

# GroupTEST Gilets

A windproof vest, a gilet is an ideal extra layer. **Mat Brett** explains what to look for and reviews five

A gilet is a versatile addition to your cycling wardrobe, providing a halfway-house option when it's too cool for just a jersey but not cold enough for a full-on jacket. It'll really prove its worth in spring and autumn, and also on summer mornings when you want to keep the chilly air off your chest. If you start to warm up after a while in the saddle, a gilet is small and light enough to take off and stuff into a jersey pocket.

## Fabric

A gilet's main job is to keep cold air off your chest so that you're not robbed of your body heat as you cycle. That's why most manufacturers use a windproof fabric. A breathable fabric that lets sweat escape is handy although you can always open the front zip to cool off.

## Fit

A slim cut isn't vital for short trips around town but if you're riding further, especially at speed, you'll want something that fits closely – any flapping will drive you nuts and may let cold air in. A stretchy fabric lets you get a close fit without any tightness and also lets you vary the number of layers you wear underneath. Mesh panels often have a bit of give in them too, so do a similar job.

## The back

Most cold air hits the front of your body as you ride so manufacturers often use mesh panels around the back, where you don't need the protection, to improve breathability and keep the bulk down. Others use windproof fabrics all round for a little extra warmth, which is handy for shorter, low-intensity rides like urban commutes and for off-the-bike use.

## Neck and hem

A collar that's cut higher will keep draughts off your throat. A close fit here will prevent the gilet scooping cold air when you're leaning over, while a soft face to the collar fabric helps it feel snuggler when it's colder. At the waist, an elasticated or drawcorded hem will keep out draughts.

## Waterproofing

Manufacturers occasionally boast that their gilets are waterproof, but that's of limited use given the lack of sleeves. Most windproof fabrics are at least water resistant and will keep out road spray and a bit of drizzle – often enough when you're riding at pace. If it rains more heavily or you're riding more slowly, then you need a proper waterproof jacket. So waterproofing isn't a top priority when choosing a gilet.

## Pockets

Some gilets come with pockets, others don't. Chances are you'll be wearing a jersey with plenty of storage space anyway, but pockets in your gilet will be easier to get at while you're riding. Pockets in the lower back keep all your riding gubbins out of the way although a zipped chest pocket can be handy too, especially for carrying valuables.





### ALTURA ETAPE £29.99

The lightweight Etape is made from a ripstop nylon/polyurethane fabric that does a great job of keeping the wind out. A silicone gripper holds the elasticated hem in place while a chinguard keeps the zip off your neck. The mesh back panel lets heat out and is stretchy enough to provide a flap-free fit. It rolls up small enough to fit a jersey pocket, though sizing is a little large. Reflectivity is fair.



### POLARIS SPHERE VEST £37.99

The Sphere uses waterproof polyester with taped seams. Mesh rear panels and no sleeves mean it won't keep you dry in heavy showers but it gives useful protection from spray and drizzle, and it's windproof. While this fabric isn't stretchy the mesh is, and the cut is fine. Black is dull but visibility at night is good due to reflective panels and piping. It packs small and has four pockets.



### DHB WINDSLAM £36.99

The Windslam's softshell fabric comes with a windproof membrane and a fleecy inner face for comfort and insulation – this is a warm gilet. It's stretchy so you can get a close yet unrestrictive fit. Two zipped pockets in the side seams provide stowage space while the open-mesh back panel boosts breathability. Excellent detailing includes quality zips, reflective piping and a hem gripper. Good value.



### BONTRAGER SPORT WIND VEST £34.99

As the name says, this is a sporty gilet: it's cut close and is about as lightweight as they come, though it still blocks the wind. It packs down to the size of a tennis ball and makes a good just-in-case gilet for when the temperature drops. The mesh back panel improves breathability while a zipped rear pocket adds useful storage space. There's some reflective trim too.



### MADISON ELEVATE £49.99

With a relaxed cut and several zipped pockets, the Elevate is as useful off the bike as on it, so is good for commuting and touring. The durable softshell fabric is windproof and water gets in only through the seams. The back panel is the same polyester as the rest, making this gilet a bit too warm for sportier riding. That said, the drawcord hem and two-way front zip provide air conditioning.

## DETAILS

#### Altura Etape



**Sizes:** S-XXL  
**Colours:** Red, Black  
**Distributor:** zyro.co.uk

#### DHB Windslam



**Sizes:** S-XXL  
**Colours:** Blue, Red, Black  
**Distributor:** ctcshop.org.uk

#### Madison Elevate



**Sizes:** S-XL Women's version available (Ella)  
**Colours:** Black  
**Distributor:** madison.co.uk

#### Polaris Sphere Vest



**Sizes:** S-XXL  
**Colours:** Black  
**Distributor:** polaris-apparel.co.uk

#### Bontrager Sport Wind Vest



**Sizes:** S-XXL. Women's version available (Bontrager WSD Wind Vest).  
**Colours:** white, red, blue, 'visibility' yellow  
**Distributor:** bontrager.com (Trek UK)