"In Hertford, Hereford and Hampshire – hurricanes hardly happen." But, in one of golf's hot spots – Florida, they certainly do. Perhaps last year's quadruple hurricane assault on golf's paradise state inspired outerwear manufacturers to emphasise wind and waterproof outerwear at this year's PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando.

Wet and wild in PGA Country

Depending upon when you joined the ranks of amateur golfers, it wasn't really so long ago that golfers' outerwear options were fairly limited: either borrow a jogging suit or ski jacket from another sport or freeze. Sure, there were exceptions, but now it appears that, in order to protect all-weather golfers from the elements, the golf apparel makers such as Zero Restriction Outerwear, Sunice, Röche, Nike and Firethorn, to name but a few, have looked towards Mount Everest and the Olympics in order to take their game to the next level. Long gone are the days of simple PVC where in order to keep dry you would need to be swathed in restrictive, bulky and inflexible plastic rain slickers. What is important is that ordinary golfers now know the difference between performance outerwear – and 'pretend' performance outerwear.

Performance in outerwear for the golfer essentially means multi-functionality – waterproofing, windproofing, warmth, breathability, comfort, noiselessness, lightweight and ease of movement. Not an easy task to accomplish in a single garment. Fortunately, technological advances in fabrics and finishes, along with functional active styling, are what make today's performance golf outerwear so appealing. Twist and peached microfibre, chosen for Fusion by cdn spirit golfwear as an outer shell, are tightly woven, soft, quiet fabrics that are water repellent, windproof, breathable, strong and durable yet lightweight. Combined with an Entrax lining, which is a lightweight nylon tricot fabric laminated with a high precision monolithic membrane of hydrophilic polyurethane, it makes a formidable barrier in jacket form. The polymer structure of the Entrax membrane is engineered to allow body moisture to pass through, but at the same time not allowing rain to penetrate – resulting in a high performance, waterproof yet breathable fabric.

Nowhere are these advances in golf apparel more apparent than in waterproofing. In the past, fabrics that offered protection from water and wind were too warm and were not breathable. Now, with the use of membrane technology such as Gore-Tex, preferred by Zero Restriction outerwear, air can actually breathe out of a water- and wind-proof jacket or trousers without allowing any elements to enter the garment – providing the seams are sealed effectively. Zero Restriction Outerwear is one of the leading companies that is very serious about functional outerwear for the golf market. Working closely with W.L. Gore, ZR has expanded its Tour Soft line of waterproof suits and vests, using recently introduced 'Featherweight' and 'WhisperSOFT' Gore-Tex developments to claim the top spot for the third consecutive year as outerwear supplier to players on the US PGA, LPGA and Senior PGA Tours. Stretch Gore-Tex, which can be added in panels to flex areas such as across the shoulders and on the elbows, gives increased motion without affecting the waterproofing quality of the garment. Companies using stretchable Gore-Tex include Forrester's Performance Outerwear from Oregon in jackets and Sunderland of Scotland (out of Chatsworth CA) in its 2005 rainwear line.

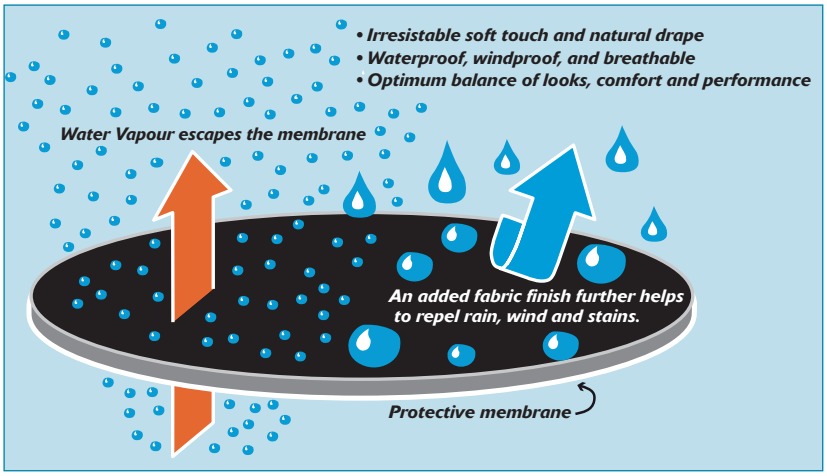


Zero Restriction's waterproof golf wear utilises 'WhisperSOFT' Gore-Tex shell fabric.

