

Páramo Halcon Jacket

Does this top of the range outdoor jacket live up to the plaudits given so far?

Keith Wilson leaves the umbrella at home to find out

» **GUIDE PRICE (inc VAT)** £300 » **CONTACT** www.paramo.co.uk

Over the years, I have worn numerous outdoor jackets to keep out the fiercest of Atlantic winds, torrential Highland downpours and Arctic cold. Despite the wide choice available, few jackets have fulfilled these requirements without causing a river of perspiration to cover my back, or restricting my movement with copious layers of insulating bulk. I'm not exaggerating when I say picking an outdoor jacket needs to be given as much attention as choosing your camera; put it this way, in extreme weather a well insulated jacket may save your life. No camera ever will.

The Men's Halcon Jacket is Páramo's top of the range outdoor jacket specifically made for ramblers and fell walkers, as well as bird watchers and outdoor photographers. It is already picking up plenty of endorsements from the pros who make their living from these pursuits, so I wanted to find out what all the fuss was about. A couple of months later, I am mightily impressed.

What I noticed first was the jacket's lightness – it weighs 967g – and lack of bulk. Putting it on for the first time, I wondered if something so lightweight and, dare I say it, flimsy to touch, could possibly be as insulating and waterproof as Páramo claim. Well, yes, is the simple answer, but what has

UPCLOSE

- » Adjustable, roll-away hood with wired peak
- » Articulated shoulders and sleeves for extra movement
- » Two-way reversed zip
- » Reinforced shoulder construction
- » Adjustable cuff design
- » 2in drip skirt and scooped tail for protection

really impressed me is how well this jacket repels water. I looked for some tell-tale signs of leakage whenever I went out in the rain, as every jacket I have ever worn before has had its weak spots where rain finds a way to seep through a hem, creep past a zipper lining, or drip into a pocket. Not here. I have been kept bone dry, every time.

Ok, so what about the sweat that inevitably builds up from body heat being trapped by the insulating layers, leaving you soaking on the inside? A jacket might keep the rain out, but you still end up being soaked. Páramo uses a specially designed NikWax Analogy synthetic fabric and a series of liners that draw moisture away from the body through the layers of the jacket to the outer cover. As well as letting perspiration and condensation to escape as water vapour, this microfibre outer also deflects wind and rain. Even in humid conditions I have not felt the level of condensation build-up within, as experienced with other jackets.

Then there is the number of pockets: oh, what joy! Having plenty of good pockets is a prerequisite of any jacket meant for the photographer.

Just think of the stuff we simply must have within quick and easy reach: memory cards and sticks, batteries, mobile phone, iPod, filters, as well as large Ordnance Survey maps, binoculars, compass and whisky flask. The zippered

hand-warmer pockets are a real treat. A quick glance at the Up close box will give you an idea of the jacket's key design features.

The Men's Halcon Jacket also includes a hood with a wired peak that actually succeeds in staying in place with the collar buttoned up and keeping the rain off your brow. It also rolls away compactly into the back of the very comfortable fleece-lined collar. Ventilation is provided through zippered upper arm vents, adjustable cuffs and waist, and the main two-way reversed zip with pop button internal storm flap.

On the most practical level for the backpacker, this jacket has very little bulk or weight, meaning it can be scrunched into the tightest of spaces. Brilliant! ■

THE VERDICT

Could this be the best outdoor jacket I have ever worn? Quite likely, because I haven't worn anything better. It certainly is the most comfortable, breathable and lightweight of outerwear. There isn't a pocket out of place, it is fabulously well insulated and it will keep you as dry as a bone. Many may balk at the £300 price tag, but think of the number of possible wears you could give this jacket in a year and it will work out at around a £1 a day. By the end of year 2, that comes down to 50p. Suddenly makes sense now, doesn't it?

RATINGS

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| Performance | 96% |
| Specification | 98% |
| Value | 92% |
| Overall | 95% |

