

Field Testing **the 1280-X** AQUANAUT

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I'm the owner of Research and Recovery International, located at 2803 Old Spanish Trail, in Houston Texas. Treasure hunting is my business I've been at it for over 25 years, and Field testing new detectors is a routine with me.

My associate, Ron Houghton, is a California beach boy, ex-Marine, professional deep sea diver, and underwater engineer. He works for Ocean-eering and Sub-Sea, two of the largest underwater oil field and salvage companies in the business. Ron's deep dives, and engineering feats, are well known the world over. He was Dive Master-Safety Supervisor for the Jacques Cousteau Arctic Expedition. Ron and I have almost every metal detector, land or water, in our arsenal of treasure hunting equipment. Ron's love of the Fisher type detector led him to modify a 1220-X for under water hunting. The detector performed well on the beach, or under the water but the solid coil and bulky Ikelite case strapped as a hipmount was awkward.

In June my phone rang. It was Terry Humphries of Trans Mississippi Elec. Tulsa, Oklahoma. "Van, how would you like to try out a prototype Fisher underwater detector? It works great in rivers and lake water, but we need someone to give it the works in the Gulf." Authorization was given from the Fisher factory in California, and in a few days I received the 1280-X experimental unit. A smile came across my face as I lifted the unit out of the shipping box. I could see the first-class engineering, design, and weight balance; the simple, easy to operate controls; an easy, quick adjustable shaft; and a quick slide, on-off control

box for conversion to hipmount. Here was an all-in-one unit, beach surf to underwater or vice versa. No tools or spare parts are needed to convert this detector. Some of the better underwater detectors on the market today have too many accessories, and too much is involved in changing the unit to the desired condition.

The next day, Ron and I had the detector in the Gulf. We were successful in coin areas and Civil War sites, but these locations were in only seven to eight feet of water. We planted and measured coins in deeper water, but this type of test does not pass the criteria of a treasure hunter. We needed a place



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I contacted a friend of mine, Dave Clark, who owns Saltwater Center. Dave had three of my Pulse Induction units working in Florida. We sent Dave to Florida to check the water and set up a boat. He flew down and the next day he called. He had contacted our friend Cap. Carl Fismer. Carl and Johnny Berrier own a nice treasure salvor boat, the Wasp. Johnny was in the hospital for a serious operation, and Carl's divers were taking a break. The water had been rough for the last three weeks, but he would let us dive on his lease, the famous "Cabin Wreck" site off Sabastian Inlet.

Two hours after the call, I had my Toyota loaded with gear, my divers Ron Houghton, and Mike Stalts, and we were on the way. One day's travel, and one day's rest. Came morning, at daybreak, and we were boarding the Wasp. Capt. Fismer and his top hand and diver, Tommy Roth greeted us. Dave and Jack Haskins, one of the best divers and most knowledgeable treasure hunters in the world, were checking the gear. We left Sabastian Inlet, and by 9:00 we were anchoring and positioning the Wasp on site.

Carl took out the logbook and sextant. "Boys, we're here. Let me log this position, and we can hit the water. It's about 35 to 40 feet here. We can blow some holes and work in the crevices 12" to 18". This spot's been worked a lot, but if you've got a good detector you can pick up a few coins. There may not be much on the bottom, but in the reef you might get lucky."

Carl is one of the best divers and treasure hunters in the U.S. He was taught by D.L. Chaney, who was one of the most respected Florida treasure hunters. Carl owns Spanish Main Treasure Company.

I'm not revealing too many secrets here, but it's a well known fact among professional underwater treasure hunters that the metal detector for underwater recovery is a pulse induction unit custom built in Florida. It sells for around \$3400, and there's a waiting list of around six months. Once a diver has had success with a technique, a piece of equipment, or a certain type of metal detector, it is almost impossible to get him to change. You can't beat success!

Carl set the dive rotation: Tommy, Carl, then Ron. Jack Haskins had already maneuvered his small Zodiac some 50 yards away. Jack likes to work

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alone.

Tommy geared up, checked out his pulse induction detector, and dove. The divers would be on hookah today. A few minutes later, Tommy broke the surface to report two feet of visibility on the bottom. This was the last we saw of Tommy until one hour later.

We helped Tommy on deck not knowing if he had found anything of value. Tommy reached in his wet suit and removed two rusted-out pieces of cans. Disappointed, he asked if we would check the detector. "It seems to be erratic." A quick inspection showed the air pressure value, which allows 25 pounds of pressure inside the unit, had developed a leak and water had seeped into the unit, causing it to stop working. This was Carl's best unit, and now it was not working. We had not

planned to use the new Fisher 1280-X VF Search unit until it was Ron's turn to dive, but since Carl's best unit was out of order, he agreed to try it.

