

The Best Softshell Jacket for Women Review

[Overview](#)[Ratings](#)[Price vs. Value Chart](#)[Buying Advice](#)[How We Test](#)

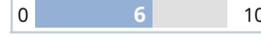
Deciding between softshell jackets? To help you find the right model for your adventures, we researched the most popular 50 and tested the best 8 models side-by-side for three months. To assess these jackets, we romped through all kinds of winter weather and wore them ice climbing, alpine climbing, skiing in the backcountry, nordic skiing, hiking, and snowshoeing, as well as around town to see how they held up to peer scrutiny. We compared and contrasted these jackets to find out which one breathe the best, keep up with our body movements, and actually protect from heinous weather. Maybe you are looking for a do-it-all softshell, or maybe you just want a bargain. For these needs and more, we can guide you to your ideal match, making tough purchase decisions that much easier.

[Read the full review below >](#)

Test Results and Ratings

Displaying 1 - 5 of 8

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Rank	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Product	 Arc'teryx Gamma MX Hoody - Women's Read the Review	 Mammut Ultimate Hoody - Women's Read the Review	 Mountain Hardwear Alchemy Hooded Jacket - Women's Read the Review	 Marmot ROM - Women's Read the Review	 Outdoor Research Enchainment - Women's Read the Review
Awards					
Price	\$350 USD List	\$280 USD List	\$395 USD List	\$190 USD List	\$219 USD List
Overall Score ▾	0  100	0  100	0  100	0  100	0  100
Star Rating					
Pros	Stretchy and the most comfortable fit, excellent mobility, highly breathable, helmet-compatible hood	Lightweight, windproof, electronics feature in hand pocket	Cross-over chest pockets, very weather resistant, helmet compatible hood, two-way zipper	stretchy, very breathable	Stretchy, breathable panels underneath arms, extremely water resistant, beefy zipper
Cons	Expensive, non-adjustable cuffs	Hem and sleeves have no adjustments, no chest pockets	Hem too short, no hand pockets	tight sleeves are hard to layer underneath, hood doesn't fit over a helmet, short hemline, not very water resistant	Not the most breathable or flexible
Ratings by Category	Arc'teryx Gamma MX Hoody - Women's	Mammut Ultimate Hoody - Women's	Mountain Hardwear Alchemy Hooded Jacket - Women's	Marmot ROM - Women's	Outdoor Research Enchainment - Women's
Weather Protection - 30%	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10
Breathability - 30%	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10
Mobility - 20%	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10
Weight - 10%	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10
Features - 5%	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10
Style - 5%	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10	0  10
Specs	Arc'teryx Gamma MX Hoody - Women's	Mammut Ultimate Hoody - Women's	Mountain Hardwear Alchemy Hooded Jacket - Women's	Marmot ROM - Women's	Outdoor Research Enchainment - Women's
Measured Weight - Size Small (lbs)	1.06 lbs	0.94 lbs	1.24 lbs	0.85 lbs	0.97 lbs
Material	Fortius 2.0: 49% polyester, 35% nylon, 16% spandex, 160 g/sq m	GORE WINDSTOPPER	3L Dry.Q Elite Synchro NBT	WINDSTOPPER Softshell 100% Polyester Stretch 5.4 oz/yd, Softshell Double Weave 90% Polyester 10% Elastane Stretch 7.3 oz/yd	100% polyester fabric body, 100% polyester Schoeller fabric with Nanosphere technology under arms
Number of Pockets	4 (1 chest, 1 sleeve, 2 hand)	2 hand	4 (2 chest, 1 interior chest, 1 interior drop-in)	3 (1 chest, 2 hand)	4 (1 chest, 1 interior chest, 2 hand)

[Expand to show full specification table](#) | [Hide details](#)

Analysis and Award Winners

Review by:
McKenzie Long
Senior Review Editor
OutdoorGearLab

Last Updated:
Wednesday
May 17, 2017

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Updated May 2017

For your shoulder season needs, we worked to get this review up-to-date. Both Best Buy Award winners received recent updates, and we highlight the differences between the newer and older models in the individual reviews. We also reformatted the information from our analyses with charts and tables to help you find the right product faster.

