BMW ON

kit and caboodle KIT J. VERCELLA

Silver Eagle Outfitters' New Generation Classic Cooling Vest

Wife Dilia thinks I'm a bit odd. (Come to think of it, so does everyone else.) At age 57, I'm told that comfort should occupy a higher rung on life's priority ladder. But for me, part of the sensory pleasure of riding is feeling the early morning chill subtly sneaking under my jacket. Or the warmth of the midday sun heating the tops of my shoulders. If I wanted total sensory depravation, I'd take the family car.

Though I may be odd, I'm not an idiot. I get no masochistic rush from shivering uncontrollably in freezing weather while every muscle surrounding my bladder is straining to contain its contents. And when 100-degree heat turns my leather

suit into a human bota bag of boiling flesh and sweat, my enthusiasm for the ride tends to wane a bit.

Age, experience and wisdom teach you to temper the extremes. During the sweltering dog days of summer, the principle of evaporative cooling can be an effective tool.

A few years ago, Silver Eagle Outfitters began marketing a line of evaporative cooling apparel. Of particular interest to us damn-the-weather BMW riders, is the New Generation Classic Cooling Vest. This vest is the company's progeny to their venerable Classic Cooling Vest. This latest version boasts changes in both the inner liner and outer fabric to enhance comfort and durability.

But first a quick refresher course in the biophysics of evaporative cooling as applied to Hydroweave®. The NGCC Vest (as well as the rest of the company's product line) is constructed of a three-layer fabric known as Hydroweave. The outer layer is a quick-drying, breathable DuPont Cordura nylon material. The inner layer is a DuPont Teflon HT-coated water-repellant, breathable material which permits body heat to escape without transferring moisture to your body. Sandwiched between these two layers is a fibrous core of hydrophilic fibers (that attract moisture) and hydrophobic fibers (that reject moisture).

Now, let's put everything together. Soak the vest in water for three to five minutes. Wring out the excess water, wipe the inner lining dry, and put it on. On a hot day, your body quickly starts emitting heat. The body heat passes through the conductive inner layer of the vest into the water-saturated middle layer. As the water in this layer begins to evaporate through the breathable outer layer, it sucks the body heat out with the water vapor. It's like having a giant radiator strapped to your chest (good analogy; bad visual).

Although the vest can be worn directly over the skin, I prefer to wear it over a silk-weight microfiber T-shirt. Regular cotton T-shirts and other heavier shirts tend to impede heat transfer, thus, the effectiveness of evaporative cooling.

Meanwhile, the remaining water in the vest feels cool against your body without getting you wet. The whole idea of evaporative cooling is to maintain the body's core temperature. In doing so, the attendant problems of heat stress are held at bay.

When activated, the NGCC Vest holds about eight to 12 ounces of water. Depending upon a combination of ambient temperature, airflow and humidity, the evaporative process should last from two to eight hours. When it's time to reactivate, stop at a rest area, put the vest in the supplied lockable plastic bag and fill with tap water. Wring out the excess water, wipe the inner lining dry, put the vest on and ride off.

When dry, the vest is wafer-thin and weighs about 13 ounces (size L). Completely saturated with water, weight is increased by about 16–26 ounces (depending upon the size of the vest) Of course this additional weight is evenly distributed throughout the entire vest.

On a 90F-degree day (or 32C for metric minds), I activated the vest with water and wore it under a traditional leather jacket with the zippered vents open. Lesson #1: Follow the instructions and wring out all of the excess water. By not doing so, the vest was unnecessarily heavy. I discovered that once the excess water drained off on its own, the vest did its cooling job just as well as when it was over-saturated. Oh, yeah, and by not wringing it out completely, the excess water tends to drain down the front of your pants which to the casual passerby sure looks like… well, you get the idea.

Lesson #2: The sensory effect of evaporative cooling is enhanced as more air flows over the vest. This was obvious when I switched from riding my R1100RS to my Ducati 900 Superlight. The fairing and windscreen on the RS restricted the airflow into the jacket vents. On the Duck, the diminutive fly screen directed the airflow right into the chest vents, thus, hastening evaporation and enhancing that feeling of coolness. Kind of like splashing aftershave on your face. Naturally, the better that your jacket is ventilated, the more effective the evaporation. Of course, faster evaporation means that the vest will need to be recharged with water more often.

For those of you who attended the 'MOA National Rally in Spokane, I needn't tell you about the near-100-degree heat. This was a great opportunity to use the NGCC Vest. Wife Dilia and I took turns wearing the vest. Without a doubt, we both agreed that the vest enhanced our comfort level. As a rear passenger, wife Dilia noticed the evaporative cooling better because of the increased airflow from being outside of the protective bubble of the windscreen.

The NGCC Vest is a really nice option in the arsenal of hot-weather riding gear alternatives. If you have ever used a water-charged "neck snake" or a cooling bib, the Classic is simply more effective as an evaporative cooling garment because of its larger surface area.

The vest has two zippered front pockets and two water-repellant inner pockets, two adjustable waist straps and is machine washable. And, worn dry, the vest can used as a barrier against both wind and cold. The vest is available in Classic Black and Santa Fe Silver. Sizes range from S to 4XL in both separate men's and women's styles.