

# Tools News Techniques

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**Omega Aquatic's Amphibian Dynamic SCUBA Fins (Stealth)**

**Pros**

- + Easy to walk in;
- + Fins work well with many propulsion techniques;
- + Comes with bag with shoulder strap; and
- + Rubber bottom provides good traction.

**Cons**

- Plastic not as durable as rubber; and
- Cost.

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## Swim—or Walk!

Omega Aquatic's Dynamic Fins make it easy to walk in rescue fins

Story & Photos by Cliff Freer

When I first saw Omega Aquatic's Amphibian Dynamic SCUBA Fins at the Diving Equipment & Marketing Association (DEMA) conference last October, I thought, "This has to be a gimmick." People were walking around the convention hall *with the fins flipped up*, showing how easy it could be to walk in fins—traditionally, not an easy task.

I recently had the opportunity to dive with the Amphibian Stealth fin, which is the public safety diver version of the Dynamic Fin line, and it definitely has its merits.

The fins sent to me were size XL and had an ample-sized foot pocket. I wear a size 11, and it fit my Viking Drysuit fine. The fin is made of a molded rubber, and the sides and bottom are reinforced with a hard plastic, which serves as a point of attachment for the fin straps and the pivot point of the blade.



The big deal with these fins: You can flip the fins up, making it easy to walk in them.

The buckles for the fin straps are of a generic-type buckle and strap used widely on other fins. Down the road, this will make for easy replacements to either a similar strap or the replacement steel spring fin straps available.

The fin blade is a molded thermoplastic with a rubber midsection to allow for a little give in the kick resistance. The blade size is a little shorter than I'm used to, and it might not have enough displacement for fighting against a very strong current; however, for lakes and other low-flow bodies of water, they should be fine. The fins worked very well using a variety of propulsion techniques—flutter, frog, modified flutter.

Additionally, the fins came packaged in a bag with a single shoulder strap and an outside pocket, which makes carrying gloves (and other small items) to remote dive sites very convenient.

The fins are very easy to walk in with the blade in the up position, and the rubber on the bottom of the foot pocket provides good traction. The locking device and the pivot point are higher than the bottom of the foot pocket, so walking won't wear the moving or critical parts. The blade is very easy to put into place—just step on it with your other foot to lock it into place. The lock works very well so it's not as easy to disengage—definitely no accidental



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unlocking while you're swimming. Because surface support personnel are usually in abundance, divers typically don't have to walk with a victim; and when diving recreationally, there's simply no rush to unlock the device, so I definitely think it's a benefit to have such a robust lock.

The fin does perform as advertised; the only reservations I have are not with the performance of the fin, but with the materials from which they are made. Plastic is durable but does have its limitations, and in the fire service, plastic products have traditionally not fared well unless stored in a manner that prevents damage. Only time will tell if the fins can withstand public service—including being stored for months in



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cabinets that reach high temperatures, exposed to drastic fluctuations in temperature and being battered by heavy equipment and slamming doors. But like I explained above, plastic is necessary for this type of fin. Because of the moving parts, the pieces need to be more rigid, and rubber wouldn't consistently lock.

The Amphibian Stealth costs \$189, which I think is more expensive than most rubber fins. However, Sergey Dmitriev, a partner at Omega Aquatics, says, "The fins are competitively priced and are definitely less expensive than some of the high-end fins that are also popular with military and rescue personnel. At the same time, these fins do much more than any other fin out there. They allow easy movement, whether on the ground, boat deck or climbing ladders, without fear of tripping or stumbling." He adds that the fins are made in the United States and come with a standard 2-year warranty.

In my attempt to determine how durable the fins are, I intentionally beat them up to see how they would hold up to some typical municipal-employee TLC. I couldn't get them to break, but they did show some

signs of wear and tear. The plastic fin blade showed discoloration from being stressed, and when trying to gain leverage by standing on the bottom—fin blades are constantly flexed and stressed in this manner.

My recommendation: See if the Dynamic Fin fills a void in your current dive planning needs and give them a try. Use and abuse them in a drill setting until you're certain they're durable enough for field service. The fire service is unique in this respect; the tools we rely on to do our job must perform flawlessly and consistently every time we open the cabinet. If they can't be relied on every time, they don't belong on the truck.

Cliff Freer has been with the FDNY for 8 years. His current assignment is covering lieutenant for 14 Division/FDNY SCUBA Unit. He is an avid tech and cave diver, and is a National Association of Underwater Instructors divemaster.

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# Tattoos Under Review

## LAFD inks groundbreaking policy on tattoos

By Jane Jerrard

This spring the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) introduced a controversial policy on tattoos that calls for a complete cover-up. Although many fire departments have policies that prohibit showing offensive tattoos, such as those depicting nudity or obscene images and words, the LAFD now requires firefighters to cover all tattoos all the time.

"We're looking for consistency in the policy. It reads that all tattoos shall be covered while on duty, and that means the entire time you're on duty," explains Captain Armando Hogan, community liaison officer for the LAFD. "We want to stay fairly well grounded in our grooming standards, and that's all this is—an update to our grooming standards." The policy, which went into effect on May 1, has forced tattooed firefighters into long sleeves and even gloves and bandages while on duty. Those with ink have to cover up while they're in the station house, whether cooking, training or even sleeping.

Anthony Temple, a firefighter with the LAFD, has to hide multiple tattoos on his arms, which depict roses, sparrows, clouds and a ship. "I sleep in long sleeves; I wear a long-sleeved uniform from the minute I walk in. I work out in long sleeves. I work under the fire trucks in long sleeves," he says. "The thing is, they said this policy was about public image, but I don't understand why it's so stringent." Temple hopes for a compromise on the tattoo policy, saying, "Everywhere else, [firefighters with existing tattoos] get grandfathered in. That seems like a logical answer."