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- Best Value for Your Dollar for a Basic Shell - Columbia Kruser Ridge - Women's
- Best Bang for the Buck for Weather Protection - Patagonia Adze Hybrid Hoody - Women's

Best Overall Women's Softshell Jacket

Arc'teryx Gamma MX Hoody - Women's



\$350 USD List
List Price

See It

- + Stretchy, comfortable fit
- + Excellent mobility
- + Highly breathable
- + Helmet-compatible hood
- Expensive
- Non-adjustable cuffs

The **Arc'teryx Gamma MX Hoody - Women's** proved to be the epitome of our desires in a softshell. It feels comfortable and supple and moves well with our bodies. The fit is non-restrictive and it's highly breathable adequate weather protection. There are better jackets for specific sports like ice climbing, but this is the top performing model across the most activities. Take it hiking, climbing, or cross-country skiing and it will hold up well. It even looks nice if you want to throw it on to head out for a day of running errands around town. On the pricey end of the spectrum, the Arc'teryx Gamma MX is a high-end model of what we would call a luxury layer. If you want the most versatile, best-of-the-best, this is the one.

Read full review: [Arc'teryx Gamma MX Hoody - Women's](#)

Best Value for Your Dollar for a Basic Shell Columbia Kruser Ridge - Women's



CDN\$ 90.56
at Amazon CA

See It

- + Longer cut
- + Asymmetrically cut sleeve cuffs
- + Very low price
- Low layering ability

At a price *5 times lower* than our Editors' Choice winner, the **Columbia Kruser**

- Analysis and Test Results
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Ridge - Women's is hard to beat when it comes to value. For a ridiculously low price, you get a soft, pliable, and comfortable shell that is still adequately protective. This shell is very basic and does not come with a hood, but is arguably our favorite stylish piece as well. It has a longer hem, asymmetrically cut sleeves, and a simple, classic look. It is versatile enough to wear hiking or around town on a daily basis, and is available in extended sizes so will comfortably fit more women. We think the quality-to-price ratio with the Kruser Ridge is outstanding. This product received a recent update from Columbia, which lengthened the torso and updated the hand pocket design.

Read full review: [Columbia Kruser Ridge - Women's](#)

Best Bang for the Buck for Weather Protection

Patagonia Adze Hybrid Hoody - Women's



\$199 USD List
List Price

See It

- + Windproof
 - + Fairly water resistant
 - + Adjustable Velcro cuffs
 - + Inexpensive
- Stiff
 - Not as breathable as others



Updated Version Available

Since our review of women's softshells, Patagonia released the Adze Hybrid Hoody, pictured above. The original Adze is no longer produced and rare to find available at any retailer. We highlight the differences between the models in our individual review of the Adze.

If you are on a budget but want the most protection possible, we recommend the **Patagonia Adze Hybrid Hoody - Women's**. This shell incorporates a polyurethane barrier membrane that blocks wind and is also highly water resistant. Additionally, it has useful features such as adjustable sleeve cuffs and an interior chest pocket. Though it is less supple and less breathable than non-windproof shells like the Gamma MX, it is more flexible and comfortable than its biggest competitor, The North Face Apex Bionic. For the price, this shell offers outstanding weather protection and durability.

Read full review: [Patagonia Adze Hybrid Hoody - Women's](#)

Compare select up to 5 products

✓	Score	Product	Price	Measured Weight - Size Small (lbs)	Material	Number of Pockets
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<input type="checkbox"/>	75	Arc'teryx Gamma MX Hoody - Women's		\$350	1.06 lbs	Fortius 2.0: 49% polyester, 35% nylon, 16% spandex, 160 g/sq m	4 (1 chest, 1 sleeve, 2 hand)
<input type="checkbox"/>	70	Mammut Ultimate Hoody - Women's		\$280	0.94 lbs	GORE WINDSTOPPER	2 hand
<input type="checkbox"/>	70	Mountain Hardwear Alchemy Hooded Jacket - Women's		\$395	1.24 lbs	3L Dry.Q Elite Synchro NBT	4 (2 chest, 1 interior chest, 1 interior drop-in)
<input type="checkbox"/>	69	Marmot ROM - Women's		\$190	0.85 lbs	WINDSTOPPER Softshell 100% Polyester Stretch 5.4 oz/yd, Softshell Double Weave 90% Polyester 10% Elastane Stretch 7.3 oz/yd	3 (1 chest, 2 hand)
<input type="checkbox"/>	69	Outdoor Research Enchainment - Women's		\$219	0.97 lbs	100% polyester fabric body, 100% polyester Schoeller fabric with Nanosphere technology under arms	4 (1 chest, 1 interior chest, 2 hand)
<input type="checkbox"/>	63	Patagonia Adze Hybrid Hoody - Women's		\$199	1.36 lbs	Polartec Windbloc	3 (2 hand, 1 interior chest)
<input type="checkbox"/>	60	Columbia Kruser Ridge - Women's		\$115	1.02 lbs	OMNI-SHIELD 100% polyester Nexgen Controur softshell	2 hand
<input type="checkbox"/>	60	North Face Apex Bionic Hoodie - Women's		\$170	1.36 lbs	90D 351 g/m2 (10.3 oz/sq yd) plain weave polyester TNF Apex ClimateBlock	3 (1 chest, 2 hand)