I showed Carl how to turn the unit on. "You mean that's all I have to do, just turn that one control, I don't have to adjust it for saltwater, or Find a threshold tone, or balance?" I explained as I adjusted the detector and arm rest to the desired length that all he needed was to use slight motion. When he hit a target, the (LED) Light-Emitting Diode would give a visual target response, and the headset would sound off with a sharp audio signal. I did not set Carl any VF Discrimination, but the 1280-X has a full-range discrimination potentiometer. The Pulsegate Unipolar Audio Processing allows silent operation below the "Audio-Threshold Tone" with no sensitivity loss. Carl put on the headset, which is permanently wired in the same manner to give positive electrical contact.

After adjusting his goggles, he entered the water. Approximately 45 minutes went by before Carl surfaced. Ron and Dave assisted with the gear as he climbed up the boat's rear ladder. I was waiting for Carl's reaction to the detector, and could see that he had the same serious and puzzled look Tommy had when he came out of the water. I was afraid to ask how the detector performed. Carl dropped his weight belt to the floor, hesitated for a moment, then ran his left hand into the right side of his wet suit. When his hand reappeared, he opened it for all to see four eight-Reale pieces, each a deep green and gray color.

"Not too shabby for an old man, but Van, I think something is wrong with the detector. I got these four in the first 15 minutes, then the detector became erratic. It would hit a large test object

but it doesn't seem to have the same stuff it started out with!"

I took the unit, turned it on, and gave it an air test. The sensitivity was gone. I then tested the batteries with the dual-function potentiometer switch. They were dead. I had not changed the eight 1.5 volt AA penlight carbon-zinc batteries since receiving the unit from Fisher. A check of my log on the detector use showed approximately 43 hours.

Carl decided we should return to the marina, fuel the boat, get some air for Jack's tank, and see if Dave and Tommy could repair the pulse induction units and charge the batteries. Tomorrow, we would try again.

We did not know that the Wasp was rigged for hookah, but just in case we had brought along full face masks and wired them for two-way communication. That evening I put new batteries into the 1280-X.

The next morning, Ron and I got to the Wasp 30 minutes early and wired and taped the hookah airline, and changed the old regulator and mouthpieces for the full face masks. Soon, everybody was on board. Tommy and Dave had repaired the leak in the Pulse Induction units, and we had brought on board several pulse induction back-up units. Soon we were on site, and ready to dive. Tommy was given the honor of testing the new communication set-up, and he chose his pulse induction unit to dive with.

The first 20 minutes of bottom time consisted of Tommy clowning and cracking jokes. Two-way communication was really going to make underwater treasure hunting fun. Tommy soon started to count, we now have one—we now have two—we now have three. Tommy surfaced after about 40 minutes, knowing Ron was waiting to test the Fisher. A few instructions about the

bottom, current, visibility, etc., and Ron was over the side. He cleared his mask, and adjusted the straps, then headed for the bottom. Carl and Tommy gave the landmark signs to look for, knowing there was only three-or four-foot visibility. We didn't hear much for about ten minutes. Then we heard Ron say, mimicking Tommy, "We now have one—we now have two, etc."

I couldn't wait, so I asked Ron each time he hit a coin, approximately how far or deep the coin was from the detector coil. Depending on the size from one to eight-Reale, he was picking coins out from 8-14 inches.

I made notes and talked with each

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diver as he used the 1280-X Fisher. Ron on his second dive took his own modified 1220-X Underwater Detector and was soon counting more coins, Ron produced about 24 of the coins with the 1280-X. The pulse induction units produced about the same. I felt at this time, that the Fisher was a capable, reliable detector. All the divers agreed it was easy to use and quicker to pinpoint and locate the target. As we hadn't found any gold the argument still stands on what type detector works best for gold. I do know that most of the pulse induction units I've tested won't pick up small gold objects at fast sweep rates. The 1280-X will pick them up at fast or slow sweep speeds at low discrimination levels.

We had a good day's work, a successful test, and found a lot of nice

things. They would be turned over to the State of Florida, and Carl will get his division of the treasure sometime after the first of the year.

I treated the crew to steaks that night at a place called T-Bone Festus. We had a great time.

The next morning, Ron and Dave left for the Florida Keys. They were to test the Fisher 1280-X on some deep water dives below 100 feet. Ron reported the unit worked excellently. He also said that the 1280-X was very impervious to false signals caused by bumping the search coil on the bottom. In fact, he was able to search by shoving the coil down into several inches of loose gravel.

I returned to Houston, Texas, and, a few days later, I received another Fisher, 1280-X #3. Ron, and I tested this unit in the Gulf. We compared this unit with the Fisher 1280-X#2 unit we had. I decided by testing, that the prototype #2 unit hit harder in saltwater and/or land, but the #1 prototype hit with a mellow sound and appeared to have 1 1/2 inch better depth on a dime. Both of the units had piezo-electric custom-designed headsets that worked and sounded fantastic.

I can only say that those who choose the Fisher 1280-X Aquanaut will find it performs as well, if not better, than some detectors costing hundreds of dollars more

Good hunting and good luck.