

FIX Under Warmer Vest

by Peter Rowlands

Keen UwP readers will remember we included details of the FIX Under Warmer Vest in the New Products Section of UwP111 and I have been fortunate enough to be given one to review.

As an all year round UK diver I have to admit that as life progresses the winter water temperatures do dampen the enthusiasm somewhat and certainly limit dive times. Fingers become uncooperatively numb and feet chill as the body naturally withdraws heat to it's core to preserve vital functions. Winter water temperatures in the UK can dip to 8°C (46F) with fresh water lakes even more consistently colder.

And so it was a welcome task to review this vest and I was again fortunate to have the top of the range version to try.

There are three models all rated to 100 metres - SD, DX and PRO. The SD is for wetsuits only with a wired controller, the DX has a back heating element while the Pro has elements front and back and both are wirelessly controlled.

There are two battery versions available - 2.6ah (Type 2600) and 5.2ah (Type 5200). All three models have three power settings - Low, Medium and High providing 45, 50 and 55°C respectively and the Type 2600 battery, for example, gives 5.2, 3.2 and 2.6 hours respectively at those settings. Times for the Type 5200 battery are twice as long. The PRO version with its two heated panels can only be used with Type 5200 batteries.

Such burn times make it entirely possible to do two full 1 hour dives and still have some heat left before needing to recharge the batteries. So straight

away this vest can double your dives in winter because, speaking personally, one full dive was enough 'in the old unheated days'. Turn the power down a notch and you'll still be warm but with even more burn time to spare.

Fully charging empty batteries takes just over 7 hours so it is obviously being done at a sensible rate which ensures long healthy battery life. The Type 5200 batteries weigh just over half a kilo each so you will need to lighten your weight belt accordingly. Speaking of weight belts I have always used a shoulder harness design which alleviates the need to have the waste belt tight as all of the weight is on the shoulders. As a 5' 6" person I think using a conventional weigh belt would take a bit of getting used to to get the right level above the hips yet out of the way of the batteries.

Donning the vest is via the side entry zip which is very simple and a zip in extension panel is available to make it more comfortable for 'the fuller figure'. Needless to say I found the extension very useful! If you are in the market for one of these I would recommend taking time to chose the right size for you as the weight of the batteries needs to be firmly supported for maximum comfort.

The primary battery pockets are at the front sides but there are also two at the rear which may suit you more but you would need to buy an extension cable for this.

It's difficult to put into words the 'glow' which this vest creates. Press the large button on the remote wrist controller and a physical buzz indicates 'lift off'. Press it again for two buzzes and



again for three. Almost immediately the heat starts and as a sensation it is second only to the other one which I won't mention (but I hope you'll get my drift) and it really is a very close second! Heat as we know is guttural and to be warm is bliss.

It's human nature to turn up the volume to start with but I recommend starting your dive at the base setting and you can always turn it up if you feel a chill starting. That's much more pleasant than starting at full power and having nothing in reserve if you do feel a chill.

There are so many obvious benefits which the FIX Under Warmer Vest provides; more comfort, longer dive times and all year round diving not to mention the safety aspect of hands which remain agile and a brain that can still think. From an underwater photographer's point of view there are even more; the ability to stay still and



concentrate on macro subjects in comfort, eliminating shivering helps longer hand held exposures if needed and, most important of all, a warm body means a warm brain which can concentrate better, and for longer, on composition, camera settings and lighting; all of which makes for better, more consistent images.

The final possibility which I won't be able to try until later in the diving season is that this vest could get me back into a semi dry suit in the summer months with all the added benefit of less weights, ease of movement and that special feeling of being in the environment rather than next to it in a drysuit.

With that thought in mind I lent my vest to my buddy Dan Bolt who

is an avid wet suit guy but who has succumbed to a dry suit for the winter months. I hired a local unheated pool (12°C) and invited him along to try the vest and here are his thoughts:

Despite diving the UK's temperate waters all year round, I've only taken to using a drysuit during the winter months in the past 3 years. I much prefer to use a well cut, snug fitting wetsuit - but I do appreciate that diving in water temperatures less than 10 degrees Celsius in a wetsuit is a little bit on the daft side and not something many folks would countenance.