Analysis and Test Results

The softshell is an interesting piece because it strives to do so much in one layer: resist wind, repel water, and breathe well. It wants to be a comfort piece and a protection piece at the same time. Ultimately, we find the softshell to be a luxury layer. Some athletes such as ice climbers and backcountry skiers may find a layer of this type to be a necessary addition to their garment quiver, but the majority of users don't *need* a softshell. Unlike potentially life-saving layers like protective, waterproof hardshells and insulation layers that are essential to your outdoor layering kit, a softshell is nice to have because it is, well, soft and extra comfortable, but it won't keep you warm and dry if you get caught in an unexpected storm. The primary objective of a softshell is to increase comfort through breathability and supple flexibility while offering some degree of weather protection. These layers are less stiff, noisy, and suffocating than hardshells, making them more pleasant to wear, but they only offer protection in mild weather. If you realize that you need more weather protection, check out our [Women's Hardshell Review](#).

For more details on different types of shells and the level of protection they provide, reference our [Buying Advice article](#).



Our three contenders for the women's softshell Best Buy award are here for some comparison testing on a winter hike, which is a moderately aerobic activity that is perfect for a softshell. L to R: Columbia Kruser Ridge, The North Face Apex Bionic, and the Patagonia Adze.

[\[Edit this Photo\]](#)

Uses for Softshell Jackets

So when do you wear a softshell jacket? They are not ideal for overnight or multi-day trips when it is much safer and preferable to have a hardshell or a rain jacket to keep you dry in an unexpected storm. However, there are several activities where a softshell is the ideal piece.

Aerobic Activities

For winter activities that involve an elevated heart rate, a softshell can be perfect. From hiking and running to snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, a softshell will be the perfect blend of breathability and protection. These activities usually take place over a few hours, so the lack of beefier weather protection does not leave you vulnerable to incoming storms.

Skiing

Skiing at the resort usually is more comfortable in an [insulated ski jacket](#), but in the spring when it is sunnier and warmer, a softshell may be more comfortable and will allow the wearer to better regulate her temperature. Backcountry skiing, in particular, involves much more time spent sweating and working hard, and in these situations, a softshell is far superior to an insulated jacket. In this case, many skiers will skin up in a softshell and re-layer with an insulating layer as they change over at the top.



The Mixed Guide is a very functional piece for wearing in the mountains. It is a hybrid shell made of Polartec Powershield (yellow) which is a stretchy, breathable softshell material, and H2No Performance Standard (blue) which is a waterproof hardshell material. We also love the bright and bold color combinations.

[\[Edit this Photo\]](#)

Ice and Alpine Climbing

Due to the stop-and-go nature of climbing and the environment where it takes place, a climber simultaneously requires breathability and protection from wind and wetness. Climbing involves bouts of moving fast, working hard, and building up body heat, but those periods of activity are punctuated with periods stillness, leaving the climber vulnerable to weather and cold. Also, ice climbing naturally takes place in wet and windy environments. This dual function is essentially the definition of a softshell, making it the ideal layer for this specialized activity. For mountaineering expeditions that take place over several days, a hardshell may be the most functional layer.



The author leading Horsetail Falls outside of Ouray, CO. The Dry Q Elite fabric that makes up the MHW Alchemy is windproof and highly water resistant, making it an excellent shell for alpine ice climbing. It repels weather well but is a little more flexible and breathable than a hardshell, though it is less breathable and flexible than other softshells we tested.

[\[Edit this Photo\]](#)

Everyday Wear

Since softshells lean towards comfort and flexibility, they are just plain nice to wear. A flattering, affordable, and comfortable softshell can be the perfect jacket to wear for all your less extreme day-to-day outdoor activities such as walking the dog, gardening, shoveling the driveway, and running errands.

Types of Softshell Jackets

In addition to your standard issue softshell jacket, which is wind and water *resistant* as well as flexible and breathable, there are several other types on the market. While we tested a wide range of these jackets, we didn't test every possible type. Here is a brief run-down of the unique types you may consider.

Lightweight

Some shell jackets are ultra-thin and light and are designed with runners and hikers in mind. These are best suited to high-exertion, aerobic activities that require outstanding breathability where wind and water resistance are less important. An example of this would be the Rab Solar jacket which is so thin, you may not even consider it a shell.

