

WINNERS

THE DIVER AWARDS ARE UNUSUAL, in that it is the readers of **DIVER** alone who decide who the winners shall be. Every year you put pen to paper or click online for your favourite products and services, and although some may protest that there are better yet lesser-known contenders for awards out there, it's the votes that secure the places.

Some may protest that awards like this count for little – but that's probably because they haven't won one.

What we can tell you is that the expensively produced bronze statuettes are always displayed proudly by those who carry them away and for those who are serial winners, a set of shiny **DIVER** Awards has become something of a permanent status symbol.

Clearly the better-publicised and best-known brands will have the best opportunity to take the top places, but no winner can afford to sit on their laurels. If the service falters, the customers' votes will dry up – and there will always be a newcomer around the corner hoping to take the vacant place.

TAKE ALL!



DESTINATION OF THE YEAR

The popularity of Egypt with **DIVER** readers reflects its convenient proximity, its good value for money, the hospitality of its people and the high quality of its diving in terms of both wrecks and reefs.

This was reflected in the solid margin by which readers who voted for **Egypt** this year beat off the runner-up, the island-nation of the **Maldives**, a very significant destination for divers, but that much further away from the UK, and so significantly more expensive.

The vast country of **Indonesia**, with its growing popularity with **DIVER** readers, took third place.

"We are delighted with the vote of confidence from readers of **DIVER**," said Khaled Ramy, Director of the Egyptian State Tourist Office in the UK.



"We have the closest coral reef to the UK, we're committed to sustainable development and to the protection of our magnificent underwater environment. A big thankyou to your readers for their support, and their passion for diving in Egypt."

BRAND OF THE YEAR

It's amazing what a difference good leadership from the top makes, and under the guidance of aptly named overall boss Joe Stella, the US-owned giant **Scubapro** continues to reach for the stars.



There seems to be great morale among its employees, a superb range of new products that are immediately available to retailers, and hard-to-fault customer service. Is it any wonder that Scubapro has scooped **DIVER** Brand of the Year yet again?

"Three years on the trot! We've become so attached to this award that we intend to win it next year too," said Andy Shears, the boss at the UK end, when he heard the news.

"In the next 12 months we'll be introducing more new products than we ever have in any previous year. Watch this space!"

Second came **Suunto**, the diving-computer manufacturer, which has a much shorter product line-up but another seemingly permanent residency in the top three for this award. It makes products that do the job at a price divers can afford, backed by impeccable aftersales service.

Ever close behind came **Mares**, a full-product-range company that is finally pulling up its skirts and making a race for the position at the top that it considered its own in the days before it changed its UK distributor. Who knows, next year the order of things might be different.

DIVE CENTRE OF THE YEAR

Which is your favourite dive centre? Do you return to the same one year after year? The results for this category are becoming almost predictable too, given the large number of British divers who visit Egypt, and the area around Sharm el Sheikh at the southern end of the Sinai peninsula in particular.

What chance does a dive centre in any other part of the world have when it comes to the popular vote? History repeated itself with, as usual, **Red Sea Diving College** in Sharm managing to collect enough votes to win the award with, again as usual, **Ocean College**, Sharm following closely behind. Both were challenged for the top spot – as usual – by the neighbouring **Camel Dive**.

On hearing the news that it had amassed the most votes, CEO Alain Sobol said: "Four in a row, brilliant! Thanks to all our guests, **DIVER** Magazine readers and all our team!"

Regular readers may be experiencing a feeling of *déjà vu!*



TOUR OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

Diving holidays are for most of us what diving is all about, and for this we usually call on the services of specialist tour operators.

Their job is to get us there and back safely, and organise everything we need to make our diving holiday enjoyable and forever memorable, while at the same time protecting our payments in advance against unforeseen circumstances by means of ATOL bonding.

One operator has won this coveted award consistently over the past six years and when asked what its secret is, Tony Backhurst and Angela Mackintosh of **Scuba Travel** told us: "The team at

Scuba Travel are constantly striving to provide new and exciting diving experiences, together with excellent customer service.

"One of the key factors in our success is that everyone in the team is an experienced diver. We are as passionate about diving as our customers."

blue o two, operator of a fleet of high-quality

liveboards in the Egyptian Red Sea and now expanding with holidays in the Maldives and Malta, came second. **Longwood Holidays**, a company with a long history in Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Morocco, took third place.



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Suunto might be the bridesmaid when it comes to the Brand of the Year, but it's definitely the bride when

it comes to individual products.

Every diver needs a diving computer, one that can be trusted both to be reliable and to deliver sensible

information at an affordable price, backed by unquestioning aftersales service.

In 2009, Suunto rocked the boat by being the first public-quoted company to offer a computer for trimix diving. Typically, it met all its existing product criteria, including an intuitive method of use. It also came to the market at a price that must have given smaller producers pause for thought. It surprised no-one in the **DIVER** office that the **HelO2** became Product of the Year for 2009.

