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on test

insulated vests

John Manning tests a selection of gilets to keep you warm this winter



collar

The advantages are obvious but not all manufacturers insulate their collars. Some add a fleecy lining which does help and is usually less abrasive on your neck than the shell fabric.

hand pockets

I prefer zipped hand pockets for security, especially when travelling, and to ensure objects don't fall out. There is a weight penalty though. Some manufacturers line pockets for warmth.

chest pockets

Very useful for stuffing gloves or hats into, though be wary of shoving sodden accessories into the pockets of down clothing as its insulating properties could be affected.

materials

A growing number of manufacturers are using recycled synthetic materials in their garments. It doesn't make them perfect, of course, but every re-use of a petroleum-based synthetic material has to be a good thing, right?

fills

Down is much a more efficient (and, if looked after well, longer-lived) insulator than any synthetic fill but loses most of its insulating properties when wet. If you're planning to wear a vest while walking in the UK, it needs to be weatherproof.

compatibility

Few vests have hand pockets that can be accessed properly while you're wearing a rucksack with a hipbelt. Some might say that your hands should be otherwise occupied wielding poles but in bitter cold you'll welcome well-placed pockets.

fabrics

If you're going to rely on down for warmth in our damp climate, it'd be wise to choose a garment with (at least) a water-resistant shell fabric. These aren't common and there's usually a slight price and weight penalty.



PÁRAMO

Torres Gilet Light
£80

★★★★★

TECHNICAL SPEC

Fill: 133g polyester
Outer fabric: Nikwax Windproof Light
Pockets: two zipped hand, one vertical zipped chest, one mesh inner
Storage: stuffs into chest pocket
Weight: 350g (L)
Sizes: XS–XXL
Women's version: unisex
Likes: warmth, drape, wind resistance, map-sized chest pocket, insulated collar, weight
Dislikes: pocket opening style renders otherwise-accessible hand pockets inaccessible

IN August's shorts review I commented that Páramo's sizings didn't suit me – I could barely squeeze my svelte 38" waist into their largest-in-range 40" option; I'm no Twiggy but it did seem a little limiting. The Large Torres Gilet supplied for this test, however, fitted perfectly with just the right amount of room to spare. It was also, to my reckoning, the warmest synthetic gilet tested, with the best drape: instant comfort, straight from the bag. It's kept me warm and comfy on several occasions and I've no complaints... well, other than the hand pockets, which zip down to close rather than up, to prevent gaping: easier to close, as the tension pulls against the shoulders rather than the unsupported hem, and less chance of leaking. I just can't adapt and, when you've a hipbelt around you, the opening zipper is trapped and inaccessible; otherwise the pockets would be useable.

Páramo
01892 786444
www.paramo.co.uk



GOLITE

Cady
£80

★★★★★

TECHNICAL SPEC

Fill: 70g 3M Thinsulate (60% Tier 1 recycled polyester, 40% Olefin)
Outer fabric: 46g/m² recycled polyester
Pockets: two zipped hand, one large zipped inner, one small vertical zipped inner chest
Storage: stuffs supplied
Weight: 348g (L)
Sizes: S–XXL
Women's version: XS–XL
Likes: fleecy insulated collar, weight, recycled content, price, just-accessible hand pockets
Dislikes: lack of chest pocket, fit

GOLITE'S adoption of recycled materials across its range is praiseworthy and the Cady is fine proof that price and quality needn't suffer one iota. Like GoLite's Beartooth vest, I found the Cady's fit a tad close though this isn't simply a synthetic version of that down-filled gilet. The Cady has an elasticated hem rather than the Beartooth's drawcord; it also lacks an external chest pocket but like the Beartooth has a small inner one with a small loop nearby, behind the main zip, through which earphone cables can be trained. Weight is good but in this instance I'd have preferred a chest pocket: the collar and hand pockets' fleecy linings might add comfort but also add a few grams, so pocket-skimping seems needless. The elasticated armholes gape a little but (hurrah!) another case of hand pockets being accessible beneath a hipbelt! Someone's reading my mind...

GoLite
0800 917 5642
www.golite.com



BERGHAUS

Chulu
£60

★★★

TECHNICAL SPEC

Fill: 60g Polyester Fibrefill (Primaloft Eco)
Outer fabric: Berghaus AF
Pockets: two zipped hand, one vertical zipped chest, one zipped inner chest
Storage: stuffs into right hand pocket
Weight: 352g (L)
Sizes: S–XXL
Women's version: 8–18
Likes: price, insulated collar, accessible hand pockets, sizeable chest pocket
Dislikes: fabric, warmth-to-weight ratio*

THE lowest priced of the vests featured, the Chulu has attention to detail you might not have expected: external pocket zippers have tiny "garages" to prevent seepage; the inner mesh pocket has an earphone cable exit. An Ordnance Survey map can be crammed into the outer chest pocket though not without some abuse, and certainly not in a waterproof case. The warmth offered isn't the greatest – the Chulu needs to be fully fastened before you feel the benefit – and the face fabrics aren't as comfortable as those on most other tested garments. That said, with a little shuffling, the hand pockets can be accessed when you're wearing a hipbelt and that, to me, is an important consideration: what's the point of any vest having pockets that can't be fully exploited, especially when they do such an important job as preventing your digits chilling?

Berghaus
0191 516 5700
www.berghaus.com



RESULT PERFORMANCE

R165x - Airdown Core Gilet
£106.25

★

TECHNICAL SPEC

Fill: inflatable 300T Tactel
Outer fabric: HydraDri 10000 Dual Layer Tactel Interlock
Pockets: two zipped hand, two large inner
Storage: none
Weight: 530g (XL)
Sizes: XS–XXXXL
Women's version: unisex
Likes: long cut, wind/waterproof
Dislikes: price, weight, discomfort, bulk, inflating, non-insulated collar, inaccessible hand pockets

TGO readers will be familiar with inflatable sleeping mats: basically, a layer of air trapped within a membrane insulates you from the cold ground. The Airdown Core Gilet uses a similar principle: inflate it when temperatures drop and the trapped air, warmed by body heat, insulates your torso from the cold. Being wind- and waterproof, and cut long with a decent collar, it does indeed keep you warm, and you wonder why no-one's tried it before. Not for long, though. The heaviest garment tested, the pricey Aircore Down (for clarity, there's no down in the product) is also the least comfortable – what do you expect from the equivalent of a Therma-Rest duct-taped to your torso? Inflating the vertical tubes (via a concealed valve below the collar) hurt my cheeks and made the already uncomfortable gilet stiff and unwieldy. It doesn't even pack down compactly.

Result Performance
01206 865605
www.resultperformance.com