Windproof

On the opposite end of the spectrum from ultralight models are windproof models that offer the most protection possible short of being a hardshell. These models typically incorporate a membrane into the face material, which also makes them highly water resistant (not waterproof), but they usually aren't as breathable or as flexible as thinner, membrane-free shells. They tend to be thicker, stiffer, and less comfortable, but they are often warmer and more protective. The clear advantage of having a windproof shell is that it eliminates the need to have a [wind jacket](#). Though a softshell will be heavier than a dedicated wind layer, a windproof softshell might mean you only need one layer instead of two when heading out into the mountains for a day. Examples of windproof shells are the **Patagonia Adze Hybrid Hoody - Women's**, The [North Face Apex Bionic Hoodie - Women's](#), and the [Mammut Ultimate hoody - Women's](#).

Fleece Insulated

There are a few designs on the market that combine a weather resistant face material with a high-loft, insulating fleece interior. Backcountry makes some shells like these with their Stoic brand and Arc'teryx has made several models in the past which fits in this category. These models are warmer than a softshell without an insulated lining, but a tiny bit less breathable. They are also heavier and bulkier but may make a more complete and useful everyday jacket for someone living in a mild climate.

Hybrid

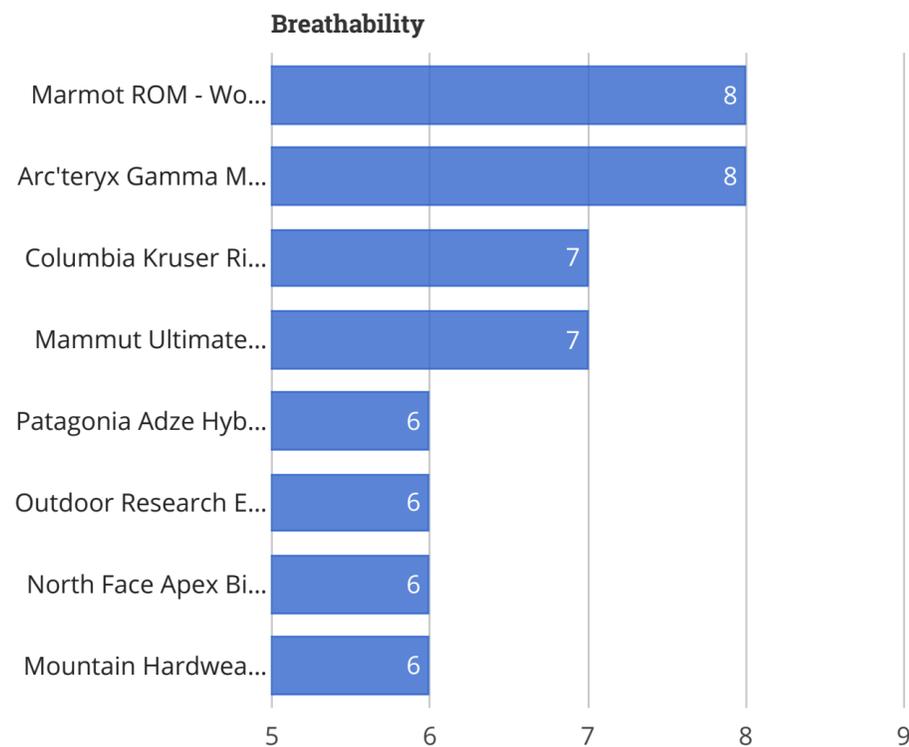
An emerging yet popular category is hybrid jackets. These jackets combine two materials with very different properties to create a jacket that bridges the gap between two functions. The [Outdoor Research Enchainment - Women's uses a similar design](#). Additionally, the [Marmot ROM - Women's](#) uses Gore Windstopper in concert with an extremely thin and breathable layer to offer wind protection and outstanding breathability.

Criteria for Evaluation

Breathability

Breathability is the reason why people buy softshell jackets. If your primary need

is weather protection, then you want a fully waterproof hardshell. However, when you plan to get your blood moving, a hardshell can feel suffocating and stuffy. Enter the softshell. Finding a piece that strikes the perfect balance between breathability and weather protection is key.



We tested these softshells in a variety of conditions during a number of different activities. The most telling is when we wore them for high exertion activities such as skate skiing and hiking. Both of these activities get the blood moving and the sweat flowing. We found the **Arc'teryx Gamma MX Hoody - Women's** to be the most breathable and the hybrid Marmot ROM to be on the same plane. Just after these two standouts came [the windproof Mammut Ultimate Hoody - Women's](#), which also features pit zips in case you need extra ventilation. The least breathable were the windproof models that include a membrane or laminate of some kind: the Patagonia Adze Hybrid and The North Face Apex Bionic. We also found the hybrid models that provide additional water resistance, such as the OR Enchainment, to be less breathable than the thin and flexible Gamma MX.