Zero Restriction

Ripstop nylon fabrics, Thinsulate and polyurethane coatings create garments for the golf enthusiasts that are extremely durable and comfortable. And the advances continue. At Röche Sports, where innovation has always been high on the company commitment list, reversible windwear in two high-tech fabrics and double protection have been added to the men's and women's lines for 2005. Röche, which was quick to introduce Aquator, the waterproof technology from DuPont, into its new outwear line, has added new 'block designs' to the moisture management knit top group. These tops, of various styles and weights, can be layered under all-motion sportswear or can be worn individually so that the golfer can play in varying weather conditions — sunny, rainy, warm or cold. Röche employs various materials in its wind and rainwear, from brushed microfibre treated with an outer finish for extra protection from wind and light rain to Aqua-Dri fabric, a waterproof, breathable microfibre with a water vapour membrane finish to repel rain, wind and stains. Aqua-Dri tests out at the high end on industry standards with a three-year limited waterproof warranty. This material is also available as a full suit with storm flaps and sealed seams for full moisture protection. Röche also makes brushed synthetic fibre suede with an added fabric finish for additional water repellency. An added benefit is that the suede fabric is also very windproof.

Among the new golf outerwear styles in the premium wear lines at the PGA show were several in the Page & Tuttle collection. Its All Weather Parka is made of 100% durable nylon shell with water resistant finish. It features a 100% anti-pill polyester micro fleece upper lining and quilted nylon lower lining and sleeves. It has a stand-up fleece-lined collar with detachable hood, heavy two-way nylon zipper with double storm flaps and hook-and-loop closures. It also offers two bellows waist pockets with side entry hand warmers, two chest pockets, three inside pockets and hidden embroidery access pocket in the storm flap. Also new in the Page & Tuttle line is an all weather jacket and a microfibre full-zip fleece with adjustable elastic cord bottom with safety tab and novelty locker loop at the back of the collar. Specifically for golfers P&T has a microfibre windshirt, which is ultra-soft and water-resistant. This shirt guards you from the elements with 90% polyester-10% nylon unlined microfibre twill with an ultra-soft, sueded finish. This material is also available in its ladies cool swing quarter zip windshirt, a performance system short sleeve windshirt for men and a microfibre windvest.



Röche's Aqua-Dri fabric is waterproof and breathable by construction rather than by any coating.

Röche Sports

Snuggly fleece

In golf outerwear many manufacturers chose to take the high road with fleece linings instead of going after the lowest price. Companies such as Firethorn from Champlain, NY offer a technically inclined product (wind blocking, waterproof, breathable) as a reversible vest combined with



Moss microfibre reversible vest from Firethorn.

Firethorn

microfibre. Fleece is warm and comfortable and, if it doesn't restrict the swing, can be the perfect answer for chilly, windy days – especially since the price of micro fleece has become competitive with regular fleece. When fleece is used as a jacket lining, micro fleece lends itself better in cold weather jacket linings and lightweight vest linings, because it is less restrictive than regular fleece for the 'athletic' golfer. Nike, however, prefers wool for undesirable conditions. The Tiger Woods Collection's wool windstopper reversible jacket is adaptable as a warm windproof jacket or reverses for added water resistance without missing a beat or an admiring glance.

Sunice goes so far as to categorise its outerwear range with the names Hurricane, Tornado, Typhoon, Storm and simply Weather. It has dedicated its 2005 line to golfers who embrace the challenges of the game – rain, wind or shine. Sunice has named and categorised its outerwear to make it easy for the consumer to select the desired degree of protection required based on the length of exposure to the elements. From Weather's water repellency for light precipitation to Hurricane's ultimate waterproofness for intense downpours, Sunice offers different materials in each category of outerwear protection to suit all needs in a range of climates. Sunice goes so far as to technically define each material to match the feature in the garment. As in "Waterproof – a garment is truly waterproof if the fabric is laminated or coated and all seams are sealed to prevent water from seeping through." The level of waterproofness, which is indicated by the millimetre (resistance against water test result) measurement, varies depending on the technical properties of the fabric and the laminate or coating used. Sunice offers an exclusive water repellent finish called Wx Tech, which can be applied to all outerwear shells to add an extra layer of defence against water and stains. The unique formula of polyurethane resin allows air to flow freely through the fibres maintaining maximum breathability of the garment and reduces the effects of wet out, causing water to bead off the surface of the fabric. The higher the mm count the more waterproof the garment. Sunice also offers definitions for breathability, measured by MVT (moisture vapour transmission) and windproofness, measured by wind chill factor.



