

Fish 'N' Chips

A Monthly Marine Newsletter
January 2000 Issue

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From Liz

By Elizabeth M. Lukan 1/22/00

Surprise! I managed to make a January issue after all. This is a small issue, but at least I didn't miss a month! I **refuse** to let a hard drive crash keep me down! Or, anything else for that matter!

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LifeReef VS3-48 Venturi Protein Skimmer

By David Weinstein, David@fishwish.com (no longer a valid address - 4/29/01)

Edited By Elizabeth M. Lukan, 1/29/00

This review is based on the performance, quality of construction and ease of maintenance of the LifeReef VS3-48 venturi protein skimmer. This skimmer was compared to several other venturi skimmers in its class as well as several other types of skimmers. The contents of this review are my findings and my opinion of this skimmer.



Quality of Construction: This skimmer is constructed from 1/4" cell cast acrylic throughout and the flanges are of 3/8" material. Where input and output tubes were inserted through the body of the skimmer, an acrylic support plate was placed for reinforcement behind each one, this is a quality move at the highest level. Unlike so many of the skimmers I see where all joints are sealed primarily through the use of an acrylic solvent/joining solution the seams/joints on this unit are sealed with a clear binding epoxy and then rubbed to a fine finish with the solvent thereafter. The result is a joint that is not only as strong as I've ever seen but quite pleasing to the eye as well. Overall this skimmer has a wow factor of 10 for sure! All components of this skimmer are made from the highest quality of materials available, from its 1/4" cell acrylic and flanged sections to its Maezzi injector.

Concept of Construction: This is an area where the LifeReef clearly pulls ahead of the pack. This skimmer by classification is a venturi skimmer. However, unlike most, the designers at LifeReef have incorporated a countercurrent skimmer into the same body, the end user can either utilize this feature or not as they see fit. One of the single largest problems that most Venturi skimmers have in general is the constant plugging of the venturi valve itself. This situation can lead to a failure of the skimmer to operate as well as an overflow of the water in some cases. The LifeReef designers have addressed this through their ingenious inclusion of the self cleaning venturi valve. This is accomplished by using a hose that connects between the skimmers upper collection cup and the air input of the venturi valve itself. Basically it takes a small amount of moisture being collected in the collection cup and allows this clean moisture to be drawn into the venturi valve allowing it to remain clear at all times. This moisture, by the way, is freshwater. It's clear that the designers of this skimmer had the end user in mind upon its creation. By thoughtful design this same venturi valve can be installed on either side of the unit itself. This allows the user a greater deal of flexibility where installation is concerned. The output of this

skimmer can also be directed so that the skimmer output hose can be routed in such a fashion as to allow the user a more beneficial positioning of the skimmer leveling valve, this is done through the use of unions both above and below the skimmer output gate valve, a very thoughtful inclusion indeed. The Base of this skimmer is a standardized assembly allowing the user to move to a taller skimmer later by only purchasing an extension tube. Essentially you could have a skimmer as high as your ceiling would allow!.

Ease of Maintenance: Of all skimmers tested, the LifeReef was at least equal to the majority of the upper end skimmers in ease of maintenance and superior in some areas for sure. Considering that any skimmer worth its salt is going to have to be cleaned on a regular basis, it is my feeling that this should be a relatively easy task to perform. The LifeReef has indeed made it such. Cleaning of the skimmer basically consist of the removal of the upper reaction chambers and collection cup. This task has been made quite easy to do by its designers. The collection cup is placed on top of the reaction body using a machined slip fit and O ring. This basically means that the fit of the collection cup to the skimmers body is such that it will allow for ease of removal without the removal of the nuisance screws, hold it! What about the drain hose and SCV hose that I mentioned earlier you say, aren't they difficult to remove sometimes? Well maybe but not in the case of the LifeReef skimmer, there are in fact two hoses which are connected to the effluent collection cup via clear flex hose, a drain hose which is routed to an effluent collection bucket and the SCV hose which are connected to the venturi valve itself, both of these hoses have quick disconnects installed on them of the medical variety so as to make the removal of the effluent cup a piece of cake to do, two quick presses of the disconnect and the collection cup is in your hands ready to clean. At the next level down of reaction chambers the designers of this unit have made removal of this flanged chamber easy as well, the upper flange assembly has a keyholed flange and thumbscrews and once partially unscrewed allow for the quick twist and removal of the upper reaction chamber, very neat, very easy. All in all I found that the maintenance of this skimmer could be performed should I so choose to do so during the commercial break of my favorite TV show.