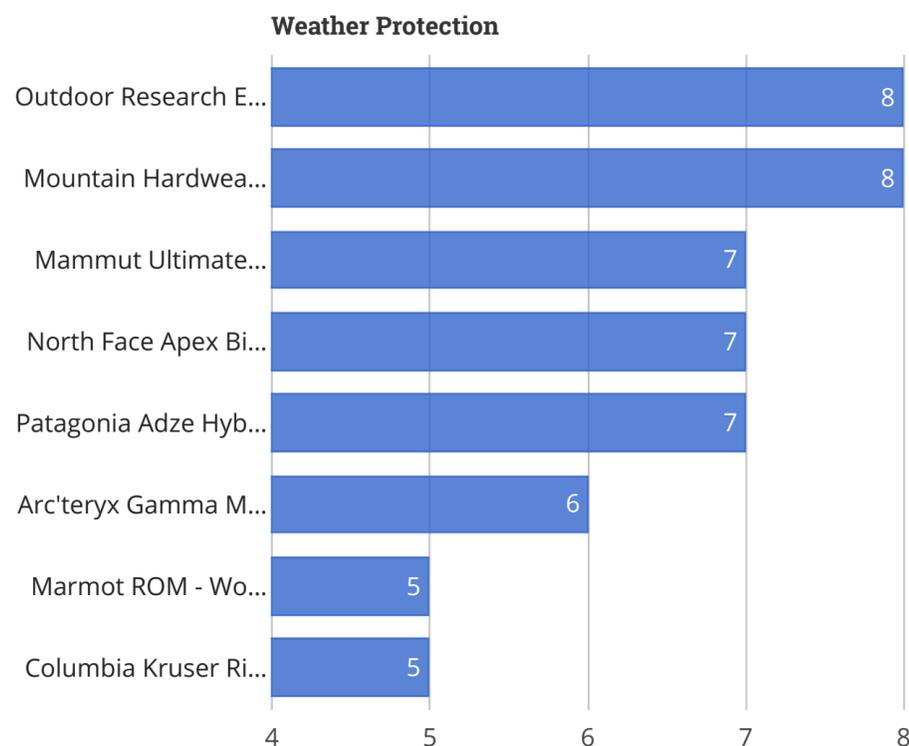
The pockets of the Gamma MX are lined with mesh, allowing the pockets to double as vents when left unzipped, increasing breathability.

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Most of the jackets in this review have mesh-lined hand pockets that can be left unzipped and used as vents if more ventilation is needed. The only ones that did not have this extra feature were the Kruser Ridge and the Mountain Hardwear

Weather Protection

No softshell is as fully protective from the weather as a hardshell, which is *waterproof* and *windproof*. While there are some windproof models, the designation of "waterproof" is reserved for hardshells. Most softshells are designated as water and wind *resistant*. Some of the hybrid designs that we tested have waterproof parts, but these jackets should not be worn as rain jackets in a bad storm. Overall, softshells are ideal for mild weather where some moderate protection from wind and water is needed, but full storm protection isn't required. When evaluating for weather protection we took into consideration both wind resistance and water resistance.



We tested four windproof models: the Patagonia Adze Hybrid, **North Face Apex Bionic Hoodie - Women's**, the Mammut Ultimate Hoody, [and the Mountain Hardware Alchemy Hooded Jacket - Women's](#). The Adze features a polyurethane barrier membrane in the material to block wind, and incidentally, this construction is also highly water resistant. The Apex Bionic has a similar construction with a tightly-woven exterior fabric and a fleecy interior material. These shells offer the most weather protection of any of the jackets we evaluated, allowing the wearer to protect herself from a gusting windstorm. Of these four, the lightest and most flexible is the Mammut Ultimate Hoody, which is made from Gore Windstopper and weighs less than a pound.



The Apex ClimateBlock fabric that makes up the Apex Bionic is 100% windproof, making it warm and protective in stormy, windy weather.

