

GETTING IN GEAR

Puffy jackets perfect for winter freezes

BY DAN A. NELSON / *Special to The Seattle Times*

Seinfeld was mocked in his puffy shirt, but no winter enthusiast would dream of laughing at these puffy jackets.

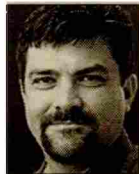
Puffy, insulation-filled jackets have long been part of our regular list of winter outerwear but we found a couple new insulated jackets that put a new spin on the old "Michelin Man" mainstays.

REI's new **Salix** jacket puts a waterproof shell over a puffy layer of synthetic insulation to keep you warm and dry during a typical soggy Cascade snow adventure. We wore this jacket while skiing at Stevens Pass and hiking along the Dungeness Spit near Sequim during a heavy rain shower.

The outer shell, made from REI's Elements (the company's proprietary waterproof-breathable material), shed wet snow and rain as well as any rain jacket we've used, though its breathability was a bit marginal (perhaps because of the extra layers of material under the Elements layer).

The insulation of the Salix comes in the form of **Primaloft Eco** — a synthetic fill spun from recycled materials (mostly old beverage bottles). The layer of Primaloft proved thick enough to keep us toasty warm, even when just standing around camp in temperatures in the high 20s and low 30s, yet was light enough that we didn't look like advertisements for a tire store.

The Salix has a host of nice features, including a nicely fitted hood, pit zips (a great addition, given the breathability issue) and a number of pockets. Best of all, the winter jacket sells for \$189. See www.rei.com.



Freelancer Dan A. Nelson, of Puyallup, is a regular contributor to Backpacker magazine, and an author of outdoor guides with The Mountaineers Books. For the purpose of review, gear manufacturers lend products, which are returned after a typical use of four to eight weeks. There is no payment from manufacturers and they have no control over the content of reviews. Contact Dan with gear-related questions at gearguy@adventuresnw.net.

If you prefer down insulation, or you want something that will keep you warm

even when the temperatures drop into the negatives, consider the new **Sierra Designs Flex Down** jacket. This is the first real innovation in the puffy down jacket in years. Sierra Designs incorporated the flex technology used in their high-end sleeping bags to make this insulated jacket for active recreationists.

The Flex design allows the body of the jacket to expand by as much as 4 inches as you twist, turn and stretch while skiing, climbing or paragliding. That means the jacket doesn't ride up or pinch when you move.

We skied in this jacket at Crystal Mountain during our early December deep freeze (base-temperature was 4 degrees F.) and actually felt a little too warm at times. The jacket sells for \$249, but it's worth the investment if you want to stay cozy during those coldest days. See www.sierradesigns.com.