Ease of Installation: I found that all of the materials required to complete the installation, with the exception of some 1¼" PVC pipe or flex hose, were included by the manufacturer. The instruction manual, which was supplied with the unit, was well written and easy to follow should I have needed to read it before hand (which I didn't). Hey I gotta be me. Some day I'll learn to read the manual first, maybe :-). I found the unit easy to assemble and install. But then again I'm a father of two with many years of X-Mas eve gift assembly under my belt.

Skimmer Performance: This skimmer was powered by an Iwaki MD55RLT water pump as were all of the other skimmers that I tested. Upon startup, the skimmer immediately

began to make a great amount of foam and its level varied throughout the break in period of about a week as expected. After break in, the skimmer leveled out and remained consistent throughout the remainder of the test period of about three weeks. The tank that the skimmer was installed on is a 100 Gal. Reef with a purposefully high bio-load and nitrate levels in the 80 PPM range. The skimmer continued to produce good dry foam and a level of effluent waste throughout the test period that would surely make a billy goat puke! Between the quantity of effluent produced and its dark disgusting consistency it was clear that this skimmer was doing its thing, big time. In its first week of operation 5½ Gals. Of dark smelly effluent was produced, with a ¼" thick rim of scum throughout the reaction chamber. During this period of time there was a noticeable amount of bubbles returning to the tank. These went away as the weeks progressed but never completely disappeared, any residual bubbles were easily removed by running the skimmer output over a combination of floss and Chemi-Pure prior to its return to the sump. During its last week of operation the skimmer produced less effluent then it had at first but its consistency was greater in quality then had previously been reported. The effluent waste was darker and contained a greater amount of carbon based chemical compounds and amino acids then it had previously done. It would be best described as a dark thick sludge slightly diluted by salt water and foul smelling to boot!

Problems: The single biggest problem we had was with the excessive amount of gurgling noise that came from the siphon break pipe. The unit does in fact come with an air filter / dampener that slips over this tube. We did discover that with this tube partially capped the noise did in fact reach a more tolerable level. This noise does not occur in all applications but would seem to come from an imbalance of skimmer height to output tube length and positioning. Some bubbles were present in the return water to the tank but not enough to be a problem or of any particular concern IMO.

Technical Assistance: Jeff at LifeReef was a pleasure to deal with throughout the units testing and offered his insight and assistance when asked to do so. What you have here is a Co. that is proud of the product they produce and will assist the end user in any way they can. I wouldn't hesitate to purchase a product from this Co. for a moment.

This is a partial list of what some of the effluent contents were, and the quantity of each which was found in them, all quantities are in PPM:

- Nitrate: 27
- Potassium: 1.0
- Sodium: 3.9
- Iron: .12
- Bi-Carbonate: 26

- Magnesium: 2.8
- Calcium Carbonate: 4.3
- Amino Acids: 29% (several varieties)
- Organic Compounds: 59% (several Unidentified varieties)
- Living Phytoplankton: 8%
- Dead Phytoplankton : 12%

Summary of Contents: While I'm sure that this is only a partial list of the actual effluent contents were, our budget for this level of testing was exhausted rapidly.

Summary of the product review: The VS3-48 was by far the best of the Venturi skimmers tested. It performed well under all conditions and showed minimal differences in its operation during feeding times or during tank maintenance. All in all we thought quite highly of this product and think it well worth its asking price.

