

Sea Trials con't

by Alexis Terrosa



I was a bit skeptical when I first tried on this jacket. At 6'2 and 190 pounds it was hard to believe that something with such a small looking air bladder would be able to create enough buoyancy to keep me afloat.



The jacket is pretty comfortable used as a windbreaker. It has three methods by which it can be inflated. Orally by blowing into the inflation tube hidden in the pocket on the left side of the jacket. By manual release to activate the CO2 cylinder or by automatic release in water. I chose the latter being that it would probably be the most common way to do it.

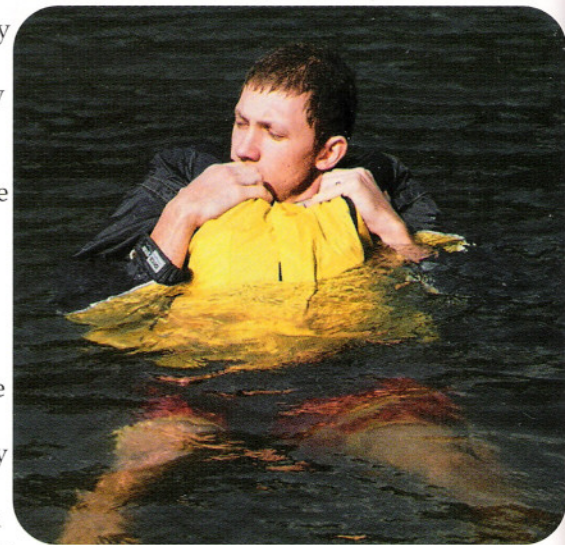


I won't confuse you with tons of technical jargon because our tests are done as used by normal recreational sailors who use the equipment first and read the instructions later. In this case though you really should read first. The palm size instruction manual is very good and explains how to arm the PFD in words and schematics. I tried to perform the automatic arming without reading the instructions anyway to see how user friendly it is.

If you understand the concept of how the self inflation device works, you won't have a problem. The humidity sensitive pill can be installed only one way and the CO2 capsule has a RH thread. The system will display a green color when you have armed it properly and you are ready to go. If this is your first time dealing with anything of this type you should save yourself the headache and read the manual first in its entirety. Personally I suggest that you purchase a couple of rearming kits at the same time you purchase the jacket. Rearming kits can be purchased from Float-Tech or at most marine supply store (very convenient).

I say this because I suggest that when you first purchase this jacket you should arm it for automatic inflation and jump into the water and perform your own test. Not because I want you to spend more money but that so you become familiar with the way and speed in which the jacket inflates. This way if something ever happens where you fall in the water, you will know exactly how the jacket should perform and whether you did something wrong, (which would be very difficult). Back to the test. Our first surprise came the moment the PFD touched the water. We had set up a camera to capture the entire sequence of infla-

tion for you to see, I'm sorry, but the jacket inflated so quickly, well under three seconds, in the moment it made contact with the really cold water that we were not able to capture any mid-inflation shots. This Float-Tech jacket kept almost two thirds of my torso completely out of the water and in an upright position.



Back at the dock, the PFD can be separated from the jacket by a very good quality nylon zipper. A couple of big pockets (which you don't need to have to own the Float Tech), give the jacket the full functionality of a windbreaker even without the PFD attached. I would like to see a couple of small D-rings in the front, letting you attach something like a vhf or a line to the jacket, leaving your hands free to swim or signal someone.

Just remember that this was an extreme test and this model was design for casual use not for Inspector Gadget or Atlantic crossings. It's also not made for high-impact activities like jet skiing or cold weather where you have to wear something over the thin jacket, like ice fishing.



Technical Specs

Float-Tech Jacket

Available sizes	M,L,XL, XXL
General Information	CO2 Cylinder is 25 Grams, and 3/8 inch thread Manual, automatic and oral inflation available
Fabric Type	Coated rip-stop nylon
MSRP	\$400 (w/ manual cap)

Manufacturer

Float-Tech Inc.
216 River Street
Troy, NY 12180
1(518) 266-0964
www.floattech.com

What we liked

- * Near instantaneous inflation.
- * Maintains inflation for days.
- * Comfortable to wear as a windbreaker when deflated.

What needs improvement

- * Deflation is a little tricky since you have to use the oral inflator tube.
- * A strap under the arms on both sides would help reduce the strain put on the neck while floating.
- * A couple of D-rings would let you attach essentials to the jacket and free your hands

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