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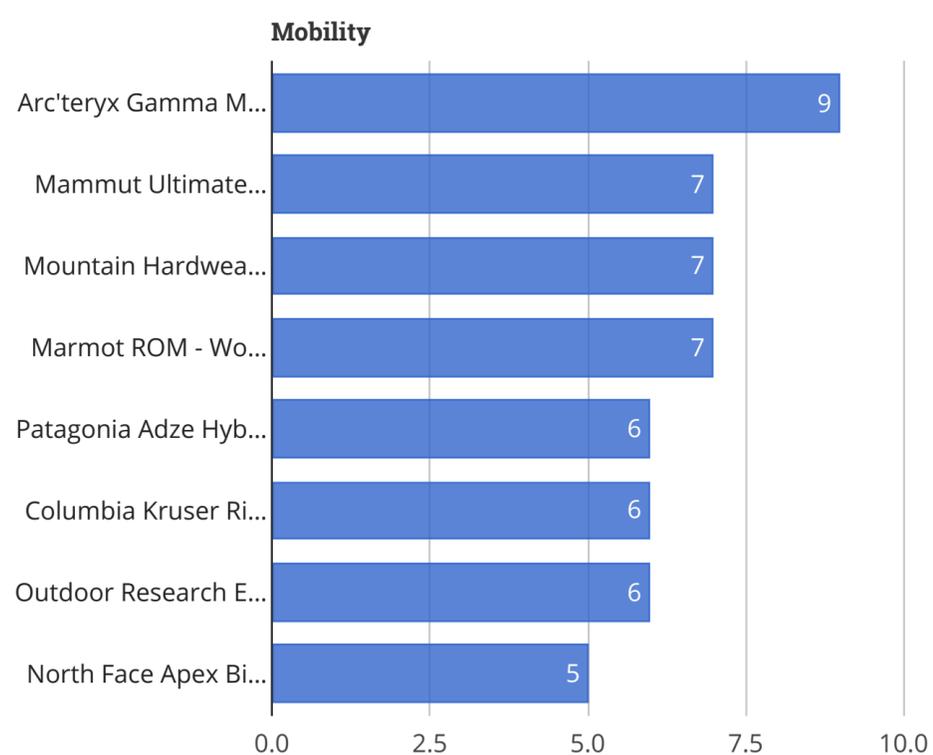
The other notable mentions are the hybrid designs made to increase water resistance: the **Outdoor Research Enchainment - Women's** which uses a tightly woven 100% polyester shell material that is extremely water resistant. Both of these repel more weather than the soft and supple shells like the Gamma MX or the Columbia Kruser Ridge; however, they are also slightly stiffer and less comfortable. These hybrid designs are useful for more specific applications such as ice climbing or skiing where more weather protection is needed and beneficial. Even more specialized than the already specialized softshell, hybrid jackets are tools for a focused athlete rather than the general outdoorswoman who is in the market for a multi-use jacket.



The tightly woven polyester shell material that makes up most of the Enchainment is highly weather resistant. We tested this jacket on a miserable day of rainy ice climbing and the wearer stayed dry for most of the day. (Note: this piece is not designed to be a rain jacket.) [\[Edit this Photo\]](#)

Mobility

Mobility is important in a softshell jacket because these types of shells are designed to be worn during activities that involve raising the heart rate through a lot of movement. A restrictive jacket will not allow you to move freely enough to enjoy your sport. We looked for jackets that fit well, layered well, and had designs tailored towards motion.



The clear winner in the mobility category is the Arc'teryx Gamma MX. It has articulated elbows, gusseted underarms, and is made from a lightweight, stretchy material that feels like a second skin when worn. It does not ride up when the arms are lifted and actually doesn't make the wearer think about it at all, which is a good thing.

