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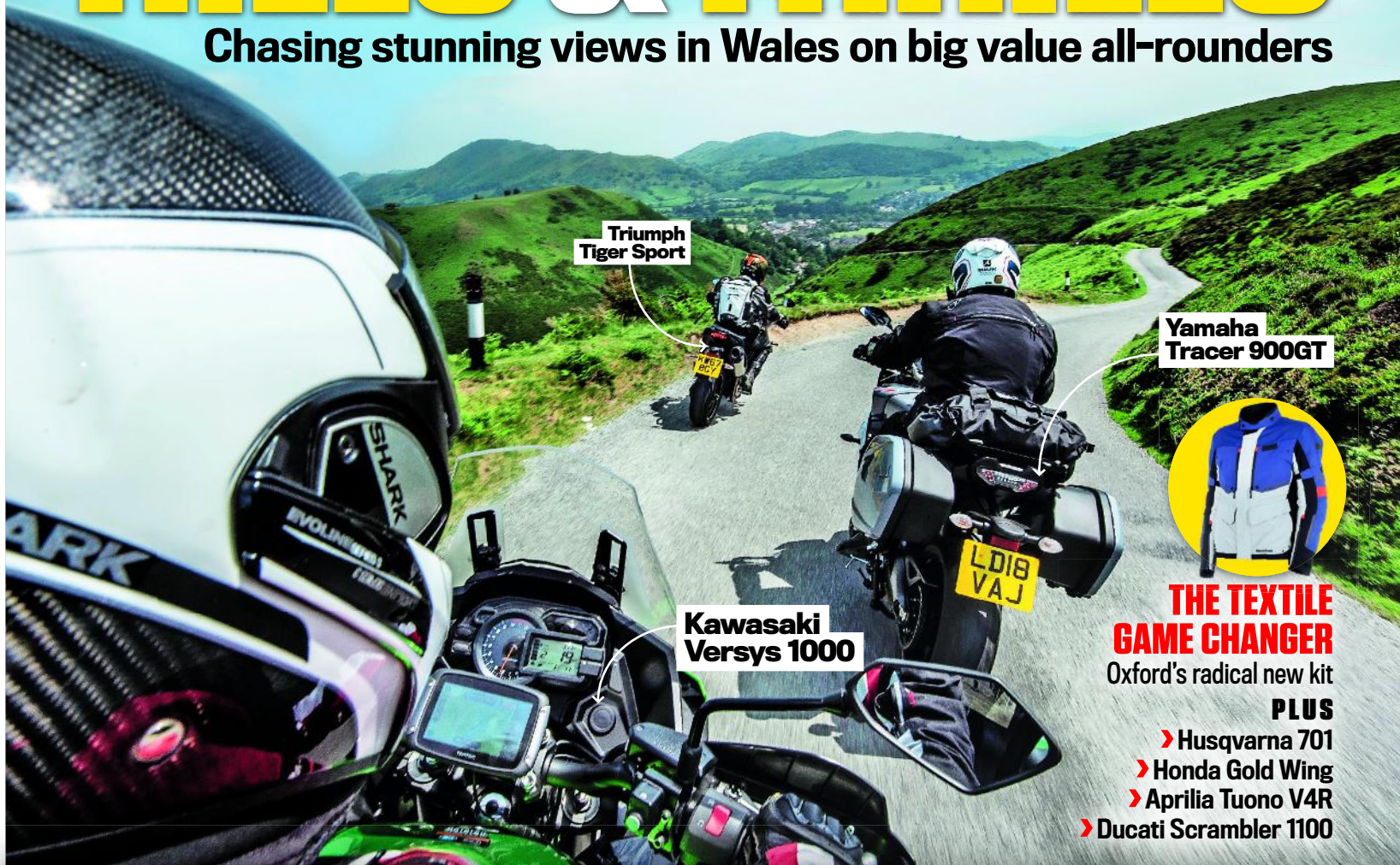
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**THE TEXTILE
GAME CHANGER**
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The new Oxford laminate products are the result of careful design and innovative material development





THE TEXTILE GAME-CHANGER

You can spend £1000 on a Gore-Tex laminate jacket. Oxford is promising the same kind of technology for a quarter of the price

Words Simon Weir Pictures Mark Manning

IF YOU WERE asked to name a top-end textile suit, what would spring into your head? Is it Rukka, Dane, Klim or BMW? Something from the premium end of the Dainese, Alpinestars, Held, Halvarssons or Rev'It ranges? All offer high-end gear, but it's all slightly different in terms of design and approach to layers and details like collars, cuffs and fasteners. But it all has two things in common: a laminated waterproof exterior; and a hefty price-tag.

Now Oxford Products is looking to radically change the perception that laminate kit is for only the wealthiest motorcyclists. The firm is launching a new suit using a Dry-to-Dry laminate material – for a fraction of the cost of the big-name brands' offerings. Where a jacket using the



Development and quality control is continuous

tried-and-trusted Gore-Tex Pro laminate will set you back £800 to £1300, Oxford's latest jacket costs just £250.

It's called the Mondial – part of a new 'Advanced Series' that currently consists of the Mondial, with the Dry-to-Dry laminate exterior, and its matching trousers. There's also the Continental, a more conventional three-layer jacket where the Dry-to-Dry makes up the removable waterproof drop liner – giving even greater adaptability for hotter climates – which will cost £200.

Where did it come from?

