

Silver Eagle's High Performance Cooling Vest

by David Zemla

SO YOU'RE ACHING TO ride... Not a problem except the temperature reading on the thermometer has crossed the triple digit mark. Faced with choosing between sweating and possibly bleeding, too many of us are abandoning critical safety gear to avoid perspiration. There are better and safer options, one of which is the cooling vest from Silver Eagle Outfitters.

Before we get too far into high-temp solutions, it may help to review the basics of how your body deals with excessive heat. When ambient temperature increases, your body tends to warm-up as well (more so when combined with exercise). One way that the body maintains inner body temperature is by the transformation of a liquid into a gas—sweat evaporating into the air.

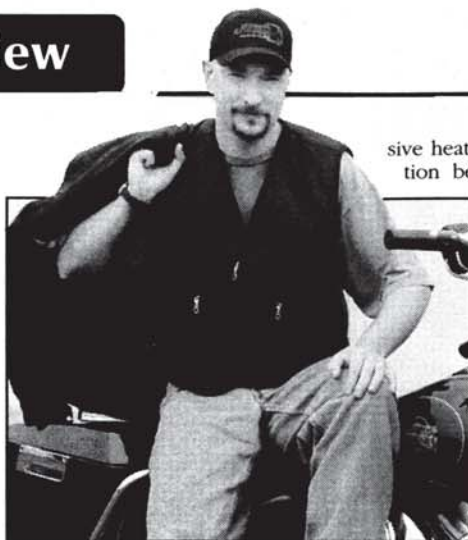
Unfortunately, heat gain can sometimes outpace heat loss and inner temperature can rise to dangerous levels. Heat stroke and dehydration are potential results, both of which would seriously hamper your ability to ride a motorcycle. The human body is more than 50% water and a loss of even a small percentage of this water can constitute dehydration. As ingenious as your body is at regulating internal temperature, it can sometimes use a little help.

The Silver Eagle vest works in a similar fashion as your body—it uses its own storage of water in concert with evaporation to help reduce internal temperatures. The vest is soaked in water which is absorbed into the Hydroweave fabric and trapped. Triggered by elevated temperatures the water begins its own evaporation process and pulls heat from the wearer. Interesting theory, but let's see how it works in real life.

The instructions indicate the vest can be worn directly on your skin over a T-shirt, or under a well-vented jacket. Not willing to forego the safety of my riding gear, it would be necessary to wear the vest as another layer. Adding clothing to stay cool flies in the face of traditional logic, but I was willing to try it in the name of science. Preparation involves soaking the vest in a supplied bag for 15 minutes (refrigeration is also an option should you be riding on Mars). A slight wringing was necessary to void excess water.

The garment was definitely heavier but not ungainly, and oddly it did not feel wet on the surface. Worn over a cotton T-shirt, I could already feel the chilling effect of being surrounded by cool water. Running the zipper at half-mast and all vents opened on my riding jacket, maximum airflow was allowed to reach the Silver Eagle vest and aid in the evaporation process. Outside temps were hovering just over 100°F and a freeway full of nearly stagnant cars only seemed to magnify that number.

Initial sensation was pleasant and I could feel a noticeable difference over the prior day's ride without the vest. About 20 minutes into the test, though still feeling cooler, I couldn't help but notice a clammy sensation around my lower torso. The balance of the ride was comfortable in spite of the oppres-



sive heat. After arriving home, the cause of that clammy sensation became clear, as the top of my pants were soaked.

Apparently the pressure of my leaning against the backrest had prematurely forced out a portion of the water.

The following days involved longer rides under similar conditions (sans backrest) with excellent results. Out of curiosity, I tried a small backpack to see if it would cause seepage, and was pleased to arrive home with dry pants! The vest also includes several zippered pockets, but I might hesitate storing anything that wasn't waterproof in them.

Next up was a demanding dual sport ride in equally-high temperatures. Worn over a jersey and under my chest protector, while not terribly fashionable produced the same refreshing results. Four hours later I was covered in dirt, out of fuel, but surprisingly comfortable. Cleanup was a simple gentle cycle in the washer and overnight line drying.

Although the Silver Eagle cooling vest may not be the only solution for dealing with the brutal summer heat, it certainly is an effective option. Riding in extremely high temperatures can be dangerous and every tool we have to stay cooler ultimately keeps us safer. The vest retails for \$85. To learn more about the cooling vest or other water-cooled apparel available at Silver Eagle Outfitters, visit www.silvereagleoutfitters.com or call 888.672.6969. **FZ**

David Zemla lives in Corona, California and has been riding for 21 years. He enjoys riding Interstate 40 (on his 2001 Harley-Davidson Electra Glide Standard) across the desert on a clear spring morning, or Stoddard Wells' Off-Highway Vehicle area right after a little rain (on his 2002 Suzuki DRZ400).