

Newbury Scuba Diving Club

This Berkshire club has upped its marketing game to attract new members and is keeping established ones happy with a packed diving programme. Interview by **Kristina Pedder**



↑ Above: Early season sea trials for the RIBs was a good excuse to take a trip over to the Isle of Wight

Membership Fees:
£100.00

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📍 Newbury Scuba Diving Club

NEWBURY, BERKSHIRE

NEWBURY IS A MARKET TOWN IN THE English county of Berkshire, 60 miles west of London. Despite its rural location in central southern England, Newbury is an ideal location for a dive club as it is just a few hours drive from some of the best dive sites on the south coast.

Newbury Sub-Aqua Club was formed back in 1981 by a group of like-minded individuals who wanted to take up the growing sport of UK scuba diving. In recent years, despite all the diving and training activities provided, club membership had steadily declined. During the ten years between 2006 and 2016, numbers dropped from 70-plus to just over 40.

The committee recognised that something radical had to be done to redress this decline before it went too far, so in late 2016 the members decided that the club needed a complete relaunch to reverse this trend.

Now known as Newbury Scuba Diving Club, the club has 53 full diving members and is looking to the future with confidence. How did they do it? Let's find out.

📍 What was the club like in the noughties?

⚠️ Back then the club was typical of many BSAC clubs around the UK, one or both of the club's RIBs were towed down to the coast most weekends and more than half the diving was from a RIB. However trends change and now we have more

twin-set divers and quite a few rebreather divers who are better suited to hard boat diving than RIB diving. It was increasingly costly to run suitable 4x4 towing / launching vehicles and subsequently the number of towers decreased. The solution was to have one of the club RIBs stationed down at a boatyard on the South Coast for the summer months.

📍 What else do you have back at base?

⚠️ We still have our own boatshed, which can house the club's two six-metre rigid-hulled inflatable boats and compressor and trimix blending equipment. The club also has access to a three-metre-deep, heated indoor swimming pool and up to two classrooms a week for theory lessons at Mary Hare School, just outside Newbury. We work closely with Wantage Dive Club: we pool share and cooperate to fill places on dive boats, and on training and try dives.

📍 What sort of diving does the club do?

⚠️ One clear fact is that our members like shipwrecks. The first dive of the day is on a wreck on almost every UK club trip. The vast majority of these dives are off the south coast as the Jurassic Coast is only a couple of hours drive from Newbury. Overseas, Malta is the favoured destination closely followed by the Red Sea, however most overseas trips are organised by individuals or small groups within the club.

📍 What were the biggest concerns for the club?

⚠️ Membership numbers. Retaining existing members is in many ways even more important than attracting new members. Members will only stay if they are getting what they need out of the club, therefore a big part of the club relaunch looked at member retention and how we could improve it. Realistic objectives for membership numbers had to be agreed. So a target was set to increase the membership by 20 over the next three years.

📍 How did you start?

⚠️ The first step was to set up a project team, outside the committee, to devise

an action plan. The focus had to be on achieving sustainable long-term membership, rather than just an influx of short-term members. Ownership of the relaunch plan by the members was critical, so the 2020 Vision plan was presented to the full membership at a dedicated event one evening. Audience participation was actively encouraged and views were sought. Once the plan had been approved, regular updates were sent out to all the members.

📍 How did you identify the club's core values?

⚠️ All club members were asked what three words they thought best described their club. These words were then used to help create the core values for the club.

📍 ...and the club's key benefits?

⚠️ Obvious benefits listed were items such as the diving and the training that the club facilitated, and then there were the numerous practical skills that could be learned in the club; from gas blending to boat handling. Additionally there were the life skills that could be enhanced through club membership; such as team working, instructing, mentoring, crisis management and so on. As the benefits list became longer, it was obvious



↑ Above: A club RIB is based in the summer at Portland Harbour, so most of the RIB diving is along the Jurassic Coast

↑ Left: Hard boat diving is popular with our technical divers

that the club offered a lot more than just diving. This developed into a theme of 'It's a lot more than just a diving club' that was to be used as part of our relaunch message. This theme was then further enhanced by creating the tagline 'What did you do at the weekend?' as this captured the diversity of activities that the club facilitated.

