

## Seago Seaguard



The second lightest lifejacket on test, the Seago Seaguard 165 is unobtrusive and comfortable for longer periods of use.

The clip buckle was popular with our testers, adjustment was easy and the surplus webbing can be neatly stowed.

The lifting strop is sewn externally, so it's not tucked away inside the casing and is always present, which might be a bit of a snagging risk for some.

The casing has enough surplus capacity to fit a sprayhood and light. The Seaguard is also available as a harness model for just £10 more.

We liked the cross-over bladder design, which helps protect against waves funnelling up and hitting you in the face when in the water.

The lifejacket inflated quickly, using the older style trigger mechanism with longer, slimmer CO<sub>2</sub> bottles. There wasn't as much reflective tape as the

other models, but could be easily retrofitted. Repacking it was very easy.

■ **Newtons:** 165

■ **Pros:** a great budget friendly option. The cross over bladder design works well.  
 ■ **Cons:** There's a few little snaggy areas where straps or toggles could be better tucked away. No spray hood or light as standard

■ **Price:** £55

■ **Buy from:** piratescave.co.uk



ABOVE Seago Seaguard has a crossover bladder design  
 FAR RIGHT Clip buckle was popular with testers

## Crewsaver Crewfit



This lifejacket went through the testing process twice. Why? Well, the first time we couldn't believe how well it performed, so we did it all again and came out with the same result.

Adjustability was easy for all of our testers with the simple double adjuster pull to fit. The buckle, while not the easiest to use with cold hands or with gloves, is the tried and tested metal buckle for use with the integrated harness attachment point.

A spray hood, crotch straps and light also come as standard: the sprayhood was fiddly to locate from its stowage but once found was easy to fit over the bladder in the water.

Our testers liked the wide, flared style of the bladder which gives excellent stability and rollover speed, and were pleased to see that the light triggered instantly.

The manual top-up tube is well positioned, though the lifejacket felt quite stiff

around the neck when inflated.

■ **Newtons:** 180

■ **Pros:** a smart black, understated lifejacket when deflated. Fitted with sprayhood and light as standard. Well designed wide bladder. Very comfortable, easy to adjust

■ **Cons:** rearming the firing mechanism is a bit of a fiddle – though this is a deliberate feature of the new EXOLOK system to stop the cylinder working loose.

■ **Price:** £100

■ **Buy from:** piratescave.co.uk



RIGHT Wide bladders were liked by the tester in the water  
 FAR RIGHT Buckle adjustment on the back for a comfortable fit



# Spinlock Deckvest Lite



The low-profile design of the Spinlock Deckvest Lite made slipping it over the head easy for most testers, except for a couple of the larger ones. Adjustment out of the water was also straightforward with a seatbelt-style buckle.

In the water, the brightly coloured manual activation toggle was easy to find, though activation did take a bit of effort. We had to pull it three times, so you'd need the wearer to be very confident they could do this.

This has one of the brightest bladders in a fluorescent yellow. It has large reflectors too, but there's no spray hood or light as standard.

Finding the lifting strop and whistle was really easy and they are clearly visible from the wearer's perspective.

The lifejacket held our tester high in the water, and allowed for her to cinch up the waistband.

■ **Newtons:** 170

■ **Pros:** A smart looking lifejacket with a slimline feel with very few things to get caught or snag. It comes in a variety of casing colours. It is really easy to repack. Fits smaller adult body types well. Very high visibility bladder.

■ **Cons:** This might not suit larger bodies. No spray hood or light as standard

■ **Price:** £110

■ **Buy from:** marinesuperstore.com

**RIGHT** Low profile design makes it easy for most people to put on  
**FAR RIGHT** Bladder is an easily seen bright, fluorescent yellow



# Baltic Athena



A lifejacket designed to better suit the curves of a woman's form. It'll fit some men too, but is not so comfortable for those with broader shoulders and a triangular shaped upper body.

Harness, sprayhood and light are additional extras. Velcro tabs on the ends of the webbing straps allow them to be rolled neatly to avoid snagging. The crotch strap is wide and easy to fasten.

On inflation, our pool tester found the bladder was tight against her foul weather jacket collar. She needed to release some air via the top up tube valve to take the pressure off her neck.

The manual inflation pull toggle was easily snagged and unseated from its stowage place by our tester during fitting.

Repacking was relatively quick and easy, and checking the trigger mechanism is easy via the window provided.

■ **Newtons:** 165

■ **Pros:** cut for women and fits really well over foul weather clothes and lightweight layers. Comfortable and easy to move around in. Easy to fasten in all conditions

■ **Cons:** the bladder might be a bit tight around the neck when inflated over bulkier foul weather clothes. No spray hood or light as standard

■ **Price:** £139 (£169 with harness)

■ **Buy from:** suffolkmarinesafety.com

**RIGHT** Baltic Athena is designed with women in mind  
**RIGHT** Inflated bladder might be tight around the neck for some





## Ocean Safety Sport Pro



This lifejacket comes with a light and sprayhood as standard. It's a good fit under the arms, feels secure when fitted and easy to move around in.

