



Orvis SonicSeam Pack and Travel Jacket (\$149)

Mystic M793-4 Fly Rod (\$399)



Simms GORE-TEX Paclite Jacket (\$229.95)



G Loomis PRO4x 1207-4 Fly Rods (\$365)



**Costa Wingman
Sunglasses** (\$259)

Fly Fishing

By Todd Tanner

With spring just around the corner, it's time for our annual equipment review. Our focus this year is on fly rods and gear that keeps you dry and comfortable. (Montana winters do a pretty good job of separating the wheat from the chaff when it comes to equipment and clothing.) Fortunately, we had a chance to get everything out on the water.

Orvis SonicSeam Pack and Travel Jacket (\$149) – One of the exciting new technologies making the rounds in the fly fishing world is welded seams. No stitching means no holes, which, theoretically at least, eliminates leaks. The Orvis SonicSeam is a sweet little welded seam jacket that works equally well on the water and running around town. It rolls up small to fit in a fanny pack or the back of your vest, yet it still provides

*Fly rods and lines, waders, jackets and sunglasses . . .
Our columnist puts a dozen new products through
rigorous workouts in tough conditions.*

serious wet weather protection and a full range of motion for casting. The hood stores in the collar, and the zippers for the chest and hand-warmer pockets are waterproof. This is a handsome, minimalist jacket for anglers looking for versatile, lightweight rain gear.

Patagonia Rio Gallegos Waders (\$449) – These are undoubtedly Patagonia's best-ever waders, and they're also one of my all-time favorites. I've been wearing them for a year now, and they've held up incredibly well. They resist puncture and abrasion, they're super comfortable, and they look almost as good now as they day I pulled them out of the box. Rio Gallegos feature an innovative suspension system that adjusts

easily and gives you the ability to lower the waders in the front without having to remove the shoulder straps. There's also waterproof storage up front for your cell phone or camera. The only downside is that the warm and comfortable merino wool feet tend to get a little damp with sweat, and you may want to turn your waders inside out to dry after a full day on the water. All in all, though, these are really exceptional waders.

Sage One 590-4 Fly Rod (\$725) – Starting with the Z-Axis and now continuing with the One, Sage seems focused on making their high-performance, fast-action rods more enjoyable to cast and easier to fish. The 9-foot, 5-weight One is definitely on



Winston 9-foot, 4-weight CVX (\$495)

the quick side, yet it's smooth and very, very accurate. Just as importantly, you can feel the rod all the way through the casting stroke. The One's cosmetics are topnotch, and the fit, finish and quality of components are excellent. The cork grip is a little unusual, in that it's a modified full wells rather than a cigar grip. I really liked the grip – it felt natural in my hand and it may even have given me a little extra control. If you're a Z-Axis fan, you'll want to test-drive the One. It offers serious performance, yet it's still a blast to fish.

Mystic M793-4 Fly Rod (\$399) – For a little company that hasn't been around all that long, Mystic just continues to impress. This 9-foot 3-inch, 7-weight is a sweetheart; it throws a handsome line, mends like a champ and fights big fish with ease. I landed a number of hefty Idaho steelhead with this rod, and after fishing it on the Clearwater for a few days, I wouldn't hesitate to take it out for pike or smallmouth bass. I'm not sure how they do it, but Mystic offers a ton of performance for the money. Serious kudos.

Simms GORE-TEX Paclite Jacket (\$229.95) – The Simms web site describes the Paclite as a tropical flats rain jacket, but that's not the half of it. The Paclite shielded me from cold Idaho winds, protected me from sleet and rain squalls on the Clearwater, and packed down to just about nothing when the sun came out. It features a 3-layer GORE-TEX shell fabric, corrosion-resistant YKK nylon zippers, three exterior pockets and an adjustable stow-away hood. This is a well-designed, highly technical piece. If you're looking for a high-quality, minimalist rain jacket, the Paclite should be right at the top of your list.

Redington Sonic-Pro Zip Front Waders (\$379.95) – The Sonic-Pros are the first welded seam, zippered waders I've ever tested, and they are the real deal. They don't leak (and I've been beating on them for a full year), they're easy to put on and take off, and they truly do simplify those occasional "I shouldn't have had that second cup of coffee." trips to the bank. In other words, the Sonic-Pros are really, really

nice waders. They're comfortable and breathable, with tons of well-placed pockets. I don't know that I've ever fished another pair of waders that made everything so convenient. The only thing I don't like about the Sonic-Pros is a slight chemical smell that seems to come from inside the waders. Other than that, they've been outstanding.

