

HARLEY-DAVIDSON SWITCHBACK 3-IN-1 JACKET

In a year that will be remembered for a warm spring, torrential summer and a late recovery into Autumn (so far), most people's riding gear will have been tested to the extremes – well, those who don't wear their BLJ all year round and to hell with the consequences.

It doesn't have to be like that, however, because clever design and technology is making an increasing impact on clothing, and the result is gear that you're happy to wear for its style as well as its practicality. One such example is Harley-Davidson's new Switchback jacket: cool when it's hot, windproof and warm when it's cool, and waterproof when it's wet. Three jackets in one, if you like, and not just in terms of its marketing hype: it nearly is three jackets.

This is the second generation of Switchbacks, building on the success of last year's Bracket Jacket, which features a strip running horizontally around the jacket that can be unzipped to reveal a breathable mesh racing stripe that acts as a vent without compromising its structural integrity. This time, they've gone a step further, and the result is a substantial textile jacket that features an almost wholly removable front, inner sleeve and lower back, that reveals a mesh jacket beneath, leaving the shoulder and yoke, and outer sleeves as a more abrasion resistant outer shell on those areas that are more vulnerable in a tumble. Complete with body armour at the elbows and shoulders, that are not too obtrusive whether in hot or cold mode, it really does make sense as the ultimate in flexibility – providing you can find somewhere to stow the outer section if you decide to remove it when on the road. To be fair, most times you will make that decision before leaving home, and there are always vents in the outer lining – two at the front and a matching pair at the back – to provide air cooling without fully removing it.

If you've never ridden in a mesh jacket in hot weather it'll be hard to appreciate just how cooling the air that passes through can be: certainly cooler than the ambient temperature and cooler even than the rushing air you get from riding a motorcycle in a t-shirt: the small holes channel the air into thousands of jets of air without running the risk of sun or wind burn.

It wouldn't be a Harley-Davidson jacket without maximizing the opportunity for branding, but the Switchback is very tastefully done. The full width embroidered logo on the rear yoke is always visible, but on the front is on the removable section, leaving a smaller version on the left breast, giving the impression of two distinctly different styles, and the ubiquitous reflective detailing has been restricted to the piping between the black and racing orange details and a few panel trims on the sleeves. These appear grey in daylight, and so don't detract from the stylish lines, but light up like something from Tron in the dark without looking like a Sam Browne belt.

As a jacket that will be worn over a t-shirt in the summer and something thicker when the temperature drops, the sleeves are adjustable for fit, and can be tightened using press-studs to stop the excess material flapping around excessively, with two options in cold weather mode and a third press stud appearing when the outer lining is removed. Similarly, both elements of the main jackets have waist adjusters: the inner has a Velcro buckle, while the outer has a drawstring. You really need to use the two together, and the seal isn't a tight weatherproof one, but will be fine until the onset of a hard winter.



There is only the one compromise, which is a result of its flexibility: the outer shell doesn't form a watertight seal with the inner jacket and so relies instead on a full waterproof inner jacket that is held in position within the mesh jacket on press-studded straps. It could be described as shower-proof as it stands, but it also means that anything in the outer pockets won't be protected from heavier rain, and oddly the waterproof inner jacket has no pockets of its own to transfer those vulnerable items into. The waterproof inner comes in a bag, affixed by Velcro to the inside back of the jacket as a soft (non CE) back protector. The Velcro

that holds the back serves also as a seal on a pocket within the lining designed for the small FXRG back protector, although that isn't supplied.

On a personal use note, while there are two external zip-up pockets in hot and cold mode, those in the outer layer are removed with it, revealing a second pair beneath and I wonder how long it will be before I spend hours hunting for something that is in the mesh lining's pockets beneath the outer layer, or else in the outer lining hanging under the stairs while I'm out in the mesh jacket: which is probably why they call them hand-warmer pockets. I'll try to discipline myself to only using the two that are just within the zip at the front, as they are common to both modes.

An excellent, well-engineered three season jacket – you'd want something with better waterproof sealing and a thermal lining for the depths of winter – which successfully combines safety with style and comfort. It's worth mentioning too that more tailored women's versions of both the Switchback and Bracket Jackets are available.

Harley-Davidson Men's Switchback Jacket:
98267-08VM (Women's 98267-08VW).

Black/Grey/Orange. (Women's: Black/Grey)

Sizes: S/M/L/XL/XXL/XXXL (Women's: XS/S/M/L/XL/1W/2W/3W)

£296.71 which includes 2 years H-D warranty