Just to put the cherry on the icing of the cake for Suunto, the now discontinued **Vyper 2**, and its replacement the **Vyper Air** came hard on the heels of their illustrious brother, in second place.

Ryan Crawford, recently promoted to boss of Suunto UK, told us: "I'm very excited by the news that we have won with different products for the third time in a row. Winning this award means a lot to all of us at Suunto."

"The warm feeling it gives us will go a long way to thawing out our test divers, who spent so many hours under the ice in Finland making sure we'd got the HelO2 spot on."

Miflex flexible lightweight braided hoses, now also available for high-pressure applications, are already proving very popular with the diving public. They took third place.



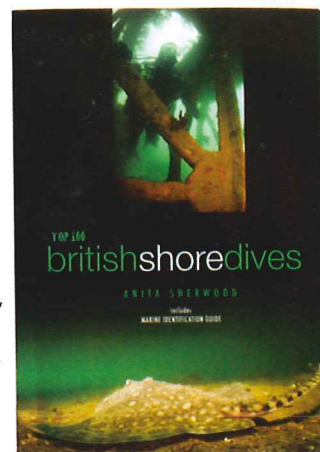
PUBLICATION OF THE YEAR

You don't have to be a mainstream publisher to win this award. Diving is such a niche activity that it is open to anyone, even if you self-publish. You just have to come up with a book or DVD of a good idea and produce it in a way that every diver wants.

Top 100 British Shore Dives by **Anita Sherwood** is sold direct and appears not even to have an ISBN number, but it received rave reviews in all the diving magazines, including this one, and is full of useful information, presented in a palatable fashion at an acceptable price.

"After an exhausting year of diving, researching and writing, it was fantastic to see the book in print, even better to see it be so successful," said Anita. "It was a lot of hard work, and took over my life completely during 2009. My husband went pale when I was asked about a sequel!"

Runner-up was the DVD of the **BBC** production **Oceans**, and the well-received book **Deco for Divers** by well-known technical diving instructor **Mark Powell** took third place.



LIVEBOARD OF THE YEAR

There are now some very high-quality liveboards to be found throughout the world, but such is the popularity of the Red Sea with the British diving public that this category is always closely fought by a number of good boats from this area. A former winner, **Blue Horizon**, took the chequered flag.

blue o two company directors Jason Strickland and Nathan Tyler were said to be over the moon when they heard that their vessel was **DIVER** Liveboard of the Year. "It feels very special to have our guests recommend us in such a way for this award," said Jason. "It is testament to all the hard work our team have put into our products, both in the UK and in Egypt."

Many familiar names were in the final list, including vessels from other theatres of operation, such as **VIP One**, **Grand Sea Serpent**, **Hurricane Sea Spirit**, **Sea Hunter**, **Taka**, **Valkyrie** and **Siren** to name but a few. In the event, repeat winner Tornado Fleet's **Whirlwind** was close behind the number one spot in second place, with **Emperor Elite**, also from the Red Sea, not far off the top spot in third.



NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR

By its very nature, there is never a repeat winner in this category! This year, it was all about products. First place went to the **Apeks Flight**, a superbly performing British-built ultra-lightweight regulator that has been conceived to answer the problem of the swingeing excess-baggage charges of airlines for long-haul divers.

Tony Gallagher of Apeks was quietly confident that it would be a best-seller when he gave us an early production version for trial in **DIVER** Tests and it certainly looks as though he might be right.

An interesting closed-circuit rebreather originally designed by Jan Petersen and Jan Jorgensen with development by Dave Thompson and launched this year, the **JJ-CCR** took second place, while the avant-garde **Scubapro Seawing Nova** fins were close behind in third place.



RETAILER OF THE YEAR

Many dive-shop owners in the UK jealously covet this award, and the fight to garner the most votes can be intense, but there can be only one winner. This year it was online retailer

Simply Scuba of Kent.

"We're thrilled to receive the award," proprietor Gerrard Dennis told **DIVER**. "We've been runners-up in the past, so we're going in the right direction. We hope to continue improving still further in the coming years. It's obviously an accolade to all our staff, and all our customers who voted for us."

Former award winners **Scuba + Outdoor Pursuits** and **Deep Blue Dive Centre** came second and third respectively.



AND OUR READER-WINNER IS...

"But I've never won anything before!" said a delighted Gillian Evans of Aston Clinton, Bucks, on hearing that she had bagged two Sea-Doo Sea Scooter VS Supercharged DPVs, worth £1000, just for entering the **DIVER** Awards. She and husband Rob dive with a very proactive club, Dacorun BSAC. It organises UK diving year round, mainly in the South and South-west, and annual trips to locations that extend to Galapagos, with Truk now in its sights. Gillian, a Sports Diver, has belonged to the club for eight years. While she admits that Rob is the more active UK diver, the Sea-Doos should encourage her to do that much more. "I'll be down at the club on Thursday night, saying: 'You'll never guess what I've won...!'" she said. For more on Sea-Doos, see UK distributor Alpha Distribution's site at www.alphad.org, or call 01709 515157.