With a traditional buckle and zip up front this feels like a really secure jacket to wear for long periods of time.

The only small downside is that the toggle would ideally have better stowage to avoid being pushed up into the lifejacket case by a user trying to avoid snagging it.

Once inflated, we found the light was hidden under the bladder as it flopped down and the sensor cable accidentally snapped when entering the liferaft as it snagged on a fitting.

We especially like the dedicated built-in pocket for stowing a PLB/AIS, and another neat detail is the loop for a kill cord, so RIB and other sportsboat drivers will find this handy.

**RIGHT** Zip up front and buckle make it a comfy fit over long periods  
**FAR RIGHT** Light and sprayhood are standard on the Sport Pro



- **Newtons:** 170
- **Pros:** smart stylish design from a reputable brand, has a neat-built in stowage pocket suitable for a PLB
- **Cons:** small sprayhood feels claustrophobic and too tight around the head, the trigger toggle should have better stowage to avoid accidental trigger or to avoid unsafe tucking away by users
- **Price:** £169.95
- **Buy from:** suffolkmarinesafety.com

## Spinlock Deckvest 6D



At 1.3kg, this lifejacket felt quite rigid and more substantial than the others on test. Its sculpted shape makes it a bit bulkier than other designs.

Shoreside, our tester found that the side adjusters were prone to coming loose, so you need to be certain you've properly tightened the buckles.

The add-on stowage pocket is ideal for a PLB or AIS beacon and you could probably fit a knife in there too. A harness release system (HRS) is available so that should you find yourself being dragged along in the water by your tether you can trip this release to set yourself free.

The lifejacket has a 360° light as well as an illuminated bladder. The spray hood is very easy to reach with a useful lanyard and easy to pull over the bladder. It's comfortable in the water, and you can't miss the lifting strap.

- **Newtons:** 170
- **Pros:** form fitting design, excellent elevated lighting and reflective visibility. Good snug fit which holds the user high in the water. Excellent sprayhood.
- **Cons:** bladder is a darker orange and may not be as visible as some. Sculpting can make the lifejacket feel a bit stiff to wear and makes it heavy
- **Price:** £230 (£260 with HRS)
- **Buy from:** piratescave.co.uk

**RIGHT** Harness release system is an available option  
**FAR RIGHT** Deckvest 6D is a snug fit and holds wearer high in the water







The team climbed into a liferaft to see how easily it was managed wearing an inflated lifejacket

### Conclusions

For lightweight and no frills you really can't go wrong with the Seago Seaguard. It's a great budget lifejacket that offers a superb in-water performance for very little money. It weighs so little you'll forget you're wearing it and it stows easily in a kit bag.

On the other hand, for regular sailors/boaters who enjoy their weekends in the sun in relatively sheltered coastal water, then the Spinlock Deckvest Lite is a good choice.

For regular coastal boating the longer body of the Athena Baltic is a great fit for a woman's curves but it doesn't suit the triangular shape of the male torso so well.

With a light and sprayhood as standard, the Crewsaver Crewfit is a good value lifejacket for coastal cruising that ticks all the boxes.

If heading further offshore, for longer, then lifejackets with more buoyancy or longer/wider/bigger bladders are called for. Here, the Spinlock Deckvest 6D is a good choice. You've got the optional harness, as well as the sprayhood, light and stowage for a PLB or AIS beacon. However, do bear in mind that this extra safety provision comes with extra weight and bulk.

Another great offshore lifejacket is the zip-up Ocean Safety Sport Pro, which also has a really handy PLB pocket built in to the lifejacket casing.

Once you've chosen the best lifejacket to suit your needs, make sure you get to know it well – not just in its rolled away form, but as a lifejacket, inflated. Know where your essential safety kit is stowed. Where is the whistle and lifting strop? Put your lifejacket on and feel around for them. Store this in your memory as you don't want to be doing it for the first time in a real emergency situation.

■ Thanks to Western Maritime Training and Charlestown Harbour for hosting and facilitating our lifejacket tests.

■ For a downloadable PDF on lifejackets, including advice on how to fit and maintain them, visit [nli.org/safety/lifejackets](http://nli.org/safety/lifejackets)

### Top tips

■ Double check the buckles and their friction mechanism to maintain the fitting size. When lifejackets are new they can have a tendency to slip, until there's a natural ridge worn into the webbing.

■ The lifejacket will inflate to its maximum capacity but you may have to let out a bit of air from the bladder to climb into a liferaft and for swimming.

■ Does your cruising style require a sprayhood and light? Some would argue these are essential. Check if your lifejacket comes with them, or if not, whether they can be bought and fitted as extras.

■ Manually inflate your lifejacket to find all its features and carefully follow the instructions to repack it.



Repacking the Deckvest Lite lifejacket



Trying to get into an already inflated lifejacket for a second test is quite a tricky operation!