

Bel-Aqua Dry Suits



Bill Barada (left) “designed and built suits for Bel Aqua Water Sports Company” of 3720 West 54th Street, Los Angeles. He developed “the first successful cold water dry suit, the first all rubber snorkel and the first CO₂ speargun” (Hanauma, n.d.).

Bel-Aqua’s successor is Aquala Sports Manufacturing Company of Los Angeles and currently of Shreveport, Louisiana. The firm’s website at <http://www.aquala.com> features a suit “in its original green” designed for the “historical diving enthusiast” at a cost of \$700.

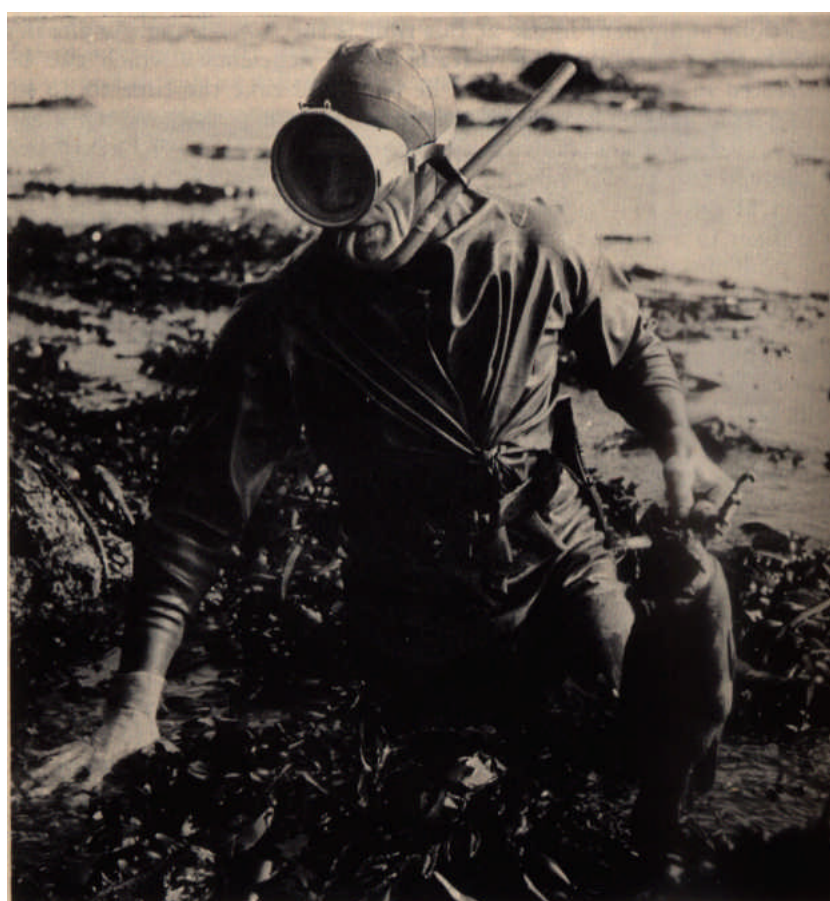
Historical Diving Suits

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Bel Aqua Suit Facts

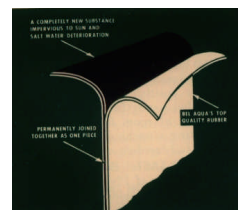
The company’s 1958 catalogue prided itself on the fact that divers in Bill Barada’s “Octopus” film wore Bel-Aqua suits and that “more Bel-Aqua suits are in use in the United States than all other brands combined” (Bel-Aqua, 1958). Insulation derived from dry air trapped in underclothing worn beneath the suit. The design kept the body perfectly dry at any depth, for any length of time and even in icy water, while allowing freedom of movement. The suit material was specially developed to protect against punctures, snagging and heat or saltwater damage. Bel Aqua dry suits were more economical than wet suits because of their greater durability. Underclothing can be varied according to temperature. Blowing more air into the suit during descent can ease suit squeeze.

