HARD TESTED: PATAGONIA YULEX FRONT ZIP R2 FULLSUIT

Gear Reviews

Made from super eco-friendly resources, it’s a very

warm, high-end suit with mid-range stretch properties

Editor's Note: ***Even though we're in the waning end of the Northern Hemisphere winter, the technology and build of these wetsuits is the same throughout the range of cool water, cold water and super cold water. The article below provides a good framework when learning about Patagonia's Yulex suits.***

Surfersvillage Global Surf News, 18 February, 2017 - Patagonia first expanded the brand into wetsuits in 2005 with a Merino wool and limestone-based neoprene line that, while eco-responsible, warm and plush, still had limits in performance. As it later turned out, the limestone neoprene also had limits in its eco-viability.

The limestone, heavy and mined from a quarry then transported to a refining facility was both non-renewable and required a lot of energy to produce.

Polychloroprene (what we refer to as neoprene, but that's a brand name, like Band-Aid - we'll use neoprene in this article for simplicity's sake) is most commonly made by chlorinating and polymerizing butadiene, a petrochemical refined from crude oil. This is the neoprene we've come to know and love in our wetsuits. However, this chemical-based product and process doesn't work within the company's eco-minded economic model and consequently does not fit the philosophy of the Patagonia Yulex R2.

So where to from here for Patagonia, a company that works off the principal of "doing no unnecessary environmental harm?" Meet Yulex.

Yulex is a company that specialises supplying alternatives to chemical-based rubber. They use a process that taps rubber from eco-certified hevea trees and refines out 99% of impurities (an added benefit to those with latex allergies) and markets the rubber material to various companies who want to make products using natural rubber. According to the Yulex website their rubber is "suitable for over 40,000 product applications, ranging from dip formed, sheeted, coated, sprayed, foamed, adhesives and solid form manufacturing in consumer, industrial and medical product markets." This includes of course, rubber for wetsuits.

Because their rubber materials are produced in trees instead of factories, using solar energy instead of fossil fuel energy, up to 80% less climate-altering CO2 is emitted in the manufacturing process when compared to traditional Neoprene.

While the actual neoprene used to make a wetsuit is only a few yards of material - and you could argue "hey I release more CO2 in one surf check than is uses to produce a new wetsuit" - Patagonia's aim in using Yulex (and other non-chemical materials) is to motivate other businesses to incorporate sustainable practices through their supply chains. And this, the company does very well.

Patagonia and Yulex also claim that natural rubber is both stronger and more flexible than its synthetic substitutes. The suit we tested, the R2 Yulex, is 85% natural rubber with 15% synthetic rubber polymer added for UV resistance and other performance traits.

So enough of the chemistry and materials-sourcing lesson - how did the Patagonia Yulex R2 perform?

First Impressions:
You know how surf shops smell like wetsuits - that chemical neoprene smell? A Patagonia Yulex wetsuit smells less like a surf shop and more like a bicycle's inner tube. The nylon material inside and outside feels a little more coarse and less silky smooth than a traditional wetsuit. It's not abrasive by any measure, just not as soft feeling. It is similar in texture to XCEL's TDC infrared weave.

For the R2 Patagonia use throughout the arms and lower legs a 100% recycled polyester jersey lining that is 3mil thick and categorised as "high-stretch" by the company. This part of the suit most resembles traditional wetsuit material.

In the thighs and torso they use a 3.5mil thick fast-drying 51% recycled polyester/44% polyester/5% spandex microgrid material.

The microgrid, or "fluffy stuff", on the inside core area works on the principle that a body heats air more efficiently than it heats water. This material scored excellent marks for both insulative qualities and for quick dry times, but was about average when it came to flexibility. The Yulex rubber is stretchy but I wouldn't call it high-performance stretch. It's about mid-range.

The R2 is calculated for use in water ranging from 55 - 60 degrees Fahrenheit or 13 - 16 Celsius. I would dare say you could use it in colder water. The Yulex wetsuit material has great insulative properties, also the inner and outer seam construction is top notch.

The outer seams use what brands were calling “performance” or “super” seam sealing just a few years ago as the outer liquid seal on these seams is very narrow and thin (instead of a thick, wide rubber seam). Typically, a suit without an outer seam seal will be more flexible (see end of this article for full crash course on wetsuit mechanics). The outer seam seal on the R2 is done with a material that is not as flexible as the neoprene, meaning the seams don't stretch as much as the rest of the wetsuit. This could be what hampers the flexibility of the suit.

The inside seams are taped as well with a smooth, flexible ribbon of fabric. This inner tape fits snuggly on the smooth wetsuit material through the arms and lower legs, but in places through the torso (where the fluffy micro grid material is) it looks like the manufacturers used too much glue on our test suit. The dried glue, where it leaked beyond the taped lining, feels rough and abrasive in a couple of places. Although once the suit was on and we were surfing, we didn't feel any rough spots on our skin. The spillage is purely cosmetic.

Overall the seams on this suit did a great job of keeping all the water out as we experienced minimal seepage during tests. (Note: All wetsuits let some water in, which is why they are wetsuits and not drysuits).

