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WEST MARINE

Boating retail giant West Marine has its own brand of foul-weather gear. The Third Reef jacket and trousers are made of two-layer Oxford nylon with breathable polyurethane backing and fully taped seams. This kit performed on-par with those kits in its price range, but it didn't offer complete protection from wind and water.

Both the jacket and trousers are taffeta-lined with mesh at the wrists, hem, and ankles for drainage. The Third Reef gear fit our testers well, offering just enough room for underlayers. The trousers have fuss-free elastic suspenders, with no buckles or clips to worry with for adjustment. They have a full-frontal zipper, but it is not a two-way and it's small. The jacket, however, does have a two-way zipper and has cargo and fleece-lined handwarmer pockets as well as interior cell-phone and zippered security pockets. The jacket's high collar is lined with a soft mesh for breathability, a nice feature.

Testers were disappointed to see that the Third Reef gear completely lacked reflective material—no patches, no piping.

Both the jacket and trousers come in yellow or red, sizes small to XXL. West Marine does offer women's fit foulie gear, and its Explorer line has more cruiser-friendly features. Look for these in a future review.

Bottom Line: For an entry-level kit, the Third Reef gear does the job, but the Ronstan gear does it better and is worth the higher price.

CONCLUSION

All of the top performers in this test can be categorized as high-quality. Testers had a tough time narrowing the field. But in the end, across-the-board excellence and an affordable price earned the Gill Key West gear the PS Best Choice. Performance- and pricewise, the sets from Gul, Helly Hansen, and Henri Lloyd were neck-and-neck. All provide Good or better wind and water protection, and offer unique features.

If you're cash-strapped, go for the Ronstan kit, our Budget Buy.

Stay tuned to see how these players and others measure up in the women's foul-weather gear tests. ▲



West Marine
Third Reef

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Photo by John Harries



The easiest thing you can do to ensure the longevity of your foul-weather gear is to give it a freshwater bath as soon as the skies have cleared, seas have settled, or you're tied to the dock. Then hang it to dry.

Help Your Gear Weather the Years

Buying good foul-weather gear is an investment, one that you can benefit from for years to come. To get the most from your gear, here are a few ways to keep it in good health:

- Most importantly, read the clothing labels and any manufacturer literature (tags, brochures, etc.) that came with the garment, and follow their care instructions.
- In the case of machine-washable gear, regular washes will keep salt, dirt, and oils from building up. Not following a regular wash routine could affect the breathability and waterproofness of the fabric.
- Use non-biological soap powders and pure soap flakes to launder water-repellent fabrics.
- If the fabric looks wet or fails to bead water, then restoring its water-repellency is likely in order. There are several wash-in products available that effectively do this, one such re-proofer is Grangers G-Line for Outerwear (www.grangerusa.com).
- Regularly inspect your gear for worn seams or stressed zippers. If the damage is significant, contact the manufacturer to see whether an in-house repair service is available.