David is a professional reviewer whose prices are based on the product being reviewed. Anyone interested in getting a review done, should contact him via email to David@fishwish.com (no longer a valid address - 4/29/01).

Editor's Comments:

David does this for a living, so what I had to edit was very limited. I corrected a few spelling and grammar errors and that's about it. The bulk of my editing was really just taking David's document and putting it into html.

17 sites were checked and I didn't find any selling this particular skimmer. Sorry folks, but that means no price references this time.

Photo Credits:

The LifeReef image was provided by David.

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What's Up @ ReefsUK
- <http://www.reefsuk.org> -

By Elizabeth M. Lukan 1/22/00

1/6/00 - The phone number for ReefsUK has changed to +44 077 15527134

1/14/00 - Update on the ReefsUK Reef Tank at Scarborough Sea Life Centre:

- Received a brief mention in this month's PFK.
- The tank will also be featured in the April edition of Les Holliday's Clubscene.
- The tank's only problem is hair algae, which remains even after many measures have been taken to eradicate it (phosphate removers, water changes, reduced feedings, etc.).
- To help bring the hair algae problem under control, ReefsUK would like to introduce some hermit crabs (red legged or blue legged), but to keep to the theme of the tank (only captive raised livestock), they need a source for captive raised hermits. If anyone has had any success with raising hermits, please contact Derek Scales (post@reefsuk.org) at ReefsUK. All shipment details will be taken care of by Derek.

1/14/00 - A new section called "Marine Aquariums" has been added to the ReefsUK Website. This section deals with how to establish and maintain Marine Aquariums and new innovations and techniques within the field.

1/14/00 - An article is wanted for the new "Marine Aquariums" website section. The article should explain the minimum levels expected in equipment, water parameters, stocking levels, etc. ReefsUK understands that every marine aquarium is different, but they want this article to cover the things that many of us take for granted but that a new comer would need to be aware of before establishing their first marine aquarium. Anyone interested in writing this article should contact ReefsUK.

1/14/00 - A new article has been added to the ReefsUK Website. Richard Rajski's article on how to establish a Garf Zero Impact Aquarium, complete with photographs, can be found by following the Marine Aquariums - Articles Links. A Garf Zero Impact Aquarium is an aquarium containing man-made living rock.

To join the ReefsUK Mailing List, send an email to post@reefsuk.org.

Editor's Comments:

Information in this section covers the latest happenings at Mark T. Taber's ReefsUK Web Site. Mark has given me permission to publish any information from his mailing list that I feel would be of interest to Fish 'N' Chips subscribers. So, the above, although reworded by me, should be credited to Mark or to Derek Scales who works closely with Mark on the running of ReefsUK. The dates in bold coincide with Mark or Derek's mailings and are provided as a reference.

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Caught In The Net

By Elizabeth M. Lukan 1/23/00

Some fun stuff!

David Girardot has written "The Rock Tank FAQ". I thought some of it was pretty darn funny and if it makes me chuckle, it's worth passing along. Check out "The Rock Tank FAQ" at <http://www.enter.net/~dmg5/rocktank.html> (*url dead 10/02/05*) when you have some surfing time and also click to David's Home Page at <http://www.enter.net/~dmg5/index.html> (*url dead 10/02/05*) for links to some other funny stuff and pictures and info on his tanks. Thanks David for the laughs!

A Cool Site

Check out Pet of the Day at <http://www.petoftheday.com> and nominate your pet to be Pet of the Day! All pets are eligible (even fish!) and it's free. If your pet gets selected as Pet of the Day, let me know.

[This Month's Selection From The Fish 'N' Chips Site List](#)

Online Vendors

Additives (Conditioners, Medications, Salt, Supplements, Etc.)