The kneepad and outer ankle material called Supratex is durable and while we've never really given kneepads much thought, having a durable material on the ankles protects the suit from your leg rope's velcro. It's a good design idea as we've had problems with fraying Neoprene along the ankles on other suits.

The floating R2's front-zip (meaning the zipper tab is not anchored to one fixed point on the zipper) features a corrosion-proof zipper and asymmetrical flap. This is big improvement from the first generation of Patagonia suits that would flush through the zipper. The suit was average for a front zip to get in and out of and there was no flushing through the zipper during duck-dives.

The suit doesn't use an elastic drawstring and tab to cinch-tight the shoulder flap. We liked this feature because often times I've gotten tangled in a wetsuit drawstring when paddling. Another nice touch on this suit is that the corrosion-proof Salmi® zipper is fully replaceable to extend the suit's lifespan - assuming the neoprene lasts longer than the zipper.

Design-wise this suit looks a lot like other suits on the market. When Patagonia jumped into the wetsuit market their suits had a very distinct styling. The latest generation looks, if anything, a bit generic. The flying fish Patagonia logo on the back shoulder is a nice touch and fits with the brand's understated logo placement.

Things we liked
It's a very warm suit
Unhinging slant front zip entry system kept water out
No drawstring cinch cord to tighten after putting on suit
Supratex ankle material prevents velcro fray from leash
Excellent seam sealing and construction with little seepage
Minimal use of chemicals and setting a new standard for eco-responsible surfing goods.

Things that could be improved
Less glue spillage outside the interior tape along the microgrid, or "fluffy stuff"
Would like to see more flexibility through the materials, either by the neoprene itself or through the seam sealant rubber.

Overall
It's a very warm suit at a premium price, perfect for those who want to put their money where their environmental ethics are. Stretch is OK, but not superstretch. Suit is well made and solid (unfortunately longevity cannot be tested in wetsuit reviews as it's done with new suits - however, Patagonia does have a great warranty for their products). Suit is comfortable, non-flushing and non-chaffing. Inner seam glue-up was a bit messy. Top-knotch seams that keep a lot of water out. A lot of nice touches like special material on ankles to prevent the suit from fraying due to leash velcro.

Go shop your Patagonia wetsuit on LabelPark: http://bit.ly/2dD9Sym

To find out more about wetsuit basics check out the below guide

Wetsuit Basics: Neoprene, Seams, Neoprene Lining and Fit

1. NEOPRENE

O'Neill's Technobutter 2 neoprene

Neoprene is amazing. At its most basic level it’s just synthetic rubber with little gas bubbles blown into it. (There's more to it than this, but we'll keep it simple for now). By blowing more or fewer bubbles into the neoprene one can control things like warmth and flexibility. More gas injected into the suit means a lighter, stretchier but ultimately less insulative and weaker neoprene. Less gas used in making the neoprene means it's heavier and more insulative and stronger. Each major wetsuit brand has its own top-shelf neoprene, which is to say their own secret recipe for what they value in performance.

2. SEAMS

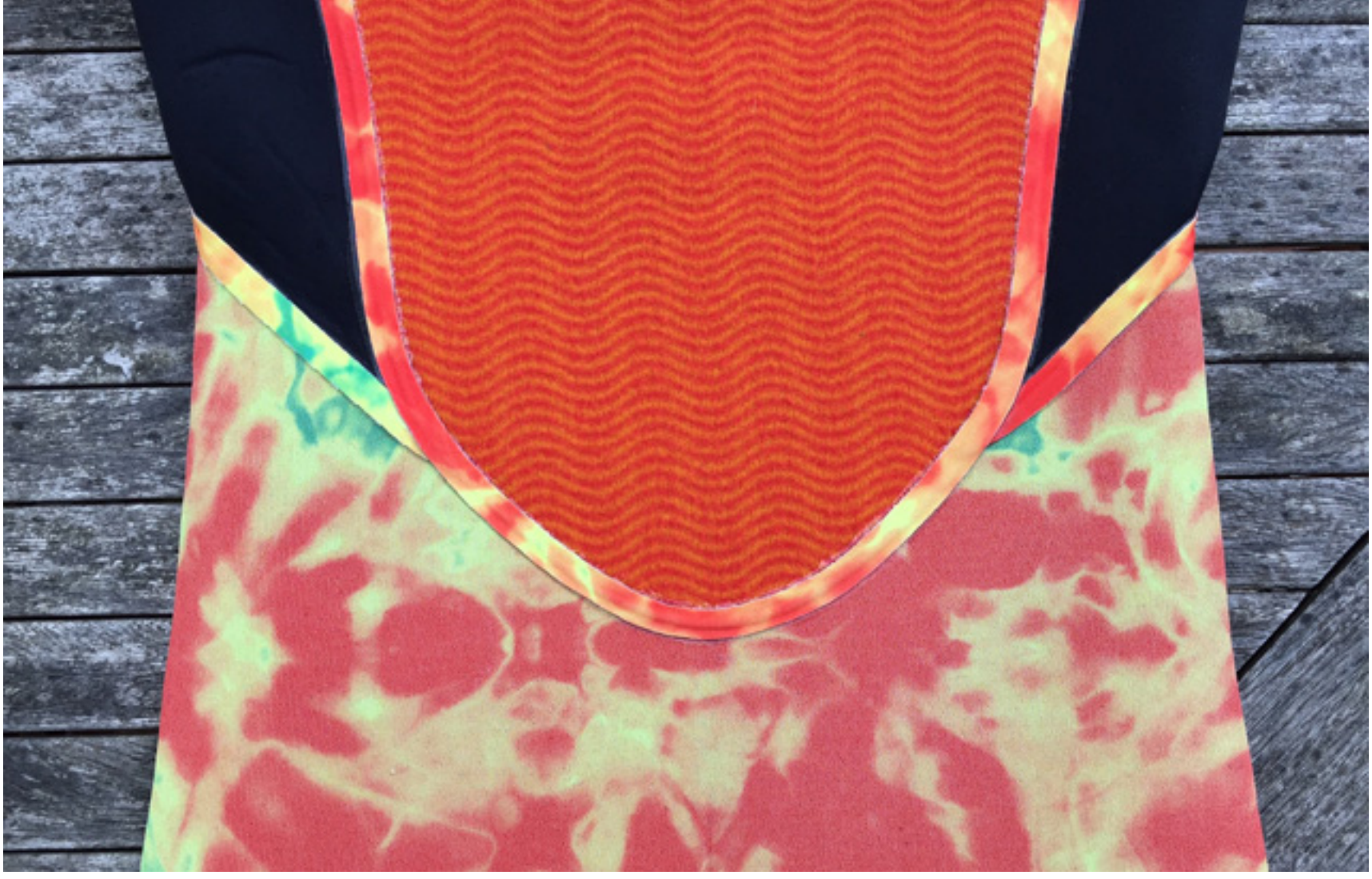
Rip Curl Flashbomb inside taping along seams

