

MY FAVOURITE KIT

Scots man of action ANDY TORBET started diving at 12. He is a cave-, mixed-gas and rebreather diver and freediver and a military and commercial diver and supervisor. He gained a degree in zoology before spending 10 years in the Forces as a paratrooper, diver and bomb disposal officer, serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Northern Ireland and the Falklands. Sandy is also a mountaineering instructor, caver, sea-kayaker and extreme sportsman. Recent TV projects included *Operation Iceberg* and *Coast* and he is currently filming with Monty Halls

MY GARAGE IS COMPLETELY taken up with dive kit. I've run out of room. For example, I've got about 26 cylinders, and these days I'm doing mostly rebreather, so I don't need to keep more than a couple of single 10s.

The problem is that our house is too small. We may have to move home to get a bigger garage!

I wouldn't ever throw kit away, although I occasionally give it away to a local club or someone I know. But we have to thin out!

REGULATORS

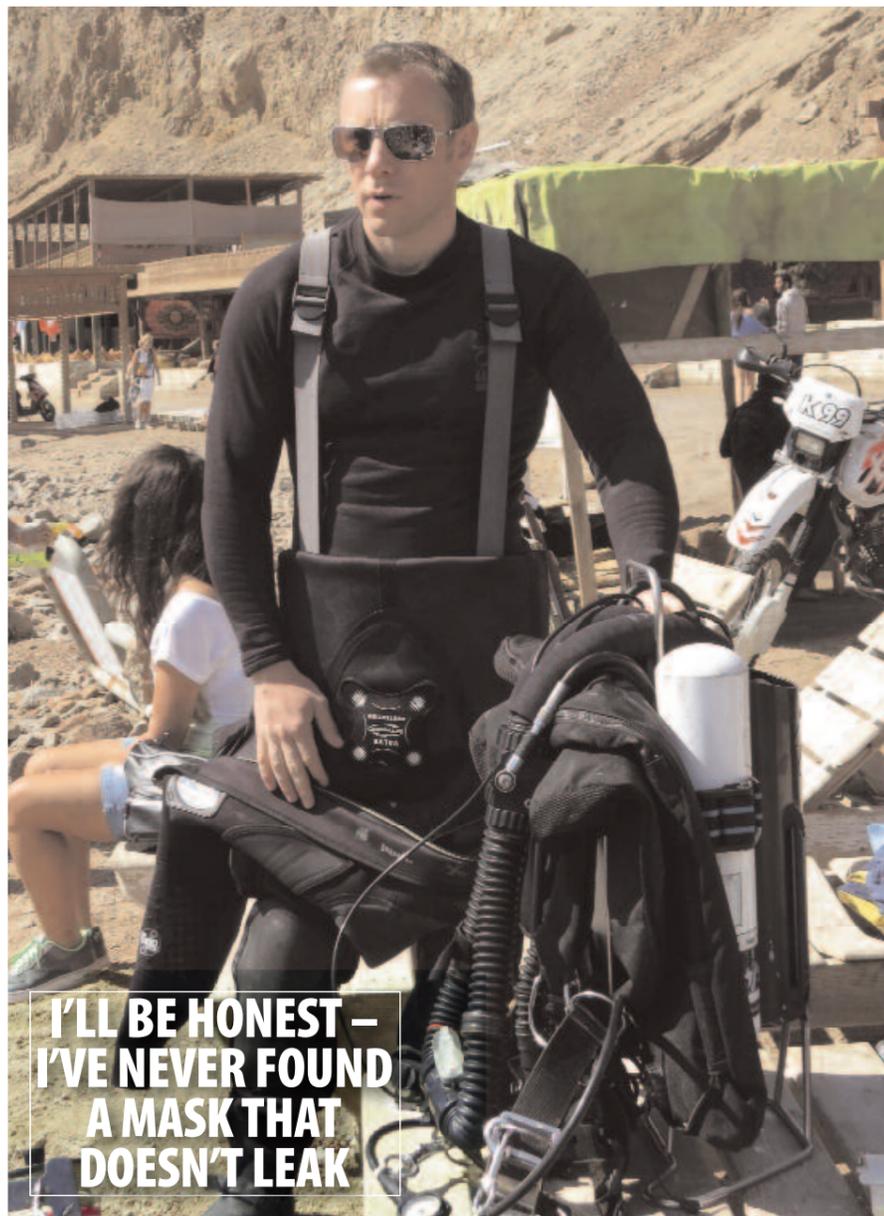
I have two sets, Poseidon Xstreams and Cyklons. I use the Cyklons usually for cave-diving, because you can bludgeon them to death and they keep working. The Xstreams you can use down to 150m, and if it's all going wrong and you're flapping a bit they'll keep going. It's a good bit of kit.

