

# BMW AirShell Jacket - three season report

RATING ●●●●●

review by Mashe K. Levy

**B**MW'S NEWEST SUMMER jacket, the Serbian-made AirShell, has been tested for the past year for well over 10,000 miles in its intended three seasons and we are now quite pleased with its form, fit, and functionality.

The AirShell features a rugged Cordura 500 exterior material, dyed a retina-melting "Signal Yellow," though most onlookers agree it looks more like a light neon green. Either way, in a sea of everyday colors, it visually pops to create enhanced conspicuity. The trim pieces on the elbows (doubled up for added protection) and back are standard issue black. Ventilation is plentiful, thanks to a generous amount of strong Polymide mesh on the chest and sleeves. Two-position width adjustments at the elbows and hem are handled by sturdy rubber-coated snaps, while the cuffs can be closed to three positions via BMW-emblazoned metal snaps. Velcro flaps at upper and lower ends of the front zipper's travel are also a nice touch.

There are two exterior storage pockets, and one waterproof pocket on the inner left side. Traditional BMW identifying marks include "BMW Motorrad" embroidered into the left lower front, and a rubber Roundel on the upper right sleeve. Finally, in keeping with the enhanced conspicuity theme, there is reflective fabric incorporated into the upper sleeves and a strip of reflective material approximately 2cm wide running across the upper back. Overall, it's a very handsome jacket with superlative build quality and a slim European cut one would expect from a BMW garment. The MSRP is \$449, in keeping with its designer style.

Inside, the Airshell's lining is 100% polyester. BMW's unique NP protectors are included at elbows and shoulders. These are thicker and softer than standard CE protectors and touted as achieving the lowest residual force transference of any protectors on the market (you can find more info on this armor on Youtube.com). Our 2009 model Airshell also came complete with a full size NP back protector (shown), although for 2010 BMW has stopped including the back protector as standard equipment, charging \$45 for the option. We thankfully did not have any unplanned impacts during our testing period, but we can report the NP protectors are well contoured, extremely comfortable to wear, and do not get as stiff as typical CE protectors in cold weather.



Above: About 13" W x 19.5" H, the NP back protector is large but also comfortable. Left: The jacket's neon green color is hard to reproduce.

Speaking of which, the Airshell includes a zip out "climate membrane insert" with a nylon/polyamide shell and polyester lining which makes the shell waterproof, windproof (yet breathable) and insulated. It can be zipped in or removed in seconds and folds up small when not in use. The insert is the key to the Airshell's multi-season claims, as without it the jacket would flow too much air to be comfortable below 65° F. We found the realistic temperature range of this jacket to be approximately 65°-95°F with the liner out, or down to 40°F with the liner in. Above 95°F, a true mesh jacket provides more precious air flow, although at a clear cost in potential crash protection.

Out on the road, the Airshell quickly asserts itself as a top-quality garment, revealing the seemingly contradictory quality of tangibly robust construction despite its light weight. Once it's on, you barely know it's there, an especially impressive performance considering the sheer amount of coverage the NP Protectors provide. In a downpour the jacket's porous outer shell quickly becomes soaked and heavy, so like most primarily summer jackets, it's not an ideal choice for long-distance wet weather riding.

Pans are few but worth mentioning: First, considering the high price of this jacket, we feel BMW should include the back protector as standard equipment, as it is arguably the most important safety feature in this package. Riders we spoke to who were considering the AirShell all commented that the high-tech NP pads were their main justification for splurging on an AirShell, when otherwise comparable jackets with standard CE pads could be had for a fraction of the price.

Second, we would have liked to see some reflective material on the front of the jacket, for 360° coverage. For instance, some of BMW's other jackets have reflective loops over the shoulders, providing such visibility without hurting the styling.

Next, why only one waterproof pocket on the inner left side? The inner right deserves one, too. As every serious rider knows, you can never have too many pockets for storage! Finally, as with all light-colored jackets, when the miles add up, road debris and bugs soon begin to stain the fabric. Though the Airshell is easily washable, the Signal Yellow Cordura should be chemically treated with something like Scotchguard to prevent stains from taking a set, and it is not. Other high end jackets we've worn seem to be more stain-resistant right out of the box.

Overall, however, we would not hesitate to recommend the BMW AirShell as a fine and versatile three-season jacket with an emphasis on warm weather use. It has held up perfectly in our testing and, once broken-in, offers even greater fit and comfort. With an occasional cleaning, the Signal Yellow color has also endured very well, with no detectable fading.

Value-minded readers will note that comparable jackets are available from reputable companies for half the price of an Airshell, but with the large, form-fitting NP protectors on this model, we know which jacket we'd rather be wearing in the event of the unexpected. ■

**BMW Motorrad AirShell Jacket**  
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