



Grouptest

Gilets

A lightweight sleeveless jacket is a useful addition to any year-round cyclist's wardrobe. Technical Editor **Richard Hallett** reviews four



RICHARD HALLETT

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Richard often rides in changeable weather conditions – he lives in Wales

The gilet is a windbreak intended to be worn over clothing not quite warm enough for conditions that are expected to improve, or to be carried in anticipation that they may deteriorate. They suit chilly starts, for example, or just the typically changeable British weather. Most are light and thin enough to stash in a pocket.

A waterproof gilet offers a welcome alternative to a sleeved shell in warm, rainy conditions though may be overly warm in cool, dry weather. Conversely, many gilets have a mesh back. While this is of no use in a downpour, the gilet's wind shielding function will help keep a wet rider warm once the rain stops.

A lightweight, breathable gilet is the versatile and adaptable choice since so much of its effectiveness depends on what's worn underneath. It can be worn or carried as the weather and landscape demands.

Details

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1 Fabric

Breathability is good for when dry weather warms up, while water resistance can make for a useful cover in warm, wet conditions. A mesh back aids ventilation but obviously won't keep out rain.

2 Weight

Thinner and lighter is better if you are likely to take it off during the ride.

3 Collar

High on the neck helps keep out cold draughts.

4 Zip

Full-length is the norm for ventilation and ease of removal.

5 Hem

Elastic or a drawstring at the hem will keep air in and prevent draughts – or moisture-removing airflow, depending on the situation.

6 Gender

Looser-fitting gilets are more or less unisex. Tight or tailored ones need a women's fit option too. Few have this.



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Summer jerseys
 Something to wear under your gilet:
cyclinguk.org/article/cycling-guide/review-cycling-tops

Verdict

Plenty of variation here in what is essentially a simple garment: thick versus thin, stretchy versus taut, waterproof or simply breathable, pockets no pockets. Of the test samples, Lusso's heavy-duty design offers serious protection from cold wind and light rain and is, perhaps, best worn as a ride-long garment rather than one that's taken on and off.

The others stick closer to the conventional gilet concept, which is of a lightweight cover that can be worn as required in changing conditions. They all work well.



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cyclinguk.org/cycling-advice

1 Altura Airstream
 £39.99 altura.co.uk

USING A THIN, breathable and water-repellent soft-touch fabric for both front and rear panels, the Airstream is simple but effective. It's easily folded and stashed in a jersey pocket, with the option of tucking it inside its own rear cargo pocket first to make a convenient bundle. It incorporates reflective edge bindings, and this bright yellow version (it also comes in black) is hard to miss in daylight. The otherwise generous fit of the size L test sample was slightly tight around the chest. Sizes S-XXL.

Lightweight, affordable, basic but effective

2 Lusso Aqua Challenge Blue Gilet
 £69.99 lusso.bike

LAVISHLY-SPECIFIED AND sumptuous in feel, Lusso's design employs substantial Italian fabrics and is a snug fit thanks to their elasticity. Breathable and waterproof, this gilet (or 'gillet') has four rear pockets, one with a zip, which is perhaps just as well: it would be tight worn over items stored in a jersey's rear pockets. The rear panel is reflective. The overall feel and impression is more of a sleeveless high-spec winter jacket than the traditional lightweight vest. Sizes: S-XXL.

Stretchy, high-tech gilet for more inclement weather

3 Pearl Izumi Zephr Barrier Vest £89.99
madison.co.uk

MESH-BACKED WITH a water-repellent ripstop nylon front, the Barrier has a notably high collar and a slightly superfluous drawstring on the hem. Of particular note is the impressively heavy-duty zip, which can be operated from either end but which engages to start from the opposite side to the others. There's a small reflective Pearl Izumi logo on the rear. This gilet is available in women's version too – same features, different cut. Sizes: men's S-XXL, women's S-XXL.

Well-tailored quality. Nice to see a women's version as well

4 Continental Windshield Meshvest £49.95
conti-tyres.co.uk

BEARING THE CONTINENTAL tyre manufacturer's logo, this is a well-constructed, lightweight, breathable gilet with non-stretch but closely-fitting polyester panels; Continental describe it as 'slim fit'. Apart from the shoulders and upper back, the rear is mesh fabric for ventilation. The zip is hidden but full length, while the hem is elasticated. Reflective strips help it stand out in headlights. It packs down easily to fit in jersey pocket. Sizes: S-XXL.

No-frills efficiency. Conti's gilet is lightweight and stashable