

BECOMING A BRAND AMBASSADOR

How I became the new UK Brand Ambassador for Huish Outdoors.

By James Neal

It was a typical Friday, my regular 'dive day', and I had arrived on site at The National Diving & Activity Centre early enough to grab a spot of breakfast before thinking about getting kitted up. I forget who I was diving with on that Friday, but I do remember that it was a particularly beautiful day, glorious in fact.

There was the usual crowd of regular divers on site, the more technically advanced tend to gravitate to the NDAC on a Thursday and Friday, and I had a natter to a few friendly faces and then settled in for what I assumed would be the usual routine... gas, grub, gear and off we go...

One of the senior members of staff approached me as I got myself a coffee and asked 'Have you ever thought about being an ambassador?' I suspect I looked at him with a daft expression on my face as I responded 'A what?'

He went on to explain a little further that Husih Outdoors were looking for a new Brand Ambassador and that my name had been mentioned, along with several others, and that he had been tasked with asking me if I would consider the role. I duly responded in the affirmative and I distinctly remember thinking to myself 'not in a million years would I be selected' and subsequently thought nothing more

of it and went diving. I really didn't think that I would stand a chance of being chosen.

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A few weeks passed and I had all but forgotten about the conversation when I was asked if I would be happy to meet with the Huish Outdoor's representative.

This was arranged and I met with Justin for the first time to discuss the role and whether or not I was interested and suitable. I honestly don't think I really fully appreciated what was potentially on offer at first. It took a period of time for it to sink in, in fact I went for a dive after the initial discussion and it was whilst at depth, lost in my



thoughts, that the penny finally dropped as to what exactly I was potentially being considered for.

Consequently I couldn't get out of the water fast enough and back up to the offices in order to convey my enthusiasm. Justin laughed! He had realised that I hadn't

fully appreciated what it was that I was being considered for.

I then tried desperately to convey how enthusiastic I was and I think this made Justin laugh even more... think jibbering idiot and you've got a fairly good visual picture!

I was asked to produce something of a diving resume, which I duly did, and then I simply had to wait.

I don't actually recall how long I waited, but some time after the NEC Dive Show I received a call to offer me the role of 'UK Brand Ambassador'... I still have to pinch myself, even now as I type this, as I really can't believe it, I'm the UK Brand Ambassador for Hollis, Atomic Aquatics, Bare, Oceanic, Zeagle and Stahlsac... WOW! Really? Me?

What happened next was something of a whirlwind as

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suits, wet suits, under suits, fins and a proliferation of shiny new dive kit that is every divers dream!

But even at this time I still thought I was imagining things... and then I received a text message that simply had a picture of two enormous boxes. The majority of the new kit had arrived in the UK... and now I was starting to feel giddy with excitement.

I had to wait another week as Justin was away at the BOOT show and we then met up at the NDAC to go through everything. It was like Christmas all over again, only better, because it was all dive kit, no chocolates, no bubble bath, just dive kit, shiny new dive kit and it was the best I could do to contain my excitement.

It took a couple of hours to unpack everything and check it off the itinerary, I had new kit for the pool, new kit for single cylinder diving and open water instructing, new kit for sidemount diving and new kit for twin set diving. I also had an array of masks, bags and ancillary items to compliment everything. In truth, I didn't know where to begin, I was somewhat overwhelmed by it all and very conscious of not wanting to appear ungrateful.

It was decided that we would go for a quick dive on the Zeagle wing, the Atomic Aquatic M1 regs and the Zeagle Recon fins. And so we packed everything else away and got ourselves down to the water. At this point I was feeling noticeably anxious about potentially making a fool of myself. I have no idea why, I've got well over a thousand dives under my weight belt, and yet I felt a noticeable twinge of apprehension.

Maybe it was pure excitement. Whatever it was, it was gone as soon as I took the giant stride off the pontoon and into the water. I was immediately struck by the ease of the breathe on the Atomic Aquatic M1 regs and by the stability of the wing. I like diving on a wing, it's something that I'm very comfortable with and I was very happy with the Zeagle.

As I dipped below the surface I automatically dropped into a horizontal position and trimmed out by stabilising with my arms. I was immediately comfortable.



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We headed north and took a gradual route around the top end of the quarry, heading round to the wreck of the MV Caroline. The Recon fins were a revelation... and I genuinely mean that. I'm not saying it because I'm the new ambassador, I adore my Jetfins, I think they're the coolest bit of kit I've ever bought... but the truth of the matter is the Zeagle Recon fins are epic! It doesn't matter if you don't believe me, by all means borrow them and try for yourself!



That was about all I could take in on that day. I headed home with my 'dive wagon' packed and set to work sorting everything out in the comfort of my 'dive den'.

It took me a week to sort everything out properly and to be honest, two weeks

later, I was still fiddling with kit and making all manner of adjustments. Ah, bliss!

For my second dive I headed over to Vobster Quay with the Hollis 200LX DCX regs. These things look 'proper Gucci' and are Hollis's flagship regulator. It took me less than an hour to rig everything the way I wanted it for sidemount and we were good to go.

Vobster in February is cold, especially at depth, and so this is a great place for

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putting regs to the test as the conditions are a little more extreme. They performed well, the breathe was very light and this took a little getting used to at first but I soon felt relaxed and confident to take them to depth with the scooter. This puts added stress on the diaphragm as you're

moving through the water at a much greater speed than you would otherwise if finning, consequently some regs have a tendency to 'weep' as a result. The Hollis did not.

All LX regulators come with a lifetime warranty, 2 year service interval and free parts for life! That's impressive!

Keeping me warm throughout these cold water dives is the BARE SB System mid layer under suit and ultrawarmth base layer, combined with the SB socks and a 7 mm BARE ultrawarmth hood. I'm impressed by the comfort and warmth of both the ultrawarmth base layer and the mid layer. Ultrawarmth Base Layers seal in warmth and create a protective heat barrier and I have to say it rocks my world... I hate being cold!

Made from an advanced stretch breathable compression resistant fleece, the one piece mid layer provides warmth without bulk. It also maintains insulating values at changing depths allowing your core temperature to remain stable.



The ultrawarmth technology is impressive, reflecting your own body heat back at you and subsequently this drastically extends the time it takes to chill... I've not had to turn my heated vest on since I started wearing this!

I managed to squeeze in one final dive at NDAC this month, a night dive, and so I took my camera along to try and grab a couple of shots of my buddy in his BARE ultrawarmth hood and BARE dry suit.

My new dry suit is presently being made and should arrive in time to review next month. I'll also be hardboat diving out of Plymouth, on Top Gun and should hopefully be able to dive it on some of the cracking wrecks that the Devonshire coastline has to offer. I'm really looking forward to this weekend away with good friends.

My stand out moments this month on the first few dives have most definitely been the Zeagle Recon fins, the Atomic Aquatic M1 regs and the BARE ultrawarmth base layer and SB system mid layer under suit.



Natty Taylor at the NDAC.
Photography by James Neal