- **Aqua-Fins** - <http://www.spartanburg.net/aquafins> (3/11/99) (*url dead, 10/02/05*)
*US Dollars, Secure Online Ordering. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- **[AquaDirect By AquaLink](http://www.aquadirect.com)** - <http://www.aquadirect.com> (12/20/99)
*US Dollars, Phone Orders, Mail Orders, Secure Online Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- **[Indo-Pacific Sea Farms](http://www.ipsf.com)** - <http://www.ipsf.com> (1/12/99)
*US Dollars, Email Orders, Mail Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- **Invert-ual Realities Canada** - <http://www.interlog.com/~invertca/irc.htm> (1/29/99) (*url dead, 10/02/05*)
*Canadian Dollars, Secure Online Order, Mail Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- **[J&L Aquatics](http://www.jlaquatics.com)** - <http://www.jlaquatics.com> (2/1/99)

- *Canadian Dollars, Phone Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- [Jeff's Exotic Fish](http://www.exoticfish.com) - <http://www.exoticfish.com> (1/12/99)
*US Dollars, Non-Secure Online Ordering, Phone Orders, Email Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- [Jen's Saltwater Haven](http://www.jensalt.com) - <http://www.jensalt.com> (6/24/99)
*US Dollars, Non-Secure Online Ordering, Phone Orders.
"Jen's Saltwater Haven is dedicated to providing the marine/reef hobbies with high quality products at affordable pricing."
- [Marine Depot](http://www.marinedepot.com) - <http://www.marinedepot.com> (1/12/99)
*US Dollars, Secure Online Ordering, Email Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- ~~Monolith Marine Monsters (m3)~~ - <http://www.marine-monsters.com> (*url dead 8/24/04*) (6/25/99)
*US Dollars, Secure Online Ordering, Phone Orders, Fax Orders.
- [Premium Aquatics](http://www.premiaquatics.com) - <http://www.premiaquatics.com> (4/20/99)
*US Dollars, Secure Online Ordering, Phone Orders
- [Reef Fanatic Inc.](http://www.reeffanatic.com) - <http://www.reeffanatic.com> (8/20/99)
*US Dollars, Secure Online Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- [Reef Life Inc.](http://www.connix.com/~reefkeep/reeflife.htm) - <http://www.connix.com/~reefkeep/reeflife.htm> (3/11/99) (*site gone, 10/02/05*)
*US Dollars, Phone Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- [Reefers](http://www.acropora.com) - <http://www.acropora.com> (1/12/99) (*url dead 10/03/05*)
*US Dollars (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- [Tampa Bay Saltwater](http://www.tbsaltwater.com) - <http://www.tbsaltwater.com> (1/12/99)
*US Dollars, Phone Orders, Email Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- [That Fish Place / That Pet Place](http://www.thatpetplace.com) - <http://www.thatpetplace.com> (12/20/99)
*US Dollars, Phone Orders, Mail Orders via their catalog, Secure Online Orders. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)
- [Thiel Aqua Tech](http://www.tadreef.com) - <http://www.tadreef.com> (1/12/99)
*US Dollars, Secure Online Ordering. (Listed by ELukan, Fish 'N' Chips)

Site Submission and Updating: Currently on hold till the new Fish 'N' Chips Website debuts.

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Chips...er...Tips

Livestock Log

By Elizabeth M. Lukan 1/22/00

A good idea for any tank is keeping a log of what livestock is added. This log is helpful in showing you how old your critters are and spotting problems with certain animals or suppliers. My log looks like this:

Date	Livestock	Notes (Size, etc.)	Purchased From	Price	Died	Death Notes

To Submit Your Tip: Send your tip via email to fishnchips@mail.com with a subject of *Tip-Submission* (information updated 4/26/00: coding replaces need for subject notation) and I'll publish it in an upcoming issue of Fish 'N' Chips. I'll write it up for you or you can do it yourself if you are so inclined. Make sure you let me know if I can include your name and email address or if you'd rather go anonymous.

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To unsubscribe, send an email to FishNChips-unsubscribe@egroups.com visit <http://www.marinefiends.com/> (updated 8/24/04).

Any and all comments, suggestions, etc., should be directed to fishnchips@mail.com

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