



Ronstan Coastal

But like the Helly gear, the jacket has the circular velcro wrist closures that showed a tendency to wear out during testing. The large zippers were easy to handle, even with gloved hands.

The jacket has reflective patches at the neck and on the shoulders, as well as a storm flap over the two-way zipper. It is available in navy, gray, and red. We would highly recommend the red jacket. In a man-overboard situation, crew waving gray- or navy-clad arms at the water's surface would be nearly impossible to spot, and that fluorescent hood would only work if deployed.

The taffeta-lined trousers come in the same colors as the jacket and have adequate pockets, a two-way zipper, and reinforced knees, shins, and seat.

Brand new at presstime, the Biscay gear had not yet been posted on any online U.S. chandleries. The price given in the Value Guide (\$375 for the set) is the manufacturer's suggested retail price. The kit will be available through www.landfallnav.com, www.apsltd.com, and West Marine.

Bottom Line: The Biscay gear was in close contention with the Gill kit, but it comes with wear-prone wrist

closures and a slightly bigger price tag, so the advantage went to Gill.

RONSTAN

Ronstan, an Australian company with its U.S. office in Rhode Island, offers foul-weather gear for inshore, coastal, and off-shore sailors. The Heavy-duty Coastal Breathable jacket and

trousers (CL161 and CL152) that we tested are made of Ronstan's breathable R-Tech 5 nylon fabric. The R-Tech 5 didn't offer as complete protection from the elements during our tests as the top performers, but protection was adequate. Testers noted that during the fan test, wind easily made its way in at the neck and waist.

Like the Henri Lloyd gear, the Ronstan men's large offers ample room for mid-layer clothes, perhaps too much. The jacket has a polyester lining, taped seams, and a fleece-lined collar. It also has the preferred two-way zipper with storm flap and fleece-lined pockets.

Unlike most of the other test products, the Ronstan trousers have a zipper only at the fly, rather than a full frontal zipper. This removes the need for a two-way zipper, but makes donning more difficult. Also, unlike the no-fuss Gill bibs, the elastic Ronstan suspenders attach and adjust via plastic buckles.

The trousers are polyester lined and have mesh lining at the ankles for quick draining. They have four hip pockets and one cargo pocket on the right thigh. Reinforced abrasion-resistant fabric covers the knees and the seat.

The Ronstan has good safety features with reflective piping along the chest and arms and reflective patches on the chest and shoulders.

The Coastal Jacket comes in grey or red, sizes XXS to XXL, while the trousers come in grey in the same sizes.

Bottom Line: The Ronstan gear was not at the top of the class, but at \$270 for the full kit, it offers adequate protection and is a bargain for coastal cruisers with tight purse strings. It gets the *PS* Budget Buy.

SLAM

The Italy-based Slam markets predominantly to the racing crowd, and this was obvious in the gear we tested from Slam's Evolution line: the 2007 Russell Coutts-inspired Evolution Extreme Sailing Jacket and Long Johns. The Euro-styled suit is made from lightweight, breathable fabric.

The suit is ideal for the go-fast crowd, but it lacks features essential to the cruiser. The jacket has two zip-



Slam Evolution



Slam gave us a sneak peek at the next-generation Russell Coutts Evolution jacket. Because the jacket was a prototype, it was not rated. PS looks forward to reviewing the new Slam gear when it hits the market this spring.

pered and fleece-lined slash pockets, which aren't the most trustworthy for electronics like a handheld GPS or VHF, nor are they adequate for warming chilled hands, in our opinion. The gear has heat-taped seams, which offer good protection from wind and water.

Like the Gul gear, testers found the Slam suit a bit snug and the zippers a bit undersized for operation with cold or gloved hands. The Slam jumpsuit does have plenty of abrasion-resistant material on the knees and stood up well in the wind resistance tests. But testers found that water leaked in at the jacket's neck closure. Both the jacket and trousers are a bright yellow-green for good visibility, but the jacket has only one small patch of reflective material on the hood.

The jumpsuit-style long-johns are more difficult to get on and off quickly than those with suspenders. However, some people may prefer these as they are more weatherproof and the elasticized waistband reduces weight placed on the shoulders, Slam reports.

The Slam garments we tested were the 2007 designs, and according to Slam, suspenders-style trousers will be offered in the 2008 lineup, along with the long johns.

Testers had the opportunity to review a prototype of Slam's upcoming Russell Coutts Evolution jacket (an update to the one in this test). We liked its pockets and unique cell-phone pocket on the interior. Overall impressions were the same as for the version we tested. Since it was still a prototype, it was not formally rated.

Bottom Line: The 2007 Slam Evolution gear is well designed and constructed, but featurewise, it is better suited for racing than cruising. Slam does offer more cruiser-friendly foulies, but their cost exceeds the price-point set for this test. We look forward to seeing the 2008 designs.

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Keys to Foul-Weather Comfort

If you have to sail in undesirable conditions, at least do it in quality foul-weather gear that keeps you warm and dry yet allows you the freedom to move unencumbered. Foulies aren't cheap, so be sure to give any prospects a good examination before taking them to sea. Here are some key considerations:

Hood: The hood should be smoothly deployable and should be florescent green, orange, or yellow for increased visibility on or in the water. It should repel water, have a visor, and have a semi-rigid peak that deflects water. Bungee cord or other fasteners should be easy to adjust and should cinch enough to keep rain from entering the jacket.

Reflective: Jackets should have a fair amount of prismatic piping and reflective tape placed in areas that would be visible should the wearer fall overboard (hood, shoulders, neck). Every garment made for sailing should have some reflective properties.

Pockets: Check pocket design and construction. Hand-held devices tend to fall out of slash pockets, so self-draining cargo pockets with flaps and velcro closures are recommended. Also a set of lined pockets to warm hands is a must in cold-weather sailing areas. Keep in mind that pockets totally lined with cotton- or fleece-like material can stick to salty, wet hands. The best combination seems to be a slash pocket interior lined on one surface with fleece, the other with the same material used for the jacket exterior.

Wind-resistance: The jacket should have a drawstring or other tensioning mechanism at the waist and hem to help keep out wind. The collar should extend up to the chin to protect the neck, but it should not feel like a cervical collar.

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Look for beefy, easy-to-grab zippers like this one on the Henri Lloyd Biscay jacket we tested.

Internal cuffs: Often made from neoprene-like material, adjustable inner cuffs at wrists and ankles will keep out water.

Bibs/Trousers: Bibs should incorporate wide, comfortable suspenders that don't cut into the shoulders. They should allow for quick, easy trips to the head and should have a front zipper and gusset to keep the wearer dry. Suspenders should have strong, quick-release plastic snap buckles or velcro tabs for adjustment.

Fabric: Each maker's top-of-the-line product usually is a breathable, waterproof fabric, and some companies have a better track record than others. Fabrics that are micro-porous to the extent that vapor can escape but water is kept out, vary in quality and durability. The fabric should breathe, and seams should be taped, not just sewn.

Mesh: Jackets should have mesh liner to prevent sweating and promote aeration. Mesh at the hem, wrists, and ankles allows any water that gets in to get out quickly.

Vents: A quality jacket will have vents that can be zipped.

Cut: A foul-weather jacket should be roomy enough to accommodate a fleece or thick sweater beneath.

Color: Black may be the height of style, but if you fall overboard, you'll have a better chance of getting found if your jacket is red, orange, or yellow.

