Diving with champions: Interview with Aldo Montano

Fencing Olympic athlete, Aldo Montano is a two times World Champion, five times European Champion, and nine times Italian Champion; esteemed athlete endorser, well-known TV personality, on his way to the next Olympics.



Zodiac sign: scorpio

Place of origin: born in Livorno in 1978, he lives in Rome, Italy.

Age: 38

DAN Member since 2017

In May 2013, Aldo Montano participated in a clean-up initiative organised by SNSI (Scuba and Nitrox Safety International) in collaboration with AVA, along with some 200 divers and sports celebrities, to remove trash from the seabed off the Tuscan coast.

How did you end up cleaning the sea bottom, Aldo? Where does the story begin?

The story begins in 2010, when my cousin Francesca, a SNSI Instructor Trainer, practically forced me to follow her underwater. Obviously I was very curious... Until then I had only dived holding my breath, and the idea of being able to get past the limits of our earthly mammalian nature, that usually prevents us

from going underwater, intrigued me. Breathing down there was a bit of a dream, just like the dream of flying. My only regret is that I'm not able to spend much time scuba diving as I would like. As an athlete, I have commitments, and a very intensive training schedule.



The Montanos are a family whose relationship with the Sea is essential, right?

We actually own a shipyard. We build and repair boats, ships, and speedboats at the Livorno port since 1890. Our family roots are in the water.

Your oldest and deepest memory of the sea?

I am part of the "Jaws" generation, and I was terrified of swimming away from shore, and of moving my tiny feet where I couldn't see the bottom. In my hometown, Livorno, it's easy to swim away from the shore just a tiny bit, and you're in deep water. My dad would take us away from shore and put us in the water without much fuss, and I kept imagining creatures coming up from the abyss, mouth wide open, full of teeth. Yet, in the end, thanks to my dad's insistence I finally overcame this fear. From there, a passion developed, quite quickly I must say, and I embraced the sea in various ways: surfing, windsurfing, and finally scuba diving.



You supported a campaign promoting road safety. What about safety at sea, do you think more should be done?

I'm no expert, but an example comes to mind: while everyone knows road signs, and road traffic is directed, at sea you find an open stretch of water without suggestions that are clear for everyone; you must be knowledgeable, you must be prepared. Yet people don't believe it's possible to have an accident, or a collision, on such a wide and open stretch of water. Some people go out at sea once a year on tiny boats you can rent without a license, some others don't know anything about proper boating, in spite of having a boat license. Then in summertime the situation gets chaotic. But I think that simply limiting traffic would be a loss for everyone, boaters, divers, tour operators, everyone.

A moment of fear underwater?

I was at a dive spot called Le Formiche, in Grosseto, and at some point I felt disoriented, I couldn't distinguish up from down anymore, and the vertical wall seemed to me both the bottom and a roof. I took Francesca's hand, my *diving godmother*, and right away I recovered. I understood that in scuba diving, just like in other sports, trust is paramount. Knowing you can rely on experienced and competent people can turn critical moments into something that can be even funny.



Share with us a WOW moment – underwater.

When I met Nemo (a clown fish) in the Maldives! It was amazing to see him in his own environment, the anemone, after being submerged only by cartoons and stuffed animals. It was wonderful to be able to stop for a while, hovering over him, and admiring his beauty thanks to my scuba gear.

Describe the typical day of a World Champion who's getting ready for the Olympics.

Well, much depends on your age! We all train starting with a warm-up and exercises, then there's a *maestro* who refines your technique, who leads you by observing your from the outside, and a sparring partner for the real games… These are things that can easily take the whole day.

Your childhood dream involving scuba diving?

I always dreamt about diving with a shark, the one of the movies, the great white. Tiger sharks, great whites… maybe to exorcize my old fear, maybe because I'm fascinated by getting close enough to understand a dangerous predator. I know we're not part of its diet, but for so long I've seen sharks from the surfer's perspective, and my surfer friends keep talking about attacks and wounds, even if inflicted by mistake. Until now I have met whale sharks, huge and chubby, with their bizzarre polka-dotted skin, simply beautiful! But the shark I'm talking about – the great white – well, it's something else, it makes me think of thoroughbreds, with their muscles flashing under the skin.

And now, your favorite dive site.

Hard to say! I’m torn between two areas, actually, not two dive spots. One is the Mediterranean, a more familiar space, and the other is tropical seas. They are very different. When you dive in the Indian Ocean you see dream-like colors and clear waters. When you dive in the Mediterranean there can be less light and color, but you dive into something that belongs to you, that has marked your childhood and, in a way, your culture. I really can’t decide.

Awards

2004 – Olympic Gold, Athens

2005 – Gold, European Championship, Hungary

2011 – Gold, World Championship, Italy

2009 – Gold, European Championship, Bulgaria

2010 – Gold, European Championship, Germany

2011 – Gold, European Championship, UK

2013 – Gold, European Championship, Croatia

2015 – Gold, World Championships, Russia

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