Surfing

Tecniq Big Wave Life Vest

Written by Josh Sampiero · 1 June 2013

Surviving a big-wave beating isn't easy – but high-tech lifejackets make it a little bit safer.

Red Bull life vest

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As big-wave surfing gets pushed further and further (and deeper and deeper), the risks athletes are taking get bigger and bigger.

After multiple incidents in which his life vest became more than a hindrance than help, Red Bull athlete and big wave-surfer Ian Walsh decided he needed something better. San Diego-based design firm Tecniq jumped in to help out.

Big wave charger Ian Walsh
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The goals were simple – maintain float, reduce bulk, increase safety, while offering the flexibility and freedom Walsh needed to surf at a world-class level.

The biggest problem was the zipper. When Walsh would hit the water at high speeds, the seams on the zipper would blow, rendering the life vest useless.

Tecniq's solution was simple: less zipper. By shortening the zipper on the lower front half, they found that the risk of a "blowout" was reduced. This had another benefit: more flotation foam in the upper chest panel, increasing chances of surfacing face-up.

The next big breakthrough was in materials: a new environmentally-friendly flotation foam called HydroZOTE is approximately 30% lighter while offering 10% more float. That's not all – the new foam has virtually no water absorption, meaning the jacket doesn't get heavier the longer the rider is in the water.

Ian Walsh charges a Jaws monster.
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While the new foam hasn't yet made its way into the consumer market, it has high potential to bring a greater level of safety to big-wave surfing and other watersport adventures where sudden, deep submersion can occur.

Safer, stronger and more flotation. The next challenge? Finding bigger waves.

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