

FINS

TUSA

XPERT ZOOM 3

I HAVE HAD SOME EMBARRASSING

experiences with unfamiliar test fins, going on multi-day dive trips only to find that I don't get on with them.

On occasions, I have even resorted to borrowing old fins from a dive-guide.

You can wear a pair of fins that feel very comfortable but it's only when you find yourself in extreme circumstances that you can really tell whether they're as effective as you would wish.

I remember going with Stuart Cove, in the Bahamas, to visit a wreck that he had recently sunk. The sinking had not gone as planned. The hulk had inverted and was lying precariously on the edge of a reef wall at 30m, possibly ready to drop a further 30m. Stuart was wearing new split-fins, with which he professed to be in love.

A huge current was striking the reef wall and pouring up over the top of the inverted hull. I was working hard, and saw Stuart returning prematurely to the boat above us.

When I got back, I met a disconsolate man who had just fallen out of love. His split-fins had proved ineffective against the rush of water.

With such instances in mind, I selected a dive trip that would not subject me to any hard conditions on which to try out the latest TUSA Xpert Zoom Z3 fins. These are a second generation of split-fin, a sibling forerunner having been in the vanguard of what was to become a split-fin revolution.

Since that time, diving manufacturers have found it almost impossible to sell fins without split blades in the massive US market, but elsewhere the love affair has been more short-lived, with many divers returning to more conventional paddle styles.

It's not that I expected the Zoom Z3 fins to be useless, but in a side-by-side performance comparison with other fins, measured on an underwater speedometer, I knew that the comfort they afforded had to be paid for in some way. There's no gain without pain.

I went diving with these fins in what are normally the kind midsummer waters of the Gulf of Aqaba, the place that gave warmwater diving the reputation for being as challenging as diving in an aquarium, but on the very first dive I found myself swimming up a slope against a downcurrent. More of this later.

Blades

Without a pair to hand to make a direct comparison, I was hard-pressed to see the difference between these fins and their forerunner, also still available. Perhaps it is the technopolymer mix that is different. They have the same split blade, augmented by stiff side supporting bars that dip away from the line of the foot-pocket at around 30°.

TUSA was among the first manufacturers to adopt the Nature's Wing split-fin design, and probably kept closely to Pete McCarthy's original concept. As such its products are among the more effective split-fins available. Tabata USA is in fact a Japanese company that manufactures in Taiwan for the US market.

Foot-Pockets

The foot-pockets were on the narrow side, and might not suit those divers who have big feet in even bigger boots. This would include many drysuit divers, but I suspect that speedy split-fins might not be up their particular street anyway.

I call them "speedy" because



they ask to be used in a speedy way. It's a bit like finning in a lower gear. Someone with short legs capable of a fast flutter-kick might be able to get a fair turn of speed out of them, but not me.

Straps & Buckles

I remember getting excited about straps with quick-release buckles, but now that all fins have them I can simply say that these fins are conventionally equipped.

Efficacy

The Xpert Zoom 3s felt light on the feet and exceptionally easy to use, so long I didn't have to race anyone or fight big currents. These are ideal fins for the gentleman-diver, if not the boy-racer.

They seemed to offer little resistance to the water, which made them very comfortable, even if this was paid for in reduced efficiency.

The fins always worked, though I must say that when I met the downcurrent I mentioned earlier, the effect was like swimming in treacle.

For this reason I give these fins high marks for comfort but low marks for performance. If you want a TUSA fin that shovels water well, go for the cheaper Tri-Ex. ■



SPECS

SIZES ▶ S, M, L

WEIGHT ▶ 2.5kg

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★☆☆☆☆