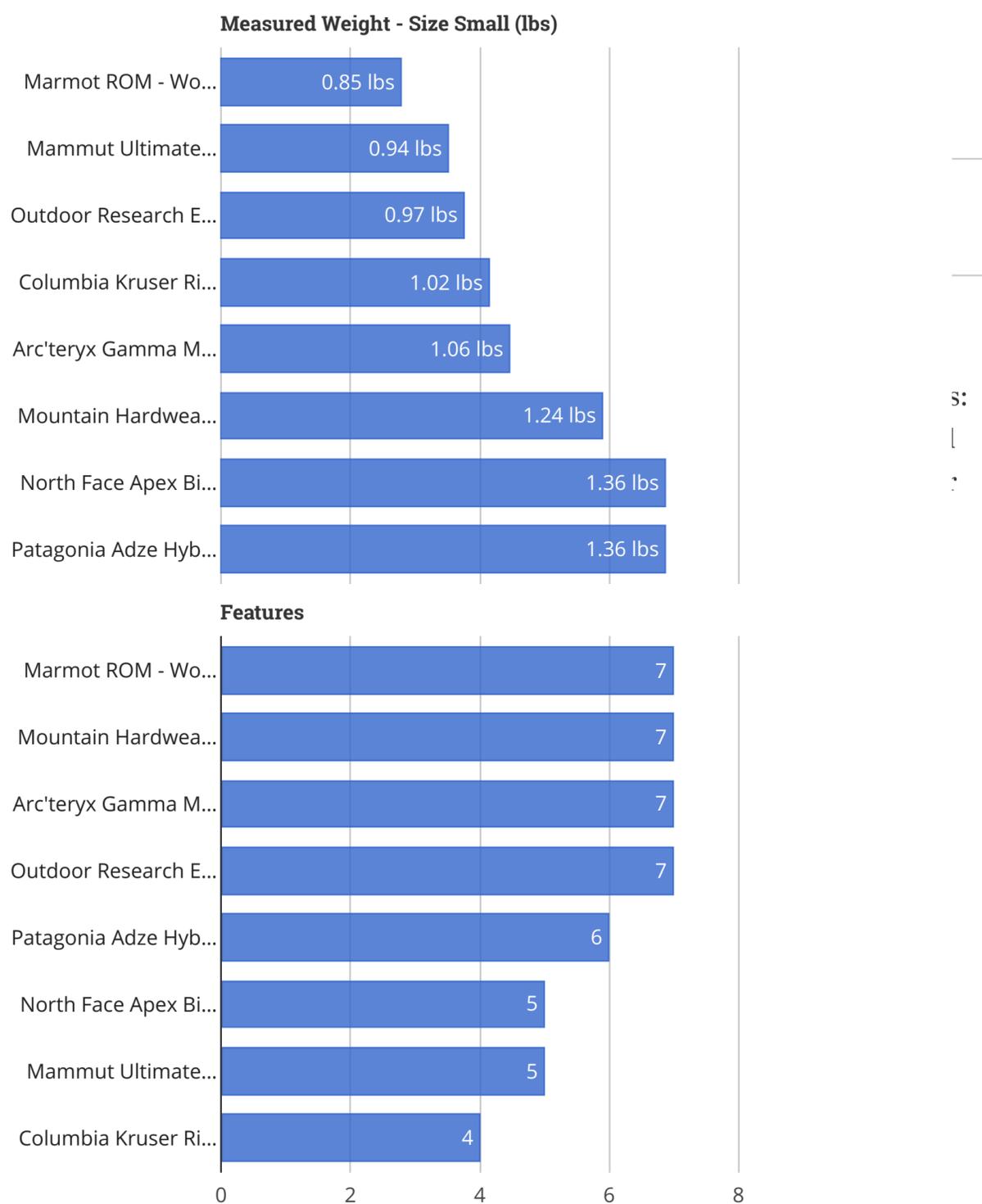


Softshell testing at the scenic Whitaker Point, Arkansas. The soft, pliable Gamma MX is so comfortable that it is a joy to wear. Whether hiking, cross-country skiing, or climbing, this jacket moves with [\[Edit this Photo\]](#)

We found that the Mountain Hardwear Alchemy has too short of a hem, so it rides up when the arms are lifted and struggles to stay underneath a harness. We also found the stiff windproof shells, the Adze and the Apex Bionic, to be less supple and flexible than the thinner and softer shells.

Weight

At 1.36 lbs, the Apex Bionic and Patagonia Adze Hybrid are tied for the heaviest shells we tested. On the featherweight side is the 0.85 lb **Marmot ROM - Women's**, half of which is constructed with a very thin and light material. All of the other shells hover around a pound each, which is adequate. None are so heavy and bulky that we could consider leaving them behind on a long day, but at the same time none of them are light or protective enough to be much use on a backpacking or overnight trip. In that case we would suggest a lightweight waterproof layer.



Some shells are designed with a specific purpose in mind. For instance, the Alchemy are targeted at ice and alpine climbers. Because of this, they both have features that climbers look for, such as helmet-compatible hoods, adjustable cuffs, and cross-over chest pockets that don't interfere with a harness or pack waistbelt.



The softshells in our test. All but one have a hooded version. Top to Bottom: Patagonia Mixed Guide, MHW Alchemy, Patagonia Adze, TNF Apex bionic, Mammut Ultimate Hoody, Arc'teryx Gamma MX, Columbia Kruser Ridge (with no hood). [\[Edit this Photo\]](#)

The Marmot ROM is designed more for runners, hikers, and nordic skiers, so the

hood does not fit well over a helmet; in this piece, Marmot combines two materials to create a mostly windproof, yet highly breathable jacket.

One feature that varies quite a bit from jacket to jacket is the sleeve cuffs. Typically a jacket will have either adjustable cuffs with a Velcro tab or stretchy, non-adjustable cuffs. We think there are plusses and minuses to each style. The adjustable cuffs can be cinched around the outside of glove cuffs to keep wind and water away from the wrists, but they are harder to fit underneath gloves with long gauntlets. The stretch woven cuffs more easily fit with gloves of this style. It can be nice to not have to fiddle with the cuff adjustment all the time, but having the option to wear the sleeves either way can be beneficial.