So when Peter asked if I would be willing to try the new FIX Under Warmer Vest I was very interested to see if it would be up to the job of

keeping me warm in the cool winter months when temperatures here go as low as 7-8 degrees.

The vest comes with a couple of extension cables that allows the two batteries to be kept in your BCD pocket - this means that you can use the vest under a tight-fitting wetsuit without discomfort. At this point I should point out that I wear a Cressi 7mm two-piece spearfishing suit, so that means that the cables first have to run from my waist to my neck (at the top of my 'farmer john' bottoms) and then over the top and down to my waist again when I put my no-zip, integrated-hood wetsuit-top on. That's a lot of cable under a tight-fitting suit, but actually I didn't notice it at all, and there was still enough reach left so I could easily have one battery in each BCD pocket.

The wrist-mounted remote control was easy to use even with thick gloves on, and the vibrating

alert that lets you know when the vest is on, and which power-level you've set and was not dulled by all that neoprene.

So what about the vest? Well; I've not used a heated vest in a wetsuit before, and I'd liken the experience to the first time you sit in a car with heated seats. Initially it feels a little odd and, how do I say this politely..., like you've just lost control of your bladder! But once your brain realises what is really happening, this vest is amazing. With two large heat-panels (the bib-style design means it spans your entire chest & back) it gives an enormous amount of additional heat and with the ease of changing settings during your immersion you can easily control how that warmth is delivered throughout your dive.

This vest should also appeal to snorkellers/freedivers who like to brave the cool winter months, with the long extension cables the two batteries would easily fit into a 'vest' style weight-harness and the heat provided will extend your time in the water by hours if you wanted it to - I was stunned to learn that at full heat it would last for over 2.5 hours.

The bottom line from me..? I love this heated vest, and if you're a cool-water diver/snorkeller like me, I think you should give it some serious consideration."

So that's Dan's summary and

Product Name	FIX UNDER WARMER HEAT VEST WL5200FB
Maximum temperature	LOW:45°C(113°F)/MEDIUM:50°C(122°F)/HIGH:55°C(131°F)
Temperature setting level	3Level (OFF→LOW→MEDIUM→HIGH)
Continuous heating time	LOW:310min./MEDIUM:180min./HIGH:150min.
Usability in air	N/A
Battery capacity	FUW65200 Li-ion battery/11.1V/5200mAh/57.72Wh
Charge time	Approx.7.5hours
Weight of remote controller	42g
Materials	Polyester 100%
Heating elements	Front & Back
Depth rating	100m (330feet)
Size(chest)	XXS:76-84/XS:84-90/S:88-94/M:90-96/L:95-101/XL:100-106/XXL:105-111/3XL:110-116/4XL:114-120cm
Weight of suit	XXS:485g/XS:500g/S:513g/M:529g/L:545g/XL:565g/XXL:585g/3XL:606g/4XL:628g
Weight of battery	538g
Bundled items	FUW65200 Li-ion Battery×2, FUW65200 Charger, FUW Y-splitter Charging Cable, FUW Remote Controller RCWL-1, FUW Charging Cradle, FUW USB Cable

here's mine:

Go for the top spec vest. A local dive contact of mine bought another brand without a remote controller and has lived to regret it ever since.

And the final, final suggestion is:

If you are put off by the price then why not think about buying one between you and your local dive buddy? Think about it. That would make a lot of sense.

If you are a cold or temperate water diver I cannot recommend the FIX Under Warmer Vest highly enough. "Sure" I hear you say. "That's easy for you to say when you were given one for free" and you'd be right but my reply would be "Dive shops should invest in one of these to loan to

temperate waters divers because once they'd experienced the benefits of 'the heat' they would almost certainly get a sale. Just like the saying goes about the National Lottery - "You've got to be in it to win it" the same is true about this vest - "Try it and I'll you'll buy it".

Finally, and please don't tell FIX this, if they'd have just loaned me a vest, I would have definitely bought it after I'd discovered all of the benefits detailed in this review.

The FIX Under Warmer Vest starts at \$399 and goes up to \$649 plus accessories.

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