

Apparel

The North Face Stormy Trail Jacket Review

Kristin Zosel on October 25, 2012 / 22 comments

If it's true that some people native to the northern climes have X words for snow, then it stands to reason that those of us in the Pacific Northwest have X+/-1 words to describe the rain (liquid sunshine?) that persists eight to nine months per year. I've experienced a wide range of weather from -40 F to 115 F in the places I've lived, and I am perhaps at my most miserable on a 35 F, rainy, windy day. Since moving to the "wet side" of the Cascades five years ago, I've taken great interest in the variety of jackets out there stating claims of water-proofness and breathability. I haven't been impressed by many. However, I received a pre-production model of the 2012 Stormy Trail Jacket from The North Face (TNF) to test and review, and I've been pleasantly surprised.

This jacket (MSRP \$165) is part of TNF Flight Series, which features high performance, "athlete tested, competition proven" gear. It weighs in at an average of 7.4 oz for the women's jacket and can pack into its chest pocket (though the zipper faces inward). It features the new "Flash-Dry" technology which is described on TNF website:

FlashDry™ is our fastest drying fabric ever. It sets a new standard in sweat removal and temperature regulation. It acts like your second skin, pushing moisture to the fabric surface and eliminating it.

The website further describes the jacket as being waterproof, windproof, breathable, and "for maximum protection on runs in the foulest weather." These specs had me totally psyched to test it out on road, trail, ridge, and forest runs that ranged from misty to downpours of rain and calm to gale-force winds. My excitement was dampened a bit when I found it had no hood.

The body of the jacket is 100% nylon with the FlashDry laminate fully lining the inside. This gives the seams complete coverage internally. Large panels of 100% polyester, also with FlashDry laminate, provide extra breathability along the underside of the arms, the sides, and the lateral third of the jacket's back. This cuts down on the "swishy" sounds while running.

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Both fabrics have a helpful amount of stretch that allows me to pull sleeves down over chilly hands without sacrificing shoulder mobility to do so. A key detail I also appreciate is the amount (just right) of elastic (not too tight) at the wrists. There is no need for the extra Velcro piece necessary to change the diameter of the wrist opening. Excellent! The hem can also be cinched with a small pull cord to keep strong breezes out; I found the slightly tapered “women’s fit” did a great job of this without cinching the hem. With regards to the fit, I found the jacket to be rather roomy. My measurements are firmly in between two sizes—sizing up provides ample room for adding several layers; sizing down gives me the trimmer fit I prefer in this style of rain jacket.

The women’s Stormy Trail comes in TNF Black and Razzle Pink, which is somewhere between fuchsia and hot pink. There are two long reflective stripes from mid-shoulder-blade on each side to the top of the lower back, almost circumferentially on a diagonal at both mid-forearms, and a reflective logo over the chest pocket. It has just one chest pocket with a headphone port that can hold a smartphone, keys, gels, or tissue. I would prefer an additional pocket in the back or along the hem as an alternate. If I was going to run with my phone, I’d still place it in a baggie.

Though the zippers don’t appear to be fully waterproof, they are well protected by tightly woven material integrated into the zipper. I was very pleased with the weighted, grippy pull tabs on that can be easily operated with gloved hands. The jacket also features a low-profile zipper garage at the neck which eliminates any chin chafing on a wet, windy day. TNF nailed another of my favorite features by using a tag printed on the fabric at the neck. Three cheers for less chafing yet again!

I’ve only had the chance to test my Razzle Pink (not quite hi-viz) Stormy Trail jacket in six types of rain (misty, small-micron drop/lower-higher volume, intermittent cloud bursts, sustained soaker, sleety) and wind combinations (0-30 mph) and in temperatures from 35 F-60 F, and it has indeed lived up to the claims of “dramatically improved drying time and breathability” stated in the official description. I think it functions best for me with a breeze greater than 5-10 mph, at temperatures lower than 50 F, and in all but the heaviest, sustained Pacific Northwest rain. With warmer temps or on a completely calm but rainy day in the 50s, I found my perspiration and heat build-up overpowered the breathing abilities of the jacket. I don’t typically prefer any jacket at 60 F regardless of the precipitation. However, even when it became saturated while running for a few hours on a day with steady, soaking rain in a humidi-

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ty-filled Cascade forest (minimal breeze, temps in the high 40s), it still blocked wind sufficiently, which warded off any hypothermia symptoms for the few hours required. Now if they'd only make gloves like this!

All this being said, if I was doing high-alpine running where getting soaked for long periods of time in potentially exposed areas was likely (or at Chuckanut 2012), I'd opt for a slightly heavier-duty jacket with a full hood. If you're someone who runs "hot," likes running caps, appreciates a trickle of rain down your neck occasionally, or doesn't need a hood to fulfill a gear requirement for racing in the UK or Europe, this may be the one for you.

On a side note, I did get a chance to use this jacket on a pre-dawn run for repeats up my favorite local 1,000 foot hill. A front was moving through, so the forecasted rain never materialized but the exposed top portion of the hill had a swirly 30 mph wind. The jacket proved quite useful in the gusts with the temperatures in the 40s. I'd unzip the top half, take my arms out and tie the sleeves around my waist when I was climbing out of the wind, and enjoyed its protection the rest of the time.

The North Face Stormy Trail is a solid choice in the realm of waterproof (for a running jacket), windproof, breathable performance outerwear. Its lightweight, stretchy, and roomy fit makes it easy to pull out of the front of the closet when facing eight to nine months of running in various types of rain. I also appreciated the pop of color on grey days both for my mood and visibility as I made my way along roads and trails. The biggest drawback in my opinion is the lack of a hood. I'm a little cold-blooded and if I'm running in conditions that require a waterproof jacket, I'd prefer to have the option of covering my head with something that also keeps the rain out of the neck opening. I don't mind them tagging along behind me when not in use.

The North Face has informative videos up discussing the FlashDry technology used in this jacket. Link over to [their website](#) for more specifics.

Call for Comments (from Bryon)

- If you've worn the TNF Stormy Trail Jacket, what did you think?
- What's your favorite running rain jacket and why?

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Kristin Zosel is a mom, wife, ultrarunner, physical therapist (on sabbatical), and transcriptionist for iRunFar.com. Her love of steep uphill, high mountain environments, and Swiss “lovely cows” keep alpine visions dancing in her head and strong cappuccinos in her mug.

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