

Gear Reviews

HydroOptix Mega-4.5d Mask RULES!

by Anastasia Laity

You'll have to pry my HydroOptix mask from my cold, dead hands. Actually, I'd prefer it if you didn't - I'd like to be buried with my new most prized possession.

HydroOptix masks do away with the refraction effects caused by normal, flat masks (the old "30% closer and larger" rule) by using two dome lenses instead of one flat one. Unfortunately, there's a bit of a price to pay for looking through a curved surface. The water curving against the plastic forms a negative lens; when submerged, the mask has an effective -4.5 diopters.



This is bad news for folks with 20/20 vision, who have to wear +4.5 contacts to use the mask. (It's also bad news for HydroOptix, because a mask that you have to damage your vision in order to use is a really hard sell.) It's FANTASTIC news, however, for anyone who's nearsighted, like my husband and I (who have -2.5 and -3.5 prescriptions). We were completely sold on it after a recent demo at Hollywood Divers, and since then have taken our new masks out on a real dive. So I thought I'd share with the rest of the group: why do I love my new mask so much?

First, it gives you normal, "above-water" vision when underwater. Objects no longer look larger and closer than they do above water. Second, the mask restores your peripheral vision: you get a nice 170-degree view (as opposed to the typical 70-degree view of a flat mask). I found it much easier to look around me without having to crane my neck, and Jeff

and I could get each other's attention without being directly in front of each other.

When I took my HO on its first ocean dive, I knew what to expect in terms of refraction and field of view - but I was astounded at how much crisper everything looked! With my contacts in and wearing a flat mask, I still don't see as clearly as I do with the HO mask. I noticed details on fish that I'd never spotted before; it was a fabulous day of diving! I also felt much more in tune with my surroundings, and better aware of my relationship to other divers, critters, and the dive site as a whole. Usually, I'm fairly easily disoriented; diving with the HO mask, I had a terrific sense of where I was in relation to everything else.

There are still a few minor flaws. First, the HO masks tend to fog, and spit won't help you. Gel-style defogs seem to work the best (as well as vigorous scrubbing with dish soap when you first bring home your mask). Second, it is a higher-volume mask than most flat masks, and therefore takes a bit more air to clear. However, I find that the two purge valves (placed below each eye) work fabulously well; I have an easier time clearing the HO mask than I ever did with my old flat mask.

But the major disadvantage for nearsighted and 20/20 folks alike is that now you'll have blurry vision on the boat between taking off your glasses and getting underwater. HydroOptix actually makes a monocle and a snap-on mask cover that restore your vision, but frankly, I found them more annoying than just being a little blurry. After all, my vision's not so bad I can't see the boat!

The bottom line is: we're NUTS about our new masks! I think everyone who dives primarily for the fun of seeing the underwater world around them will love it. For nearsighted folks, I think it's a total no-brainer. Those of you with 20/20 vision have some tough choices to make!

Check out www.hydrooptix.com for more information.

Trip Reports

King's River Rafting

by Madeline Mattias

Last month, John Marin organized a river rafting trip to the King's River. We had enough for one boat team. King's River is near Fresno. We arrived in Fresno Friday night, which wasn't a bad drive, had breakfast the next morning, and went on to the river in time for our lunch briefing and to set up our camp. Although this is my second trip with John and Gary Faland, John is a regular and has been there for almost seven or eight years straight!

The day was hot and sunny, and there were various jokes about "how cold" the water was. It's one of those visual jokes that I just can't recreate on paper.

Unlike last year, I was really looking forward to this weekend, and I definitely wasn't disappointed. We met another boat team (we'll call them "The People Who Don't Live in Pasadena", because I can't think of a nickname that wouldn't offend someone out there) and ending up bonding with them, playing cards, talking trash, and got into many water wars with them. (We beat them every time, by the way.) The first day of rafting was great. Stacey was our guide from last year. Here she was again, and it was also the day the crew took video footage. I couldn't believe how fun it was to ride the river. I was screaming, yelling, laughing, paddling, mostly laughing, instigating wars, and letting my teammates handle them, while I tried to stay dry. Yeah, I'm a coward. However, I was pleased with

how well I was paddling. Even Stacey said we all worked really well as a team.

That night was had a great dinner, and I went back to my tent to read, relax, and fall asleep. I believe John, Michelle, Gary, and Jonathan lost some money, and God knows what else, in a poker game. Then, there was the variety show produced by the crew that I missed.

Sunday morning I awoke to the smell of breakfast, and wandered over to the cantina. When we made our way to the river, we made friends with another boat team (I'll call them "The Allies"), which proved to be a blessing later. I'll explain what I mean in time!

The air was colder, and the water was wilder, and Stacey had the flu. We got a substitute guide. I can't remember his name, but we knew we could push the limits with him. He did say that "some people" complained about get caught in water wars, and that the crews were going to try to separate them. Out of about 12 boats, we saw that maybe only three others were with us. I guess the other nine didn't like us. Oh, well.

Our war with The People Who Don't Live in Pasadena escalated, and we plotted to kidnap Peach, their guide. John actually got to her, and was going to drag her off, but she convinced him not to. John, you're too nice, damn it! You should have at least made her walk the plank! The Allies were right into joining us in war against The People Who Don't Live in Pasadena, and we were really kicking their butts, in races, and

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