Why did you change the name of the club?

Effective search engine optimisation (SEO) is critical to being found in an internet search and unfortunately the name Newbury Sub-Aqua Club scored low in the page ranking from the tests we ran. We decided to change the name to Newbury Scuba Diving Club, which now scores much higher in the page ranking. The new name also required a new look and we decided to upgrade our logo by running a competition among the members who created a modern logo that is now being used in all the rebranding activities.

What marketing tools did you use?

Once the basic marketing message had been identified, we looked at what were the best ways to get the message out effectively. Obviously digital marketing was a very important tool, but not the only one. The campaign was supplemented with more traditional methods such as PR and merchandising. Branding is just as important for a club as

it is for a commercial brand, so we are in the process of rebranding everything to ensure that a unified identity is promoted. It was amazing to find out just how many club documents existed that used the club logo. Word of mouth marketing is a powerful tool and the extensive Try Dive programme with local Scout, Guide and Duke of Edinburgh award groups (amounting to more than 200 young people a year) has certainly helped to spread the word about the club.

Did you need a new website?

The club's original website was fairly basic and was in need of a total overhaul,

so yes a completely new website was created. The new website had to fulfil two essential functions: to be a sales tool to attract new members and to be a valuable information resource for existing members.

Did you use social media to promote the club?

We decided to use Facebook and Twitter to stimulate interest externally and these are updated regularly with relevant content. A YouTube channel was created to showcase members' videos and our training videos, and a separate Facebook group is used by club members as an

internal news tool. The external social media pages are also back-linked to our website to help improve the SEO.

Has the rebranding worked?

So far the results have been very encouraging and membership has increased to more than 50 full diving members, so we are well on our way to achieving our first target. This is a great testament to all the hard work that has been put in by the relaunch team and our members.

Has this had an effect on your diving?

Yes. In 2017 club members completed nearly 600 dives, 450 of which were in UK waters. This tally saw members spend more than 400 hours underwater. In this mix is the usual range of single cylinders, twin set and an increasing number of rebreathers being used within the club. The 140-plus overseas dives were carried out on multi-day trips as expected, while the vast majority of UK diving was conducted on single-day trips – a reflection of just how easy it is to do day diving with the club. Even though there is a technical bias, depth seeking is not a high priority for the club; only 40 of our 600 dives were to 40m or more and in fact just under 50 per cent of the dives were within the 35m range of Sports Divers.

Even though the club owns two RIBs, charter boats had become the dominant diving platform, possibly as a consequence of the twin set / rebreather bias among the long-term membership. Seventy-three per cent of the 2017 dives were from charter boats. We are hoping this trend will change in 2018-19 as we expect a growing number of our newly qualified Ocean Divers to enjoy their early dives from the club boats.

What training are you doing?

We offer diver training from Ocean Diver to Advanced Diver and we currently have 22 members at different levels undergoing training. The club has 18 diving instructors ranging from Assistant Diving Instructors to Advanced Instructors, and three Snorkelling instructors. Members participate in a wide range of skill development courses both internally and externally, including boat handling, buoyancy and trim, compressor operation,

gas blending, and oxygen administration, and the club has also acted as a host for regional instructor training.

Where do you see the club going in the future?

We are delighted to say that Newbury Scuba Diving Club is going from strength to strength as it capitalises on its core values as a facilitator for diving; be it RIB, shore or rebreather diving and it is using its rich instructor resource to train new divers and help in the on-going training of already qualified divers. The club has an inclusive nature and members are actively encouraged to try out new skills, whether it is boat handling, buoyancy or blending, the old adage 'the more you put it, the more you get out' has never been truer. However we must not be complacent and sustaining (or growing) this position requires constant input and support from all the members, not just the committee. Well done everyone.



Above: The club plays an active role in supporting local events such as the Newbury Carnival

Left: Submarine wrecks are always popular

Below: There is wealth of sea life to encounter along the Jurassic Coast



Above: The winter working parties are both productive and good social events

Left: The club helps facilitate many different types of diving for its members



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