

Life Jacket Checks

We all spend a great amount of time cleaning, checking and servicing the RIB, but how much attention do we pay to that important piece of equipment that we hope we'll never need to use? If you have an air inflation life jacket, you not only expect it to inflate on demand, but to hold the air as well. Yet the life jacket cover could be abraded, or even punctured, as it's probably been stowed in a console or under a seat when it's not worn.

So, when did you last test your life jacket? You don't have to activate the compressed air canister to check that it will hold air, the test is completely non-destructive!

This procedure applies to three types of commonly used air inflation jackets – manual ones (where you have to pull the cord to inflate the jacket) and two types of automatic jackets – salt crystal ones (where the salt block dissolves under water to operate the inflation mechanism) – and "Hammar" type ones (where water pressure operates the air inflation canister). The procedure is also valid for most makes as they generally conform to a similar design.

1. Release the poppers or velcro around the jacket cover to allow the "bladder" to unfold.
2. Check that the CO2 cylinder is firmly screwed into its base. But be gentle, and don't apply force as the plastic threads can easily crack.
3. Locate the "oral inflation valve" – this is the one used to top up the life jacket after the compressed air has been used.
4. Remove the dust cap from the oral inflation valve and blow into the tube. Continue until the jacket is fully inflated.
5. Place the inflated life jacket in a safe location (away from any family pets!) overnight.
6. Return to the inflated jacket the next day – it should still be fully inflated.
7. If it's fully inflated, use the tab on the dust cap to operate the valve in the inflation tube and deflate the jacket, then fold it back into the original form, stowed in its cover. Clean any crystallised salt with clean water.

If it's deflated at all, you may wish to re-inflate to locate the leak, or simply replace the jacket.

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