



Become an Open Water or Overhead Sidemount Diver

What is sidemount diving?

Sidemount diving is an alternative configuration of your equipment that moves your main tank (either one or two tanks) to your waist. Sidemount diving started in Europe in the 60's to allow divers to squeeze through tight spots while exploring sumps. Divers brought the technique here and it is widely used in places where using back mounted tanks will not allow divers to go through tight spaces during cave and wreck exploration. The benefits of this type of diving can be extended to recreational diving.

Why is sidemount diving growing so quickly?

The benefits of sidemount can be broken down into three areas, comfort, safety and control in the water.

Comfort: Sidemounting uses a harness, which can be adapted to a person's physical characteristics and abilities. The weight of the harness is distributed with the center of gravity of the tanks being around your waist. Walking in with the gear is a lot easier. Or you can put your harness on and attach your tank(s) in the water. Also, you can use smaller 40 cu ft tanks on both sides which weigh only 15 lbs empty each.

Safety: With a two-tank sidemount configuration, you have two tanks and two regulators offering a completely redundant air system underwater. This configuration is known as the basic technical rig, which is significantly different from the normal recreational scuba setup. Diving with this setup does require some training that will allow you to think differently about handling emergency situations. One consideration is making sure that your buddy knows the air sharing procedure if they are diving with you – although the procedure is very easy due to the longer six-to-seven foot hose you will pass to them.

Control: One of the most amazing things about sidemount diving is how much more streamlined you are, which means less effort moving through the water which will conserve your air supply. Another benefit is that your buoyancy and horizontal trim become a lot easier as well – and the sidemount rig will allow you to adjust your trim in the water “on the fly”. Your tanks are held up along your sides and out of your way. One of the most comfortable feelings you will have is not having anything in front or behind you.

What training do I get?

The training comes in two major sections. The first is classroom and includes a brief history of sidemount and then we go hands on to set up a sidemount rig. While working on the rigging, we will discuss some of the options of how you rig, the benefits and drawbacks of some of those options and resources that you can use. The open water portion consists of four dives with the last having a technical component for those interested. During these dives you will practice air sharing skills, air management (to keep tanks balanced), tank trimming, buoyancy, no mount, and even monkey diving if you want to try it! If you hold at least a Cavern Diver certification, most of the skills can be completed in the overhead environment.

What can I do after the certification?

Go diving!!! This specialty course can be applied toward the PADI Master Scuba Diver rating. You can also take Discover Tec diving at the same time. You can continue your training courses in sidemount.

How can I get certified?

Contact Glenn Van Vliet at SnapperScuba.com or 850-217-0679. Glenn is a PADI DSAT Tec Deep and MSDT Instructor, PSAI Sport, Cave and Tec Instructor, and an EFR CPR, AED, and First Aid Instructor.