

A skin for all seasons

FXRG Switchback Jacket
Harley-Davidson MotorClothes
\$795
harley-davidson.com

Reviewed by Moshe K. Levy

Functional four-season riding gear is the veritable Holy Grail of motorcycle apparel, especially here in the Northeast where the ambient temperature extremes between summer and winter are so pronounced. It's very rare to find gear that is truly comfortable all year round, which inevitably leads to more expense as riders buy specialized gear, and more bulk on long tours as numerous garments are packed away in the saddlebags "just in case." To address this common problem, Harley's new FXRG Switchback jacket promises general functionality over all seasons, using an innovative venting system coupled with multiple zipped-in layers, each serving a specific purpose.

The FXRG features a "Triple Vent System" which is essentially a series of three vertical vents per side of the jacket, allowing the rider to adjust the desired level of airflow. Harley claims to have designed this system in a wind tunnel for maximum aerodynamic effect, and it shows on the street in real-life use. With the vents open, a very generous amount of air circulates inside the jacket, even when sitting behind a full fairing. Conversely, the jacket is fairly well-sealed for winter use when the vents are shut.

Complementing this system are the layers beneath the mid-weight cowhide exterior shell of the Switchback. The outermost layer is a "Heat Retention Liner" made of a silver-colored thermally reflective material, which is designed to retain the natural body warmth of the rider within the jacket. Beneath this layer, a "Waterproof Liner" keeps rainfall from reaching the rider, and also provides a degree of wind proofing. Underneath the Waterproof Liner is

the polyester mesh-lined core of the FXRG jacket.

However, the true highlight of the Switchback jacket is its ability to transform its basic exterior shell from cold-weather cowhide to hot-weather mesh within minutes. For hot-weather riding where maximum breathability is required, the rider can quickly zip off the complete front and rear leather panels on the chest and back



Figure 1

areas, resulting in a dedicated summer-weight mesh jacket. The zipped panel system which allows such a swift and radical functional change by the side of the road is nothing short of ingenious engineering.

Better yet, even when stripped down into its lightest base mesh layer configuration, the Switchback still retains a reasonable degree of protection, afforded by the sewn-in CE Level 1 armor at the shoulders and elbows. (Back armor is available optionally, but was not supplied for this test.) A kidney belt is also included on the mesh base layer, which is adjustable via Velcro tabs, and can be completely removed with two snaps if so desired.

The jacket features many other functional details which serious riders will

appreciate, such as the 3M Scotchlite reflective material on the sleeves and back for added conspicuity, extended cuffs with thumbholes included, and plentiful storage provided by six YKK zippered pockets.

Figure 2



Figures 1 and 2 show the front and rear of the jacket in cold-weather mode with all the leather panels in place

On the road, all of this translates into very good performance. The fitment of the jacket is true to size, with various stretch panels, a pair of adjustment snaps on each sleeve, and three more adjustment snaps per side ensuring that everything feels snug. Having one jacket for everything obviously entails compromise, though in this case it was mini-

Figure 3



mal. In low temperatures, with all of the internal layers fitted, the jacket provides adequate warmth down to roughly 38 degrees, below which we finally substituted a heated liner for the Switchback's Heat Retention Liner. This is about 5-10 degrees warmer than we normally use heated liners when donning heavily insulated winter jackets. As temps warmed up, the layered functionality of the jacket was welcome. Riding in summer temperatures with all base layers and the leather swatches removed was breezy and comfortable, right up into 90s and beyond. The various liners fold up small, freeing up storage for other stuff on long rides. The kidney belt performed well and was unobtrusive when not in use, hidden within its integrated pocket. In heavy rain, the Waterproof Liner did keep the water off of my torso, but not before the outer layer of the jacket soaked through, which made it heavy and cumbersome to wear for extended stormy periods. Dedicated rain gear would be preferable.

In short, the FXRG has a pioneering shell design and venting system which make it useful over 90 percent of the same range as having separate dedicated winter and summer jackets, but this accomplishment comes at a

Figure 4



Figures 3 and 4 show the jacket in hot-weather mode, completely transformed within two minutes flat

cost: The MSRP of the Switchback jacket is a whopping \$795, placing it firmly within premium riding gear territory. Ultimately, its value and appeal are targeted at the rider who truly desires—and can afford—one jacket for every season. ▶