

STEELY ZIPS

Rocky Mountain Grid Fleece

If you've grabbed a coffee in any of the ski area towns in the Rockies over the past decade or so, you've probably rubbed elbows with a "micro-grid" fleece, possibly one handmade in Colorado. For both better and worse, they've become a curious cultural movement and status symbol among some adventurous types, and for some good reasons: micro-grids are comfy and durable; they make for a nice light outer layer when it's brisk, but they really shine as a thermal mid-layer under a breathable waterproof shell. They breathe, wick moisture away from the body, and dry quickly. They're light and compress well, and they look perfectly acceptable even after having been crumpled into a pack for hours or days. Perhaps most importantly, since they're made from 100% poly rather than cotton, they retain their thermal properties even when wet – like wool, but at a fraction of the price, and without that distinct "natural" odor.

All of these virtues make grid hoodies an ideal light thermal gear choice for backcountry anglers and hunters, as well as skiers, snowboarders, campers, through hikers, and anyone working in the outdoors where layering is crucial for dealing with chilly mornings, hot days, afternoon showers, and cold nights.

Thing is, many of the micro-grid fleeces on the market lack some of the more technical elements favored by anglers and hunters – exactly the features that full-time river guides like Steely Zips founders Riley Berman and Randy Ashton need. That's where the SZ Rocky Mountain Grid Fleece takes it up a notch: they've added a zippered chest pocket and fast-dry knit mesh cuffs with stretchy panels that run up under the arms and down the sides. The pocket is spacious, and the supple panels provide maximum mobility. My favorite feature is an exceptionally well-designed hood with a half-zip that tightens up nicely over a hat brim and under a rain shell. This design keeps the hood snug without a draw string to get caught in zippers, tangle with fly line, or slap your face when you're running in a boat. The result is a durable performance hoodie perfectly tuned into the particular needs of anglers and backcountry adventurers – and it still looks great in the coffee shop.

MSRP US\$149

Available now in Titanium (below left) and Moss; two additional colors will become available this fall, Ocean Blue (below right) and Salt Green. Unisex sizes from S to XXL.





STEELY ZIPS

The Mule Hoodie

REVIEWS
by Brian Clark

I've come to think of The Mule as the rowdy older sibling of the Rocky Mountain Grid Hoodie described on the facing page. All of the excellent design features of the micro-grid hoodie still apply for The Mule as well: SZ has again nailed the hood shape and fit, especially for use with hats (and still without a draw string), the spacious chest pocket, utilization of a breathable material which wicks moisture, and provision of stretchy quick-dry panels under the arms and along the sides of the torso for maximum flexibility. They've added zippers to both sides of the kangaroo pocket which are perfect for keeping your phone dry but still easily accessible even while seated, and providing a measure of safety from drops. The Mule is offered in both half-zip and full-zip versions.

The biggest difference is the exterior layer: The Mule's outer is made from a proprietary waterproof fabric that's tough yet pliable and offers a solid buffer against wind, thereby filling a crucial gap between the traditional

thermal mid-layer and a full-bore waterproof shell. Unlike many materials with similar properties, the interior is soft and comfortable against the skin.

Although it would probably be overkill for those gentle, crystal clear summer mornings in the high country when it's merely brisk (grab the Rocky Mountain Grid Fleece for those), The Mule is ideal for those blustery days when the weather is unpredictable but not quite miserable. It's extremely lightweight and packable, and the material seems impervious to wrinkles.

For me, I've found The Mule to be perfect for long runs in an open skiff on chilly winter mornings where protection from the wind is paramount, and for stormy afternoons on the water where it's not raining hard enough to justify breaking out a clumsy, crunchy rain coat but where it's really nice to not find yourself soaked to the bone.

Naturally, it once again looks pretty darned good in the coffee shop.

MSRP US\$169

Available in Black, Ocean Navy, and Slate Grey
Full zip currently available only in Slate Grey
Unisex sizes from S to XXL

About Steely Zips

Steely Zips is based in Sun Valley, Idaho. It was started in 2021 by Riley Berman and Randy Ashton, both full-time fly fishing guides in the summer and hardcore backcountry skiers in the winter.

Randy is also a professional photographer whose work can be found in [Fly Fishing in Idaho](#), and [A Celebration of Salmon Rivers](#), available on Amazon and other book sellers.

In the winter, Riley manages Rotarun Ski Area, a community-focused non-profit operation dedicated to making winter sports affordable and accessible for all.

Riley and Randy have been tweaking their hoodie designs and testing different materials for years, spending countless hours working and recreating in physically demanding scenarios during adverse weather conditions. They've worked hard to eliminate unnecessary and gimmicky features, refining the core elements for maximum performance.

www.steelyzips.com