Winston 9-foot, 4-weight GVX (\$495) – One of my all-time favorite production fly rods, both for the sheer joy of casting and for fishing dry flies to rising trout, was the old Winston 9 for 4 IM6. The jury is still out the GVX – I haven't spent enough time with one in my hands – but this new Winston just might give my chosen 4-weight a run for its money. Here's what I can tell you so far: It's extremely accurate, it throws a gorgeous line and it's wonderful to cast. The GVX will put your size 18 Parachute Adams on a dime at 50 feet, yet you can literally feel it load with five feet of fly line off the tip. I suppose I'd better send it back to Winston before I fall head over heels for the GVX. No point making my IM6 jealous.

Costa Wingman Sunglasses (\$259) – What do you get when you add Costa's top-of-the-line 580G copper lenses to classic, aviator-style frames? The Wingman. I love these glasses. They offer timeless styling, soft rubber temple tips, adjustable silicon nose pads, stainless steel spring hinges and tremendous visual acuity. The UV-blocking copper lens offer great contrast on the water and the frames are comfortable enough to wear all day long. Highly recommended, both for fly fishing and everyday use.

Sitka Gear Fanatic Jacket (\$369) – I like to throw in a multi-use piece from time to time, and while this new Sitka jacket was obviously designed with whitetail bowhunters in mind, it's also an outstanding cold-weather steelhead/trout/salmon/pike jacket. The key is the articulated arm design. Most heavy jackets make casting a pain; they're just too bulky. The Fanatic is cozy warm without all the bulk, and the fact that it stops the wind in its tracks and sheds a light rain makes it perfect for early or late season angling. I spent a day fishing in the wind, rain and snow in the Fanatic and I couldn't have been happier. The

diagonal zipper took a couple of minutes to get used to, but the kangaroo pocket kept my hands warm and the wrist gaskets kept out the wind and water. This is one hell of a jacket.

Patagonia Rock Grip Wading Boot (\$239) – I’ve been around fly fishing for a long time, but I’ve never seen, or worn, anything quite like Patagonia’s new Rock Grip Wading Boot. These boots use five heavy aluminum bars to cut through slime, silt and algae while grabbing hold of the stream bottom.

Designed with input from Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard, the Rock Grip truly lives up to its name. It took me a little while to get used to these boots, mostly because there’s no side-to-side flex in the sole; none at all. That said, they’re comfortable, extremely well made, and they seem pretty gentle on fly lines and driftboat floors. The only place they don’t grip as well as, or better than, traditional metal studs is bank-side ice. You probably won’t want these boots if you do more hiking than wading, or if you’re stalking

fish on easy-to-wade gravel bottoms. But if you fish slick-bottomed rivers on a regular basis, you owe it to yourself to check out these new boots.

Orvis Hydros Fly Lines (\$75-\$89) – I tried three of these new Orvis lines; WF-4-F Hydros Trout, WF-7-F Easy Mend and WF-5-F 3D Trout. The Hydros Easy Mend (\$75) has a bright orange tip that helps you track your drift and pick up subtle subsurface takes, and it does indeed mend with ease. It also floats high, roll-casts like a champ and handles both indicator and high-stick nymphing with aplomb. The Hydros Trout (\$75) is a truly well-designed fly line that casts beautifully and makes delicate dry fly presentations with a minimum of effort. It also adjusts to larger dries and nymphs with no problem. The welded loop seemed a little smaller and sleeker than other loops I’ve run across, and it functioned perfectly. I really liked the Hydros Trout – it’s a versatile line that holds up well to a wide variety of conditions. The Hydros 3-D Trout (\$89) is the new Orvis flagship line. It boasts a high floating tip and a friction-reducing micro texture surface, and it casts and mends extremely well. If you want to get the most out of your fly rod, this may just be the perfect line. Fair warning, though. The Hydros 3-D Trout is one of the noisiest lines I’ve ever tested, so unless you always fish while listening to your iPod, you should cast this line before you buy it. I imagine some folks will love the performance and others will have an issue with the extra noise.

G Loomis PRO4x 1207-4 Fly Rod (\$365) – This 10-foot, 7-weight is a very quick, very powerful rod that should appeal to all the Loomis GLX fans out there. It’s primarily a steelhead and salmon rod designed to make long, accurate casts on medium to large rivers. If you’re looking for a muscular, moderately priced rod that allows you to boom out 80-foot casts and fight oversized fish quickly and effectively, this Loomis is an excellent choice. I put it to the test on Clearwater River steelhead, and it did every single thing I asked of it. By the way, I’d bet you could also over-line this PRO4x with a WF-8-F to increase its versatility as a nymph rod. ➡