the cost savings. Although the course may cost money up front this is often much less than the savings you can make by avoiding certain mistakes.

Many divers go through a number of combinations of twin set, BC, regulators, accessories, etc. They buy a setup and only afterwards realize that it is not the best choice. By doing a twin set familiarization course it gives people the chance to find out the different options, the pros and cons of different setups and also what setup suits them and which ones don't. On a recent course I managed to save a student several hundred pounds by showing him that much of the equipment he was planning to buy was either not required or that there were considerably cheaper options that were a better fit for him. I know of other divers who have gone through two or three twin sets a couple of wings, discarded several accessories and also changed their regs before they ended up with a setup that suited them.

Many divers choose to find out about twin sets from their friends or from other members of their club. This can be a very useful resource but is not always the best option. I have seen a number of clubs where the divers have adopted a kit configuration by default. Established members of the club adopt a configuration and new divers who want to go down the twin set route automatically adopt the same configuration without question.

There are many reasons why the initial group adopted that configuration, some of which may be valid and some of which may not. Twin set skills are often neglected in this environment and many divers will never have even tried to do a shutdown.

One of the other disadvantages of discussing configurations with other divers is that every diver always thinks that their configuration is the best and any variation is not as good as their setup. Any criticism of their configuration is taken personally. This makes it very difficult to have an objective conversation about kit configuration.

Every configuration has a number of advantages and disadvantages but when discussing configuration most divers will stress the advantages of their choice of configuration and the disadvantages of any other configuration. A good technical instructor should be able to be objective about different configurations. They may have their personal views but should be objective enough to give the advantages and disadvantages of all setups.

This is why it is important to choose a good instructor for a twin set familiarization. If you don't choose a good instructor then they may focus on the advantages of their preferred system, or even the manufacturer they sell.

The same situation occurs on the internet, especially in diving forums. Any question of equipment configuration will turn into a debate between the supporters of different styles of configuration. Each will focus on the disadvantages of the other style while claiming that their preferred setup is perfect.

For this reason advice you get from diving forums should be considered as highly biased. The same thing applies to different techniques for performing certain skills. For example, in any discussion on the best way to do a shutdown you will see the same level of bias.

The last reason why a twin set familiarization course can be a great benefit is that many divers may have experience of diving in a twin set but very few have experience of teaching other divers how to dive in one. Knowing what adjustments are likely in different configurations is something that comes with experience of teaching people in different setup.

Similarly when performing a shutdown, many divers can manage it themselves but cannot look at a new twin set diver and identify the specific reason why they are struggling. In order to perform a shutdown there are at least ten different factors that can affect your ability to reach your valves. Many divers would be hard pressed to name even five and so would not be able to identify which of the ten factors is the problem for a particular diver.

Of course not all instructors have the knowledge to cover all the items above and so the key point is to find a good instructor. If you can do this then a twin set familiarization course will save you time, money and hours of frustration.