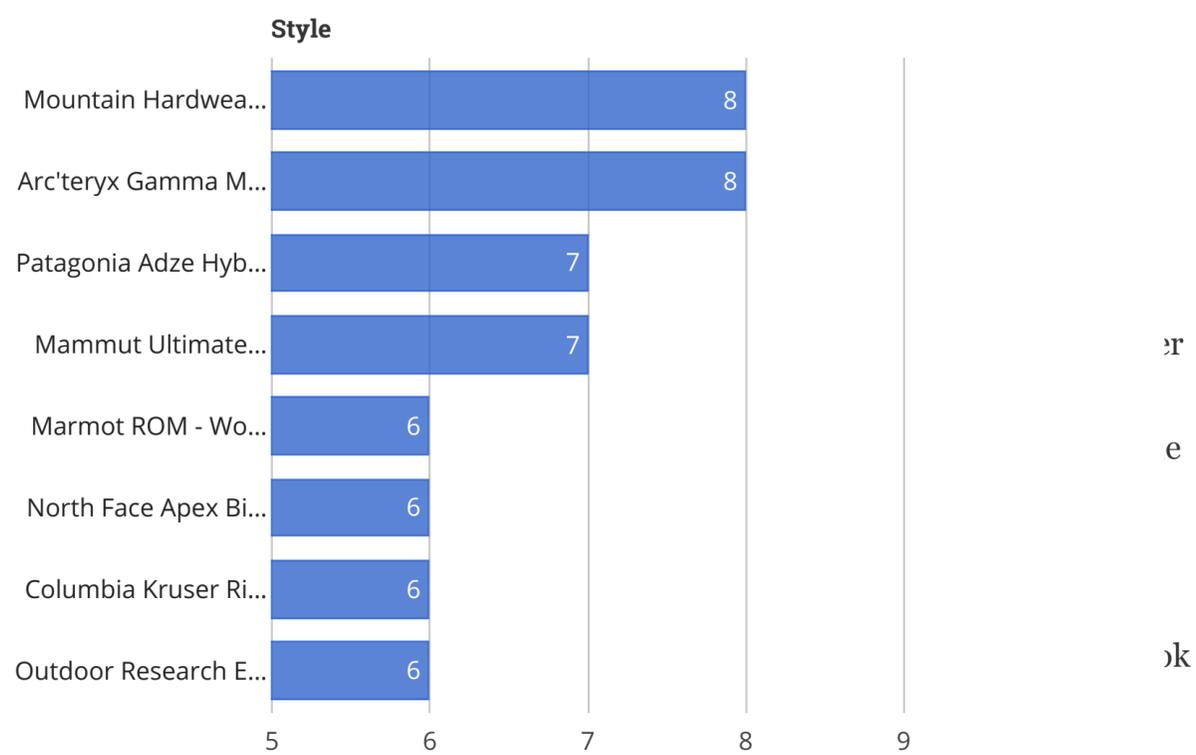


The sleeve cuffs of the softshells in our test. Most either have adjustable Velcro tabs or stretchy cuffs. L to R: Patagonia Mixed Guide, MHW Alchemy, Patagonia Adze, TNF Apex bionic, Mammut Ultimate Hoody (with thumb loops), Arc'teryx Gamma MX, Columbia Kruser Ridge. [\[Edit this Photo\]](#)

In our review two jackets have unique sleeve cuffs: the Apex Bionic has an interior fleece cuff that fits snugly around the wrist. This prevents wind from leaking into the sleeves and makes the jacket a bit warmer, but it makes layering difficult. The Mammut Ultimate Hoody has stretchy sleeve cuffs with thumb loops incorporated. This can be comfortable for when you are not wearing gloves but want to keep the wrists a bit warmer.

Style

Though style is clearly subjective, it still finds place in our scoring metrics. Who wants to wear an ugly jacket? Especially a \$200 ugly jacket. We evaluated these shells based on how classic or versatile the look is, and how easily it could be worn in day-to-day applications.



Conclusion



Out for a day of softshell testing and cross country skiing at Tahoe Donner in California. A softshell is the perfect layer for winter aerobic activities such as cross country skiing, where you want some protection from the elements but also require breathability and flexibility. [\[Edit this Photo\]](#)

With the many different types of shells and layers on the market, it can be hard to know which pieces will work best for you. The jackets in this review prioritize breathability, comfort, and weather protection but are not waterproof. We hope that this review has helped answer whether you need a softshell and if so, what type will work best for you. Read our **Buying Advice** guide for additional help with understanding the uses of each type of layer available.

— McKenzie Long

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