I've pretty well always used Poseidons. I got a set of Xstreams when they first came out and I liked them, whether used with twin-sets or stage bottles or whatever – and with a rebreather I use an Xstream for bail-out.

If you're at 120m and have to come off your rebreather, you want to know that your bail-out is completely reliable, so that almost gets more attention than the main reg.

There aren't many bad regulators these days. If you're doing 30m dives in the Red Sea it's fine to have an Xstream but you don't need one.

I also like it because it's light and compact. A good proportion of what I do, especially in the UK, is in caves or mines, and often in mountains, but even on boats I like to carry everything myself, and keep it light and small and easily tucked away. I think it's because I was in the army.



KATE WESTAWAY

WING

I've got a Dive Rite backplate, though I don't particularly rate Dive Rite above anyone else, because all the backplates and harnesses are pretty similar these days.

I've got an aluminium and a steel one. I try to use the steel one as often as possible, because it means fewer blocks of lead around my waist.

I try to keep weights to a minimum because I smashed five vertebrae and permanently damaged three discs in my back when I was 21, but when I'm travelling sometimes the best thing is to take the aluminium backplate.

I have a small travel wing and a small double-bladder wing. I do like wings more than BCs.

Diving is a very personal thing, and it doesn't matter how much time, effort and advice you get, someone in diving will always tell you you're wrong!

SUITS

I have an O'Three 1.1mm neoprene drysuit. It's really good, really flexible and keeps me warm. It was my first suit with neoprene rather than a membrane.

This one has latex seals, which are really good because you can change them in the field.

I've got 3, 5 and 7mm Fourth Element Proteus wetsuits. I was nagging Jim [Standing] to make me a silver 7mm one, because black suits are all well and good but they're rubbish for on-screen photography.

He's done it, and it looks phenomenal in pictures, both topside and below. I used it on *Operation Iceberg*. There are only two in the world and I've got both of them.

A few people have asked about them and Jim might be thinking about making a limited edition.

My favourite piece of equipment is my 5mm Fourth Element hood. I'd never change it, because it's just the most perfect fit.

I genuinely love that hood for the way it sits – it's as if they used my head for the mould!

When they made the silver wetsuit they got another company to make the hood, and it never fitted properly. It domed up at the top and let in air. I refuse to wear a silver wetsuit with a black hood, so I've nagged Fourth Element and they're making me a 5mm hood in the silver as well!

UNDERSUIT

The Fourth Element Halo is a brilliant bit of kit. It's non-compressible, and I've used it diving under icebergs at 30m when my gauge was reading -2°. The scientists told me no, it must have been -1.7°, but I said: "Look, fellas, for the purposes of this story it's -2°!"

I do get free kit from O'Three and Poseidon, and Fourth Element and Suunto also support my projects, but I should point out that I was already using all these companies' kit before that.

COMPUTER

I use the Suunto D10 computer-watch. I've been diving a JJ rebreather recently for Monty Halls' TV projects so I use it as back-up.

I've used it in the Red Sea down to 100m, and it's been absolutely spot-on so far.

FINS

I've had a set of Mares Plana Avanti Quattros for 17 years, with the same plastic buckles and the same leather straps.

When I bought them I was told to be careful, because when you drop them the buckles break.

Mine get kicked, I've had them in caves and on wrecks all over the world. They're still among the biggest sellers today, and I think Mares just got them right first time. People claim to have faster fins but if you need to fin that fast you've usually done something wrong.

For freediving I use a pair of Beuchats.

MASK

I'll be honest: I've never found a mask that doesn't leak. It must be my face. I make sure to shave closely in the morning, I've tried everything.

I try on a mask in the shop and it seems to fit me pretty well, but not when I get in the water.

