

PFDs By Land and By Sea

PS tested each inflatable PFD-harness for design and function, construction and materials, fit, comfort, and adjustability. Multiple testers participated in the hands-on review, including several women testers who rated the products for on-land fit, comfort, and adjustability.

Testers donned each vest, evaluating the buckles and straps, how secure it felt when fastened, how easy it was to adjust, and whether or not the strap stayed in place or slipped when the bladder was deployed.

Testers evaluated each vest for comfort and fit on land before jumping into a deep saltwater canal to determine in-water performance and fit. All auto-inflate vests worked properly and filled the air bladders when the wearer hit the water. Testers pulled the inflate cord on the manually inflatable vests upon bobbing to the water's surface after jumping in. If a product had a tendency to ride up while inflated, it was noted.

Testers noted that in-water performance was affected by how the bladder was attached to the PFD cover/harness. Those with bladders sewn to the cover around the entire perimeter had less tendency to ride up. They seemed more

secure and were rated higher for in-water fit. (See photos, page 13). This also made repacking a breeze.

Testers attempted to swim face up and face down with each vest, and evaluated the vest's ability to right an unconscious wearer. The oral inflator tube, whistle, and light were used on each vest so equipped.

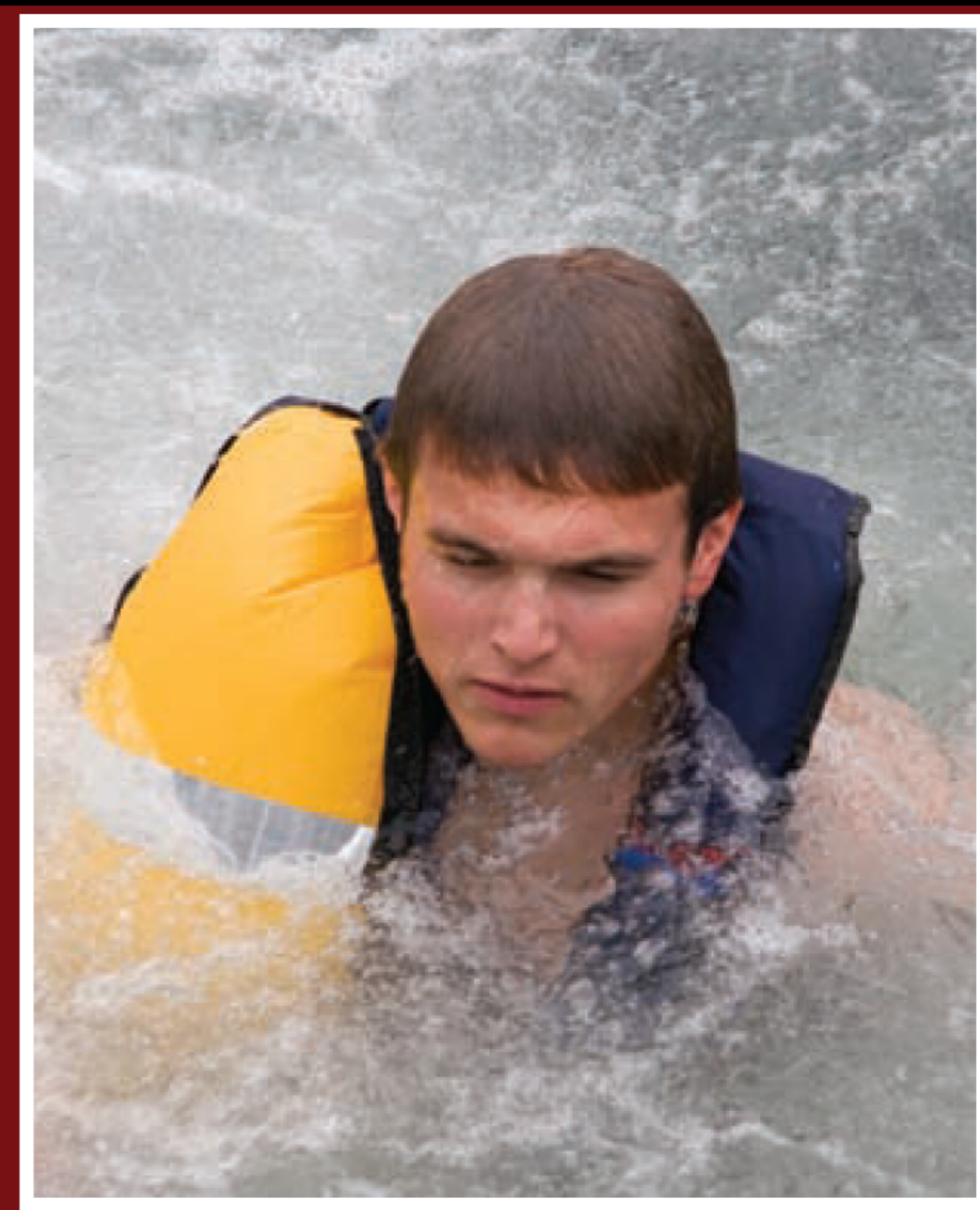
To check harness fit and performance under load in the water, testers were dragged overboard on a short tether at 5 knots while wearing each harness inflated.

Back on land, testers rated the products on rearming and repacking.

Additional testing included placing the vests that have an automatic inflator on-deck in moderate rain for 30 minutes to determine whether an unintended automatic deployment might occur.

In our final analysis, we used all of our ratings and each vest's warranty period, buoyancy, provided additional safety features, and price to select the winner.

PS relied on manufacturer's published



The Revere 61020 was one of two manual-inflate PFDs we reviewed. To rate in-water performance, testers pulled the manual inflate cord after jumping into a saltwater canal.



safe working load limits and breaking strength of harness materials collected from laboratory tests. Testers subjected each harness to 900 pounds of load, using a come-along device. Quality of materials, chest band slippage, and stitching were evaluated by visual inspection during these pulls.