Bel-Aqua suits (Carrier, 1955) originally came with or without a hood in a choice of sizes (Small, Medium or Large), entry (waist or front) and length (full or short). All could be made to measure or supplied in kit form. A swim shirt was also available. Bel Aqua retailed a full range of accessories, including tie cords for front-entry suits, sealing rails and rings for waist-entry suits, rubber preservative powder and a patch kit.



The Bel Aqua Front-Entry Suit (Schenck & Kendall, 1954, p. 126.)

- On the right is the Bel-Aqua suit label. On the left is the Bel-Aqua front-entry suit, “closed by tying with a piece of surgical elastic and the flap stuffed under the weight belt”.
- Bel-Aqua dry suits were made of “Ply-A-Bel” (right), a 3-ply “armour plate of rubber suits”. Boots, cuffs and collars were made of tough moulded rubber.
- Bel-Aqua Dry Suit Standard Sizes:



	Height	Weight
Small	5' 7"-5' 9"	140-170
Medium	5' 9"-6'	150-200
Large	6'-6' 4"	180-240

- For custom made suits, measurements of height, weight, head, waist, wrist, arm length, leg, hips, neck, chest and foot size were required. \$5 added to list prices.

References

1. Bel-Aqua Water Sports Company: (1958) *Bel-Aqua Catalogue*, Los Angeles: Bel-Aqua.
2. Rick & Barbara Carrier (1955) *The Complete Book of Skin Diving*, New York: Wilfred Funk.
3. Hanauba Bay Diver Tours (n.d.) *Scuba Hall of Fame*, http://www.hanaumabay-hawaii.com/scuba_hall_of_fame.htm
4. Hilbert Schenck and Henry Kendall (1954) *Shallow Water Diving and Spearfishing*, Cambridge, MD: Cornell Maritime Press.

Bel-Aqua FRONT ENTRY

AMERICA'S MOST POPULAR RUBBER SUIT



More Bel-Aqua suits are in use in the United States than all other brands combined and the front entry leads the field. It is a one-piece suit with only the tunnel entry to close. A positive seal is as easy as tying off the neck of a balloon. Easy, quick dressing and undressing makes this model first choice of both commercial and sport divers.

DESIGNED FOR COMFORT: Bel-Aqua dry suits are designed for free swimming comfort in any position without binding or pulling. A full roomy fit is water tight yet allows plenty of room for underclothing. No exhausting stretching of rubber. The suit allows full freedom of movement.

DESIGNED TO LAST: Bel-Aqua dry suits are made entirely of Ply-A-Bel except for moulded parts. The moulded boots are tough enough to walk on sharp rocks yet fit comfortably under flippers. The collar and cuffs are of tough, surgical rubber and give a waterproof seal without restricting circulation or irritating the skin. The hoods are designed to give a waterproof seal around the face but still allow unrestricted movement of head and shoulders. All suits are guaranteed against defects in material or workmanship.

IMMEDIATE DELIVERY IN STANDARD SIZES

	HEIGHT	WEIGHT
Small	5'7" - 5'9"	140 - 170
Medium	5'9" - 6'	150 - 200
Large	6' - 6'4"	180 - 240

For CUSTOM MADE SUITS Send Measurements Below (add \$5.00 to price listed).

Height..... Weight..... Head (circumference above eyebrows)..... Waist..... Wrist.....
 Arm Length (center of back to wrist)..... Leg (crotch to floor)..... Hips..... Neck.....
 Chest..... Foot Size.....