Wetsuit **seams** at the basic level are glued and blind stitched which, while strong, does allow some water to seep in through pinholes in the stitching. This is the type of seam you'll find on your not-too-expensive suits or warm-water suits.

The next level up is interior-taped wetsuit seams. This means the suits have flexible tape glued along the inside seams. This type of seam provides a good water barrier and plenty of flexibility and strength.

The top-shelf method for preventing water from seeping through the seams is having interior tape and exterior liquid tape. This pretty much means the suit's seams are waterproof - at least while the integrity of the inner and outer tape material stays pliable and in tact. The only drawback is that heavy taping can decrease a suit's flexibility.

3. INTERIOR LINING



Three different types of insulative interior lining on the XCEL Revolt wetsuit

Neoprene interior-lining is the new frontier in performance as companies create innovative ways to insulate the interiors of wetsuits. Previously it was just a nylon polyester stretchy material. Then companies started using textured interior linings for improved insulation. This works on the premise that the body heats air more easily than it does water, so most suits today have some type of 'fluffy' interior neoprene for your core areas.

4. FIT

Sadly this is the most overlooked component when purchasing a wetsuit. When we hear complaints from surfers about a particular suit that flushes or wears out prematurely in one place, most times it's because the suit didn't fit correctly in the first place. Extra strain placed on seams and materials due to an incorrect fit wear out that suit quicker than a proper-fitting suit. To ensure your hard-earned money is spent well, take the time to try on several suits at your local surf shop and find the best fit.

TAGS: Yulex, Wetsuits, Wetsuit Review, Patagonia, R2 Yulex, Gear Review

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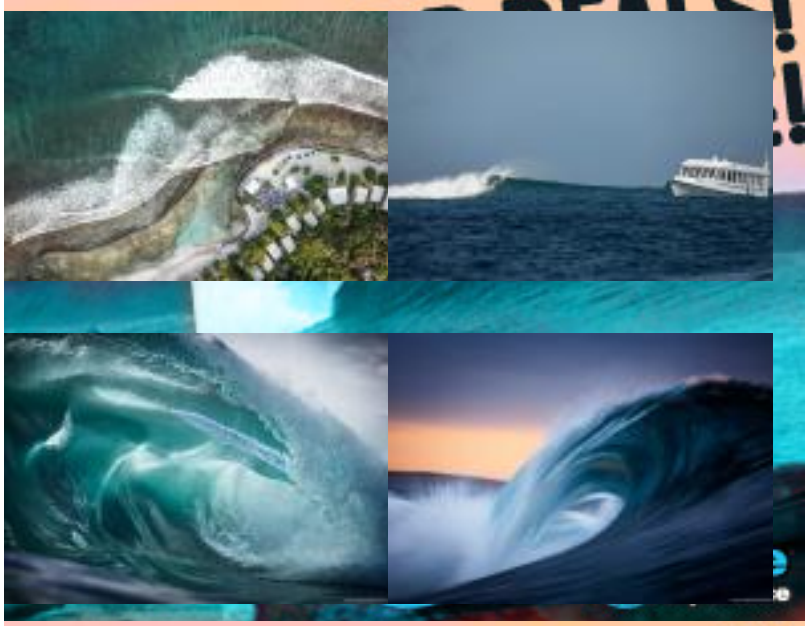

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