

I recently received an email from customer Michael Pittman describing his experience with buying a new pair of waders. He correctly noted how many different types of waders are available through retail catalogues like Academy, Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's. The choices can become confusing, and given the amount of money to be spent, intimidating.

Wisely, Michael chose to go to Fishing Tackle Unlimited to make his purchase, believing (rightly so) he'd be able to have a meaningful discussion in the store with someone who knows plenty about the various products and their features. FTU is run by knowledgeable, responsible people who aim to steer their customers in the right direction. Roy's Bait and Tackle in Corpus Christi is operated in the same manner. Purchasing critical equipment through stores like these allows one to get valuable information and advice from people in the know.

Michael learned several things while perusing the wader options, including the fact that Simms offers their XL waders with several different inseam lengths and girths. It would have been easy, he said, to wind up with a pair of waders which didn't fit properly, especially if he'd ordered them online. He stressed the importance of trying on a pair of waders before buying them.

I believe he's right about these things. He also mentioned I might be able to use his comments to come up with an idea for a new blog. And I do have several comments to add about waders and other necessary winter-wading equipment.

First, on the subject of size, I believe it's always better to purchase waders which are slightly too large than ones that fit perfectly in the store. If the waders are neoprene, this is less true, since the old rubber suits are warmer than breathables and consequently require less layering underneath when it gets really cold.

I now prefer lightweight, breathable waders over neoprene ones. Early in the "wader season", they can be worn with light clothing underneath to provide a buffer against the morning chill without becoming too hot in the middle of the day. As it gets colder, more insulating layers can be added underneath to stave off the chilling effects of Old Man Winter. Larger waders allow more room for the needed layers.

I like to start with a bottom layer of Under Armour-type, tight-fitting clothing, above which I add fleece pants on my lower body, and some combination of shirts and sweaters both under and over my main fishing shirt on the upper body. Sometimes, I wear as many as five layers on my upper body, including a jacket.

Michael wound up purchasing a Simms wading jacket during his visit to FTU. That was a good call, in my estimation. I've been wearing one for years, and love it. The need for a good waterproof jacket when wading in cold weather is a critical one. Any jacket worth owning and wearing will keep water out, will have sleeves which cinch tight to keep water from running up a wader's arms when fish are handled, will have a hood to pull over the head when it's cold and windy, and

will have large cargo pockets and durable, corrosion-resistant zippers.

The size of the jacket, like the size of the waders, is important. Again, slightly larger than necessary is better than slightly too small. A jacket must be big enough to be worn comfortably over the bulky layers in the coldest weather.

I believe the jacket should be worn OUTSIDE the waders, not tucked into them. Wearing the protective layer outside the waders prevents water from splashing over the top of the waders and seeping into the layers beneath. Wearing the jacket on the outside also makes it easier to use the pockets on the waders. I find little or no need for a wading belt, especially when I'm wearing waders and a jacket. All the stuff I need fits easily into the pockets on the garments.

Except, of course, a stringer. I don't string fish often, but when I do, I either stuff the spike of the stringer into the foam float on my Boga Grip, or into a slot in the back support belt I wear over my waders.

The size of the boots worn over the waders is perhaps even more important than the size of the waders and jacket. Notice I'm assuming boots will be bought separately from the waders. I do not recommend purchasing waders with boots built into them. I've never seen a really good pair of waders of that type. All top-quality waders are the stocking-foot type, so boots must be purchased separately from them.

When matching boots with waders, it is vital to purchase boots bigger than ones which would be worn on a bare foot, or even with a regular sock. I wear a size 12 shoe, but I use size 14 wading boots with my Simms waders, which include a thick, neoprene stocking. Few things make a wading angler more miserable than a boot that's too tight.

As with waders, it's best to try on boots before buying them. By this, I mean it's best to try them on over the waders. The proper boots will fit a little loosely on dry land; water pressure will cause them to "shrink" when wading, pinching and squeezing the foot painfully unless they are of adequate size.

For the record, I wear a size 13 boot when wading wet. I don't wear socks when wading in warmer weather, so the boot is slightly too big, and that's exactly the way I like it. One summer of wearing size 12s caused me to lose the nail on my big toe a few years ago. That's unacceptable, ugly and stupid.

A couple more cautionary bits about waders--(1) wearing jeans underneath breathable ones will chafe their inner lining and cause them to begin to leak sooner than will fleece (2) stringing fish by poking the spike of the stringer through the lip of the fish against the waders will cause pinhole leaks to develop (3) the treble hooks dangling off a fish's mouth will cause full-fledged blowouts in the waders if the angler handling the fish grabs the line and allows the fish to circle around and impale the hooks in the waders. Said angler will soon begin to look like the Michelin Man, and will be forced at least to dump water out of the

waders every hour or so, or at worst to stop wading until the hole can be patched! Take it from someone who knows.

Significantly, neoprene waders offer one advantage over breathables. They continue to provide insulation if they leak. When breathable waders become pierced and cold water rushes in, Old Man Winter gets the last laugh. On the other hand, breathable waders are easier to repair than neoprenes, especially if they are made by Simms.

To view a video describing how to repair pinhole leaks and tears in Simms waders, see:

http://www.simmsfishing.com/site/gallery/gallery_display.html?gallery_id=00006&media_id=00015.