

## Lillywhites Mid-1950s Suits

Lillywhites of Piccadilly Circus is London's largest sporting goods store. For many years, its underwater sports department published an annual mail-order catalogue, leading the way in the supply of equipment to British divers. Individual items of underwater gear, e.g. fins and suits, were occasionally commissioned for sale under the Lillywhites brand name.

Now in the Hulton Archive at Getty Images, Peter Purdy's photographs of 1955 portray a young woman dressed in a thin rubber suit with a neck seal, short sleeves, short legs and a Lillywhites label on her left shoulder. In the second picture she is sporting a full-face diving mask with twin valved snorkels, probably Cressi's "Medusa".

**Historical  
Diving  
Suits**

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An underwater enthusiast wearing a Lillywhites Suit

### Lillywhites Suit Facts

- Two sources of information about Lillywhites Suits have been identified: the 1955 "shortie" suit images above (Getty Images, n.d.) and the 1957 edition of Peter Small's book *Your guide to underwater adventure* (Small, 1957).
- Two versions of the suit were available, one with neck and ankle seals, the other with hood and bootees.
- Small described the suit as "slightly lighter and 'tighter'" than its competitors, "being designed to take light woollens under it" (Small, 1957).
- The suit was made of rubber on stockinette, a combination of materials used in other dry suits of the period, e.g. Heinke's Delta Underwater Swim Suit.
- In the late 1950s, the full Lillywhites suit with hood and bootees cost £16, while the neck- and ankle-sealed model without these options retailed at £14 6s.

### References

1. Getty Images (n.d.) <http://www.gettyimages.com>.
2. Peter Small (1957) *Your Guide to Underwater Adventure*, London: Lutterworth Press.