"We've been steadily expanding our clothing range," explains Oxford's Henry Rivers Fletcher. "If you look at the volume we produce, we've gone from being a company that also does clothing to now →



“Not a single drop of water got through to the wearer”

Oxford doesn't just design the jackets and trousers: it has a team of three 3D CAD engineers who develop everything from hard shoulder armour for leather jackets to paddock stands. The accuracy of the 3D models can save a year of development time, as getting a physical sample from the Chinese factory can take two months.

How tough is it?

The Mondial and the Continental are built to meet the new CE standards for PPE motorcycle equipment. There's CE Level 1 armour in the shoulders and elbows, plus a pocket for riders to add a back protector. The high thread-count material was selected for its strength and lightness.

Which is all well and good to say, but CE is only one standard – the European one – and products need to meet all standards around the world. Testing adds time and cost into the development process, making

What's a laminate?

Waterproof textiles used to mean waxed cotton. Then waterproof membranes were invented. Early ones were sweaty, but this changed.

Then came laminated waterproof membranes, where the surface material is treated and has a membrane behind it. So water simply runs off the fabric.

For a long time there was only one: Gore-Tex Pro and garments were expensive. But it worked and was used by top-end manufacturers.

Other materials firms began to develop their own laminates. They're not as expensive as Gore-Tex Pro items but they tend to still be £500 for a jacket or £1000 for a suit.

being a clothing company in our own right. But we don't intend to spend years continuing just at the value end, as Frank Thomas did – never developing a product that retails for more than £200.”

To grow the range means moving into new territory. Apparel category manager Thomas Plummer explains: “It's important not to lose customers if they want to trade up from one of our sub-£200 jackets to one they perceive as more premium.” This meant creating a premium jacket – which in turn meant finding a laminate material. This involved spending a lot of time at trade shows – for the outdoor trade, where there's a lot of innovation in the creation of waterproof and breathable materials.

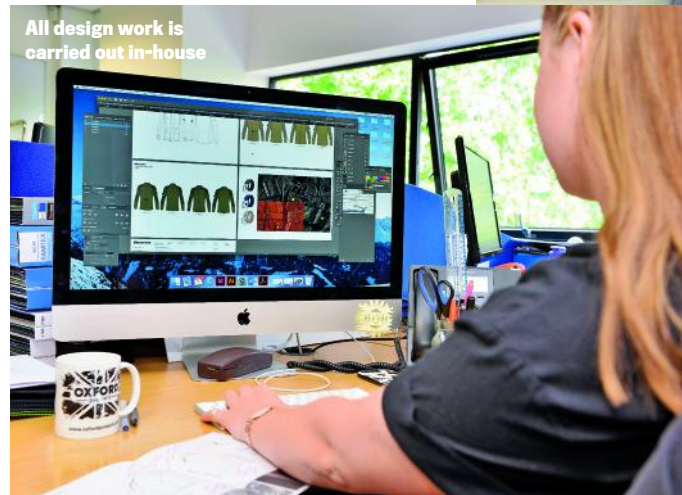
“Finding the Dry-to-Dry waterproof element wasn't enough, though,” Plummer adds. “We then had to find the correct materials for it to work with.” The final selection was a high thread-count material. “These have a finer finish, while being lighter and stronger than lower thread-count materials. They also take dye better.”

How was it created?

The Mondial was designed in Witney, by Oxford's own team, rather than by an

external design agency. There are four designers and a garment technician – an expert both in the construction of clothing and the way the factories need to operate to make it to the required standard.

Once the designs were complete, they were sent to the factory, which makes patterns and produces prototypes. These then came back to Oxford to be examined by the designers to check the styling and for the garment tech to check construction. Alterations are noted and fed back to the factory, with careful measurements to ensure changes are made correctly. There were three prototype stages to reach the final production version.





Materials are tested for strength and performance

it important everything is right before submitting a product to the certification test. Which is why the Mondial was tested in Oxford's own lab first.

There is a range of machines, including a huge accelerated weathering tester, running through heat, UV and damp cycles to see how materials react. Not just fabrics – metal is checked as well. There's also a huge high-tensile press/puller that tests everything from how strong seams and sheets of material are to the weight it takes to break a paddock stand.

“Doing our own testing means we know everything is up to the standard,” explains Rivers Fletcher. “We can see not only if something will fail but also where – and that helps us with the development.” Attached to the lab is a machine shop, turning out clamps and grips to test everything from buttons to bike parts.

How dry is it?

Just before this issue of RiDE had to be sent to the printers, we received one of the very first production Mondials to land in the UK.



In-house testing reduces development time

We headed out for a wet ride (on the same day the British GP was rained off) and the jacket stayed completely watertight. To give it an even tougher challenge, the next day we turned a garden hose on it for a solid two-minute blast. Once again, not a drop of water got through to the wearer, while the two outer pockets kept their contents dry. On inspection, it didn't seem water was beading and running off the outer in the same way it does with Gore-Tex Pro, but it certainly didn't soak through. After hanging overnight, it was touch-dry the next morning. Impressive for £250. **R**



First impressions of the Mondial jacket are very good



Two minutes under RiDE's hose and totally dry

How is it to ride in?

Timing meant we've only managed a very brief (100-mile) test in the Mondial. First impressions are that the fit is excellent and some of the details impress too – including the waterproof twin zip on the cuff, the adjustable neck and the large outer pockets on the front. It's lightweight – not at all bulky, though the trade-off is that it doesn't feel as warm as some other jackets. We'll be putting a lot more miles on the Mondial in the coming months – look for updates in future issues of RiDE.