FRONT ENTRY MODELS AND PRICES

#103 with collar instead of hood.....	\$59.95
#104 with hood attached.....	\$9.95

Bel-Aqua Full-Length Front-Entry Suit

Bel-Aqua WAIST ENTRY

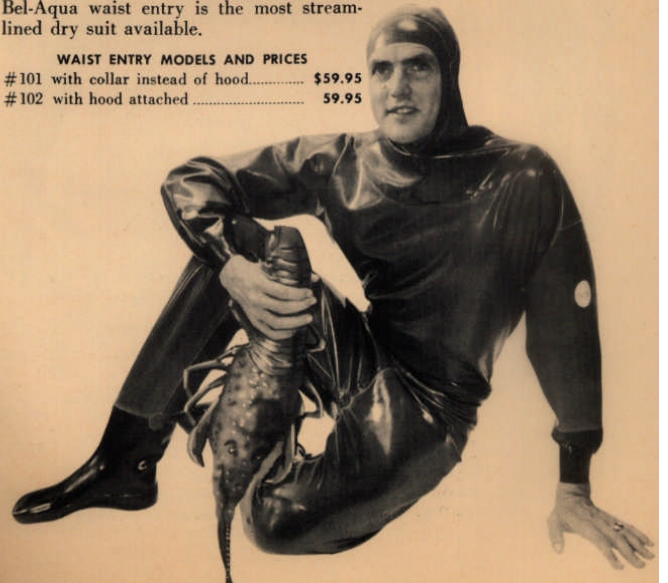
AMERICA'S 2ND MOST POPULAR RUBBER SUIT

The waist entry uses the same material, design and pattern as the front entry. Only the method of sealing is different. Selection is simply a matter of personal preference.

The method of sealing the waist entry is simple, yet positive. Pants and shirt are two separate pieces. Attached to the waist of each is a long skirt of soft, pliable rubber. A special, elastic sealing ring is furnished and the two skirts are simply rolled together over the ring. The elasticity of the skirts and ring form a tight, waterproof seal leaving only a small roll of rubber at the waist. No heavy, cumbersome rail is needed. The Bel-Aqua waist entry is the most streamlined dry suit available.

WAIST ENTRY MODELS AND PRICES

#101 with collar instead of hood.....	\$59.95
#102 with hood attached.....	\$9.95



Bel-Aqua Full-Length Waist-Entry Suit



DRY TYPE "T" SHIRT

Made of tough Ply-A-Bel it keeps the wind and water off your body. Slips on like a "T" shirt.

#109 Small, Med., Large.... \$17.50

Bel-Aqua Dry Type "T" Shirt

- The illustrations show two different Bel-Aqua Dry Suits and a swim shirt available in 1958. Three years earlier, the company offered "shorty" and "make-a-suit" kit versions as well.
- The **Bel-Aqua Full-Length Front-Entry Suit** is a one-piece suit that is sealed by tying off the tunnel-entry excess material. The price with or without hood in 1958 was \$59.95. In 1955, the hooded suit cost \$59.95 and the hood-less version \$54.95.
- The **Bel-Aqua Full-Length Waist-Entry Suit** is a two-piece suit consisting of pants and shirt with long skirts of pliable rubber that roll together to form a seal. The price with or without hood in 1958 was \$59.95. In 1955, the hooded suit cost \$59.95 and the hood-less version \$54.95.
- The **Bel-Aqua Shorty Front-Entry Suit** cost \$47.50 hooded and \$42.50 hood-less in 1955. The **Bel-Aqua Shorty Waist-Entry Suit** cost \$47.50 hooded and \$42.50 hood-less in 1955. The **Bel-Aqua Dry Type "T" Shirt** cost \$17.50 in 1955 and 1958.
- **Bel-Aqua Make-a-Suit kits** cost \$29.95 for hooded full-length suits and \$27.50 for hood-less versions. The shorty counterparts cost \$23.75 and \$21.25. Also available in 1955: boots (\$6.50), cuffs (\$4.00), collar (\$3.00), sheet rubber at \$3.00 per pound, a patch kit (\$1.00), tie cords (\$0.25), rubber preservative powder (\$0.60), adjustable ring (\$2.50), hard rubber rail (\$5.00) and elastic ring to fit rail (\$2.50).