On open-circuit it's not a drama, but when you're on a rebreather it's a real pain. I've gone back to my old Oceanic Shadow. I like it because it gives me loads of space with a nice high volume.

I freedive with a little Poseidon full-volume mask.

REBREATHERS

I have a Poseidon MkVI, and the thinking behind recreational rebreathers is that they will get more people involved in diving, but at the moment I'm loving the simplicity and reliability of the JJ. It's such a small, light unit.

Rebreathers are very personal things and the JJ wouldn't be right for everyone, but the first time I used it, I just clicked with it.

LIGHTS

For personal lights I have a couple of little Intovas on my helmet, a narrow and a wide-beam.

They do the job – you can never see that far into caves and wrecks anyway. Although they've been kicked around a lot they're still working. They're not that bright but then, they're pretty cheap.

Recently when we've been filming and needed a lot of light, I've been using Keldans. I used to use the Greenforce Squid LEDs but the Keldans have 5000 lumens – and that's just the small ones.

Rich Stevenson, who we've been filming with, has some bigger versions that are like a couple of suns. That's where diving technology has come on –



Kit Andy lugged up Italy's Apennine Mountains to dive the Cave of Skulls!

in the old days the lights would last about an hour if you were lucky, and were incredibly expensive. Now it's like lighting the world.

WEIGHTBELT

I like the little Beuchat waistcoat with weight-pockets in the back. It gets the weight away from my spine and prevents me from getting pain in my lower back.

The biggest area of buoyancy in your body is your lungs, so you want to have loads of weight beside them. If you can spread it up to your shoulder-blades that's a lifeline, and I find it easier to freedive that way. I often wear ankle-weights if I'm wearing a drysuit, too, just to keep my trim.

CAMERAS

I have a Canon 550D but I'm no professional – though I have had quite a bit of footage broadcast on television, which has all come from GoPros.

A good proportion of the times I pop up on *Operation Iceberg*, perhaps in the middle of a big ice-cave, it's me on my own filming with a GoPro.

Under water I've often used the Intovas and the Keldans with a filter to light the scene. You often

have to point them away to avoid hotspots.

I've become a bit of a GoPro geek. Shooting with Monty or on *Operation Iceberg*, the BBC might have six GoPros and I bring my two and they say: "Andy, can you look after all the GoPros, because you know more about them than anybody else!"

They're a great little bit of kit, because they've made the filming of the underwater world accessible to everyone. They're small and light and you can stick them anywhere. I've not been on a shoot in the past year where they haven't used GoPros. They're GoProtastic!

I'm going to buy one of the new ones and test it out for battery life. Weight and self-filming are the issues for me, so GoPro's a great option.

KNIFE

I used my army knife until a couple of years ago, proper 1970s with a massive knife on the leg! It may look good but it's useless for caves or wrecks.

So now I've got a little knife on my forearm. It's just one piece of metal, there's no rubber handle.

I made the holster from a piece of webbing folded over, with a stitch up the side and Velcro to keep the flap closed. It's held on with elastic.

Blue Orb, the distributor for Keldan, gave me a cutting tool called an Eezycut Trilobite. It's a really good bit of kit, razor-sharp, so I keep that fixed just below my crotch-strap.

As they say, if you want to know where something is, keep it next to your balls!

If I'm diving where I know there's big bits of thick rope, I might take a good old bread-knife.

It'll rust, yes, but it costs £1.99 so you can just get another one.

But when it comes to filaments and fishing-nets, big knives are useless.

REELS

I said I liked things light and compact, but there's a limit when it comes to things like reels and SMBs. It's fine in the Red Sea, but if you have freezing cold hands what you need is massive chunky things.

I've got little finger spools for warmwater stuff, a couple of 100m Custom Diving reels that I use for deep deployment and a couple of huge ones that Kent Tooling made for me. They take 300m each of 3 or 4mm thick cord, for laying permanent line.

SMB

I use an AP Valves crack-bottle SMB, which is really good for rebreather diving and also quite handy to take freediving. Any problems and you just crack it.

It's just a big solidly filled unit, it's the most safe thing, and I really like the fact that they've now made little valves to fit on them, so that you can plug your BC hose into it.

Now you can take your crack bottle abroad, which you could never do in the past. █

Andy Torbet was talking to Steve Weinman.

