

Healthways Carib Suits

Dick Klein founded and headed Healthways until its bankruptcy in 1963 (Miller, 2005). According to Dick Bonin, the founder of its successor company Scubapro, Healthways was a mass merchandiser, selling to all comers, and one of the five original American diving manufacturers: U.S. Divers, Healthways, Voit, Dacor and Swimaster (Gilliam, n.d.).

In 1955, Healthways retailed “Pêche Sport” wetsuits and “Carib” drysuits, both available in long and short versions. The former was a “vulcanised foam rubber frogman isothermic diving suit”, while the latter was a “pure gum rubber suit made of 3-ply translucent gum rubber” (Healthways, 1955). The Carib was about one third cheaper than the Pêche-Sport.

Historical Diving Suits

6

Carib Suit Facts

This suit (Healthways, 1955) was marketed as a product of extensive field-testing and seven years’ manufacturing experience. Every suit was hand-made of the best natural gum rubber available and assembled with air-cured seams. Carib suits were designed to be comfortable and form fitting. Although care was taken to avoid excessive amounts of material that might create undesirable folds, the garment still came with enough room inside for heavy warmth-giving underclothing. Wearers enjoyed complete freedom of movement in the water. The suit’s 3-ply laminated construction was intended to eliminate the possibility of pinhole leaks.



Carib Full-length Suit
(Bronson-Howard, 1956, p. 38)

- Healthways Carib “pure gum rubber suits” came in two alternative models: the “Healthways Carib full-length professional diving suit”, shown on the left, and the “Healthways Carib Swim Shirt (professional model)”, illustrated on the right.
- The swim shirt, priced at \$14.85, kept “vital portions of the body relatively dry” and helped “maintain body temperature in cold water” (Carrier & Carrier, 1955, p. 271).
- The full-length suit cost \$54.95. It had front entry and came with rubber band closure and four extra bands. Complete instructions for care and use were included.
- When donning the full-length Carib, divers dressed feet first through the front chute, pulling the suit over the legs up to the waist. Then the arms were inserted through the sleeves, drawing the suit up as far as the neck. Finally, the hood was placed over the head, and the superfluous entry material gathered together at the chest, securing the front closure with a rubber band to form a watertight seal.



Size table for Carib full-length suits and shirts

	Small	Medium	Large
Height	5' 8"–5' 11"	5' 9"–6'	5' 11"–6' 3"
Waist	30–33	32–35	34–37
Weight	130–150 lbs.	150–160 lbs.	160–185 lbs.

- If a Healthways Carib suit ever sustained damage, a convenient “Healthways Carib Repair Kit” costing \$1.25 supplied patches for on-the-spot repairs. The use of hot or vulcanised patches was not recommended.

References

1. George Bronson-Howard (1956) *Handbook for Skin Divers*, Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications Inc.
2. Rick & Barbara Carrier (1955) *The Complete Book of Skin Diving*, New York: Wilfred Funk.
3. Bret Gilliam (n.d.) *Interview with Dick Bonin*, <http://www.fathomspub.com/cgi/interview.pl/9>
4. Healthways (1955) *Healthways Catalog Presentation*, Los Angeles, CA: Healthways.
5. Sam Miller (2005) *What's in a name*, http://www.portagequarry.com/legendarticles/miller_070705.htm