Waterproof cap and Gore-Tex two layer Paclite waterproof jacket from Sunice's Hurricane range.

Sunice



Women's fleecelined water resistant PVC jacket from Weatherproof Garment Company.

Weatherproof

Antigua has increased its 2005 line two and a half times in a performance direction. It features an interesting packable weather system suit in 100% nylon waterproof, seam-sealed rain jacket with mesh underlays engineered for breathability. And it includes zip front, storm placket, elastic cuffs and draw cord bottom. The jacket folds into a back zipper pouch. The matching pants, made from the same material, feature a shoe protection with a storm placket, ankle snaps and adjustable inner ankle snap. Stressing the importance of weather protection as a segment of the golf market, one company – Weatherproof Garment Company from New York – has gone so far as to include the function of its product in the company name. Waterproof specialises in men's and ladies microsuede, microfibre, bonded PVC with fleece lining, nylon and Therma fleece jackets, pullovers, windshirts and full waterproof suits.

Nike, rarely to be out-weathered by other competitors, offers the same innovative approach and unrelenting passion in golf as they do in the 'grunt' sports. Nike prides itself on being able to introduce golfers to the most revolutionary advances in technical fabrics and apparel construction. With unique styling, blending traditional designs with modern silhouettes, it would claim, for an overall look that is progressive yet respectful of the game itself — but some would argue whether it is as respectful of the game's traditions as Nike may consider itself. Golf clubs around the world generally have tight rules on appropriate dress and dress codes are enforced. Shirts should be regarded as shirts, and that means with a collar. Yet Nike insists on providing its flag bearer — Tiger Woods — with collarless shirts which in other circles would be seen as glorified T-shirts. Given the size of Nike and the status of Mr Woods, they believe that the two of them are immune from following a dress code. The progression of innovation from Dri-FIT, Clima-FIT, Storm-FIT and Therma-FIT to Tech Wool, Soft Shell, and Nike Sphere offers golfers drier, cooler, and warmer garments from season to season, with apparel that is incredibly light with less bulk. This progressive technology is seen most prevalently in the Tour Collection from Nike Golf division with the introduction of Nike Sphere React in 2005, an intuitive construction that reacts to conditions to keep the body cool, dry and warm. Nike Golf was the first golf company to introduce outerwear with 3-layer technology in 2003. The Course Conditions line, Nike Golf's Advanced Weather Control, set the industry standard with outerwear around the world with its lightweight and breathable 3-layer construction. Jackets, vests and pants designed with Nike's proprietary advanced fabrics are heavily endorsed by leading male and female tour staff such as Tiger Woods and Grace Park.



Storm-Fit Convertible Full-Zip jacket from Nike.
Nike

Outerwear garments from Nike include the Storm-Fit convertible full-zip. With seam-sealed construction, this water and windproof jacket lets no moisture in. The convertible full-zip goes from long-sleeve to short-sleeve and has a centre back retractable memory pleat and articulated shoulder and elbow seams to provide a greater range of movement. The Storm-Fit soft shell pullover jacket, made in a 3-layer soft shell construction, eliminates bulk and weight while providing maximum waterproof and windproof protection. The four-way stretch fabric also provides excellent range of motion. Another worthy mention from the Nike 2005 golf apparel range from the women's collection is the Sphere thermal jacket. This jacket, made from stretch Dri-FIT UV fabric, has a full length two-way zipper with locking zipper pull and wraps the body with insulating air pockets that collect body heat, providing the warmth of a second layer without the added bulk of weight.

At least in Florida, with so many companies offering advanced fibre technologies to protect them from the elements, the avid golfer can hardly wait for this year's hurricane season to begin.

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