

A competitors view

by Gerald Rambert

Having won the Mauritian national competition in February, I was excited to be selected to represent the country for the 11th International Championship of the CMAS. Patrick Davy, my team mate, was participating for the second time, as for me it was my first. He warned me about the stress and the tension there was going to be at the event, and I was soon to discover what he was talking about.

First we went to check out just how good the others were. We found out rapidly that some of them had blocked their websites and we couldn't get access to any kind of information.

We had phone calls from other competing teams and soon realised that the others were doing the same. The competition had already begun!

I arrived in Mauritius three weeks before the event and started diving immediately with my fellow friends from the north and the southwest of the island, both of which were potential locations for the championships.

I knew the west coast like my pocket; I even had a turtle hole, where you could see it most of the time but the north side of the island however, was my weakness. I didn't know the landmarks by heart and even underwater, I could just find my way. So I concentrated my time mainly there.

I soon found out that most of the interesting stuff was quite deep and that we had to manage our dive time very carefully. The average depth was around 25 meters, with no real chance of doing multilevel diving, because most of the reef stops at 18 meters.

The tank capacity was restricted to 12 litres,



A festival of cameras on the at least 10 meters long

which was allowing us an average dive time of 50 to 70 minutes including deco stops. Even if the maximum dive time allowed was 90 minutes, there was no way we could last that long.

I was expecting people to go beyond their limits and face problems, but even if some of them came out without air, which I am sure must have happened, no major incident arose.

Other competitors were rushing to all the diving centres in these two areas of the island. After a few days of training, we had the word from the organisation that the championship was definitely going to be held in the north of the island and that the west part was reserved in case of bad weather.

To the disappointment of many who had already spent time taking markings there, we all rushed to the north. I was spied on from the start, as I was the person who had the most experience on the island.

If participants got lost underwater, I seemed to be held responsible and accused of being secretive! I was quite shocked but I guess everyone was very



Surface interval! A little rest and taking notes after the dive.

tense. The competition spirit was in full swing and no one wanted to share their pictures after the dives.

The boats used were around 8 meters long and could fit around 15 people. So we didn't really get much place for all the equipment. We had to be very careful with the cameras. Most of the participants were using 2 at the same time



Carlos Minguel and I discussing equipment.

underwater and video cameras to memorise the place.

Pressure was such that some participants nearly ended up fighting when one of them accidentally hit another's housing. That was a bit of action!

On the day of the competition, we all headed early to the north on big boats from Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius where everyone was staying. After a 45- minute drive we arrived at "Choisy" the site of the 'competition village'. Once there, we had to format our memory cards in front of the commissioner, and were

not allowed to touch our cameras anymore. The dives were spread over two main zones, covering about four dive sites each.

We could choose the dive sites within the zones and were assigned boats accordingly. The weather conditions were not ideal as we had no sun on the first day, and there was a lack of ambient light at depth, forcing us to work at slow speed and flashes on rear.

The second day the visibility wasn't that great and wide angle wasn't really possible, so everyone was mainly concentrating on macro.



Oceanica TV was present to follow the event. I am having a chat with Portuguese

It was quite hard to choose which dive site you were going to make, but what I soon realised was that it didn't actually make a big difference on the day if you knew the place more than someone else.

I found out that getting your shot was mainly dependent on how the fish and the subject decided to behave on the day; if they wanted to pose or not, or if you had the chance to drop on a nudibranch or something more interesting. You can dive the same place a 100 times, and it will never be the same.

At this level of competition,

every participant has got a good eye, knows all the little techniques and secrets of underwater photography, and truly it only depends on chance, on what the sea has to offer that day.

Nevertheless it was a great experience, where I had the chance to meet a lot of interesting people and world-renowned photographers. I got a silver medal in the macro category and was proud to have represented my country.

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