

Divers with Disabilities Get Hands-on with Rebreathers for the First Time

People with disabilities are one of the most excluded groups in our society, and among the [hardest hit](#) in times of crisis, like the current one. So we love when initiatives are taken to promote inclusion of disabled persons, especially within our diving community.

Recently, the Prague Wheelchair Sports Club (SKV) and the Divesoft team enjoyed an extraordinary demo day together. Members of the wheelchair diving club were introduced to diving with a CCR Liberty for the very first time, giving them the opportunity to experience the equipment professional divers use, learn about a completely new diving technique and compare it with the open-circuit scuba they are accustomed to.

For these students who use wheelchairs in their daily lives, the weightlessness of being underwater helps limit some of the challenges they face on land. For this reason, many have found a love for the sport of diving and were invited for a demo day with the Divesoft team in early October. This wasn't, however, just any ordinary day of diving for the students. Although SKV members regularly participate in diving lessons, they have only trained with open circuits. This time around, they had the opportunity to try out a rebreather, taking their diving experience to a whole new level.



Teamwork makes the difference

The event took place at a pool in Holešovice, Prague. It was attended by 6 SKV members, along with their diving instructor and head of the SKV diving division, Tomáš Kratochvíl, who is quadriplegic and has an impressive 120 dives under his belt. The Divesoft team was present with Jakub Šimánek and Jakub Sláma,

together with personal assistants who helped SKV members with changing their clothes and getting in and out of the water.



Following the introduction, participants donned their wetsuits, received basic information about the Liberty rebreather, and finally took the plunge. As soon as the participants got in the water, the Divesoft team took the reins.

The first step in using the new gear was to properly adjust the rebreather's harness so that it fit each diver properly. In doing so, the instructors used the quick-release and removable buckles to make wearing the unit as comfortable as possible. Jakub Šimánek paid special attention to ensuring that the rebreather itself was set up correctly. *"We helped the divers warm up their lungs and put BOVs in their mouths. We then helped them make a test turn, i.e. a barrel roll. In this way, we were able to test whether water would leak into their masks, and if they felt comfortable breathing from the device. Next, Tomáš Kratochvíl and I held the charges on each side of the device and helped the students move underwater,"* said Jakub Šimánek of the initial process.



An individual approach and safety first

When diving, good communication is a must. It's important that everyone knows the plan and what to anticipate. Because some of the students were not able to move their hands, it wouldn't have been possible to switch BOV over to the open circuit or give a signal in case of complications. Therefore, hand signals were agreed to in advance. This extra communication and detail made for a calm and enjoyable experience for everyone.

To meet the current, higher hygiene standards, and ensure that all participants could perform a rebreather trial, the Divesoft team brought two complete Liberty units. So while one participant was diving on a CCR, assistants from the Divesoft team could completely disinfect the other rebreather's breathing loop and set up for the next student. A disinfectant proven to work against COVID-19 was used, and prevention measures were taken (including testing negative before the event took place), according to local laws and regulations. ¹

Impressions of the new experience

Each of the participants learned the differences between closed and open circuit diving, and had the opportunity to try the new "silent" diving style. These new experiences were accompanied by [the positive atmosphere felt throughout the entire course](#).

"There was definitely a great spirit in the room. Everyone was extremely nice and friendly, and their interest in trying something new showed through their enthusiasm and joy. In general, this is my favorite part of teaching. When you make someone happy, everything just seems to make sense," recalled Jakub Šimánek.

The fun atmosphere and exciting new experiences were also echoed by the participants of the SKV course. One of the students, Gabriela, had this to say of her time in the water: *"At first, I didn't want to try diving with a rebreather because I was afraid of the pressure on my ears when underwater. But then I overcame my fear, and with the help of the wonderful instructors, I dove into the deep end without any problems. I was able to clear my ears, which was a bonus, and I also really enjoyed my time underwater."*

"For me, the biggest benefit of the course was getting to build my diving knowledge and try out a new form of technology which isn't commonly available," commented Kristýna, another participant.

In the end, the participants' unanimous answer to the question, "what excited you most about using the rebreather?" was the unit's complete lack of noise and bubble-free exhaling. In short, the demo day was a success, and the SKV members left with new diving know-hows and underwater experiences which they will surely cherish for a long time.



¹ For a more extensive overview of diving activities in COVID-19 times, have a look at the DAN

Europe [recommendations and guidelines](#).