

MAY 2011

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RIDE FAST TAKE CHANCES

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—Maynard Hershon

HOT UNDER THE COLLAR, PART I: AEROSTICH KANETSU ELECTRIC LINER

Electric vests are for wusses. That's what I thought for most of my riding life: if it got really cold, stuff newspaper under your jacket and keep going. Much later I mellowed and, in a weak moment, bought an e-vest on sale at a BMW dealer. Suddenly I discovered what I'd been missing all those years—comfort in the cold.

That vest worked for years, as I kept repairing the wires when they broke at the terminal connection. But, eventually, hot spots developed in the heating wires and I had the sensation of being burned over my belly, a spot where, over these years, the fit had tightened. I needed a new one (vest, that is).

I bought a Kanetsu electric liner from Aerostich. The liner is more than a vest as it has heated sleeves, which is the upgrade in heating capability that I wanted. The liner is the top-of-the-line model—the Airvantage—which has an inflatable air bladder in the front. Blowing air into this bladder does two things. It presses the heating wires to the body, which increases heat transfer, and adds insulation via the additional air space. Finally, I added a thermo-controller, which allows you to adjust temperature between on and off—my previous vest had only an on/off switch. I had to regulate temperature by leaving the switch on until I was too warm, and then leave it off until I felt cold again. The thermo-controller eliminates that bother.

A Pacific storm with rain, wind, temperatures in the 40s provided the first chance to try out my new equipment. I had a T-shirt and long-sleeved cotton shirt between the Kanetsu and my skin, and an Aerostich TL-Tec Windblocker fleece over the electric liner, next to my Darien jacket. Over a ride lasting several hours, I was



comfortable and immediately recognized the benefit of heated sleeves. The added insulation when the air bladder was inflated was evident. When not inflated, I turned up the current through the controller to compensate. So far, so good.

A much better test was a winter trip to Baja. We crossed the Tehachapi range when there was snow on the ground and the temperature ranged from 35 to 50 degrees, with considerable wind chill at freeway speeds. In a situation like this, much more is required than a heated liner and a fleece.

From inside to out, I had on a thermal undershirt, cotton shirt, Kanetsu liner, lightweight wool sweater, medium weight fleece, TLtec fleece and Darien jacket. The thermo controller was full on, as were the heated grips and, at the coldest part, I resorted

to the old-timer's trick of adding some newspaper (*we hope it was CityBike!* —ed.). It worked because the Darien jacket was large enough to accommodate all these layers, though there was no room left to blow up the air bladder. Staying warm made the ride not only tolerable but thoroughly enjoyable.

At maximum current (4.3 amps at 14.3 volts) the liner is pumping 63 watts into the space inside the jacket. So, as it gets colder, the only way to stay warm is to increase the insulation between the source of heat (the liner) and the sink (the cold surface of the outer jacket). The adjustable parameter is the number of layers (and their insulating quality) that you add to this space. On the Baja ride, I was maxed out in layers. In this case, the thermo-controller is useful because, as the air temperature warms up during the day, I could turn down the current instead of having to stop and remove a layer or two of clothing.

The Kanetsu AirVantage liner is great, but it's not cheap at \$327. It comes with a coiled connecting cord with a lighted switch that tells you at a glance if the power's on. The thermo controller adds another \$60, but is well worth it, I find. If I had to save some money, I'd forgo the air bladder (saves \$40) rather than the controller.



There are four basic combinations in the Kanetsu line to choose from: vest or liner, with or without air bladder, ranging in cost from \$187 to \$327. Aerostich design and quality craftsmanship are behind the price. Good gear makes for great riding.

—Bob Stokstad

HOT UNDER THE COLLAR, PART II: POWERLET HEATED JACKET, GLOVE LINERS AND REMOTE CONTROLLER

Powerlet's new rapidFIRE ProForm heated liner (\$250) adds an extra dimension to the utility of heated gear. That's because it's very thin and comfortable to wear, thanks to lots of stretch panels and Powerlet's "Carbon Nano-Fiber Core" heating elements which use far infrared (FIR) for a deep, safe, penetrating heat. The cuffs are finished to reduce bunching, as do the "ProForm" stretch panels. Because of all that, Powerlet promises a tailored fit with a minimum of sizes. Powerlet also claims it's the warmest heated liner on the market, with a 105-watt rating.

To complement the liner, Powerlet also offers a very clever solution to the problem of too many wires. It's a wireless controller (\$110 for single, \$140 for dual) that uses a Bluetooth-ish system to communicate with a dongle plugged into the liner, eliminating the need to have a controller hard-wired into the jacket. This minimizes the wires going from bike to rider.

The liner is stylish and comfortable (and may we add, slimming in basic black) to wear as a stand-alone garment. Its polyester construction has good wind-blocking qualities, and the stretch panels give it a snug but comfy fit. A high Polar Fleece collar blocks wind and wicks moisture away from your neck. Unlike other heated garments, there is a minimum of wires. Instead, the heating



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