



→ The 1 litre cup (on top in the red outer cover) boils in just over four and a half minutes, making the WindBurner a very efficient unit.

MSR WINDBURNER COOKING SYSTEM –

HAYDEN STURGEON FIELD TESTS MSR'S LIGHTWEIGHT COOKER

Fascination with fire and cooking in the open air has been with us since Neanderthals first rubbed two sticks together, however as we have evolved so too have outdoor cooking systems. Don't get me wrong, I love a good fire but the need for a lightweight cooking system for those alpine adventures or quick day trips is where the MSR WindBurner comes into its own. Not to mention I'm not as efficient on the sticks as my distant relatives!

MSR began back in 1969 when a professional inventor and lifelong mountaineer by the name of Larry Penberthy dedicated himself to making the backcountry safer. Larry trialed his own designs of

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cooking systems along with mountain safety equipment, which is where MSR (Mountain Safety Research) was born. The team at MSR are still dedicated to designing high-quality products that offer greater performance, reliability and safety in the backcountry.

Ampro Sales Ltd in Lower Hutt is the MSR distributor in New Zealand, and when they sent the WindBurner and skillet my way just in time for a red stag adventure in the Canterbury high country, I couldn't think of a better place to test it.

THE CUP

The WindBurner comes as a tidy pack-down kit starting with the lightweight 1 litre hard anodized aluminium cup, along with a built-in heat exchanger that almost looks like a turbine with its spiral-type design. The large surface area

allows a good transfer of both convective heat and radiant heat from the burner, to give very effective boiling and heat retention. The cup also has slots around the bottom to allow it to clip onto the radiator burner for a snug fit. The outer skin is covered with an insulated sleeve that helps keep the heat in, along with a nice, firm, tipping handle that stops your fingers getting burnt either while pouring hot water or drinking from it. There is also a plastic lid that aids boiling, with a strainer on one side and a drinking port on the other.

WINDBURNER REACTOR

This is MSR's go-to burner system with the ability to boil/cook in extreme conditions where other conventional gas cookers would struggle to be efficient or effective. How does this work?

You attach the WindBurner to the gas canister with a screw thread, then turn it on with the control valve, allowing gas to flow through a pressure regulator then pass through two inline jets that distribute an even flow across its rounded, concave surface. This is covered by a wire screen design. From here you ignite the gas manually and the defused flame covers the whole mesh disc, giving consistent heat to the cup's heat exchanger while the burner pulls in air through side ports to enable combustion.

At first it's hard to see if the stove is going – it's very quiet and burns clear, but as the temperature rises the mesh glows bright orange at a

temperature of 870 degrees. The reactor has a windshield made of perforated aluminium that blocks any wind interference, and fits up against the cup. This makes for a very fast and efficient burner. Another feature is the thermal trip mechanism that will trip the reactor burner if it overheats, although this will only be a problem if it's not used correctly. It can be reset once cooled.

FOLDING CANISTER STAND

This stand provides stability on rocky or uneven ground. You simply fold out the three legs which have two gas canister size holders that can be used for your smaller 110 gram or larger 230 gram canisters.

THE BOWL

This is a plastic unit designed for food preparation with mils measurements on the side. It doubles as a cup allowing you to have a hot drink while the wind burner is boiling water for your meal, but it's still big enough for porridge in the morning. It also fits snugly to the bottom of the main aluminium cup and helps protect the heat exchanger fins.

THE SKILLET

This hard-anodized aluminium skillet turns your WindBurner

stove into a versatile cooking system where it utilizes the reactor burner and the built-in heat exchanger on the bottom of the pan to allow for great slow cooking control. The pan has a non-stick, easy clean Teflon coating, and a clip-on, fold-out handle that's firm to hold. At 8" in diameter it's plenty big enough for frying back steaks, or for supplementing your dehydrated meals with bacon and eggs for breakfast. With a total weight of 11.5oz it's a great addition to your pack.

INTO THE HILLS

With 10-days' worth of food and gear on our backs we were soon making our way around the tussock tops of North Canterbury looking for that big red stag or a trophy-sized chamois buck, but the weather had different ideas. Gale force winds and rain meant being stuck in the tent for two days which gave us a chance to see how well the MSR WindBurner would perform at an altitude of 1600 metres. Boiling wasn't an issue with the 1 litre cup, definitely a bonus and only one boil needed for two backcountry meals.

Performance-wise it made short work of boiling water in



← On the hill the right gear makes all the difference. MSR has developed a well thought-out cooking system that can handle the worst of weather.



↑ Hayden reckons the WindBurner's skillet is just the thing for frying those back steaks...!

miserable conditions and even with gale force winds it proved that it's the most efficient cooker on the market. Boil times of around 4 minutes 35 seconds for 1 litre of water, and 2 minutes 25 seconds for 500 mils are pretty much the same as my Jetboil Titanium, but with that I have to do two boils due to its smaller 500mil cup. The Jetboil is also slightly more affected by wind.

Later in the trip Nath pulled a great shot off on a nice stag that was in mouth watering condition, so that night we pulled out the skillet. It was an absolute dream to use and with a bit of oil and seasoning we gorged ourselves on prime back steaks. I felt it was a great piece of kit where the temperature of the WindBurner was easy to control and the frying pan sat nicely

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over on top with zero burn-on, making it easy to clean.

CONCLUSION

Overall the MSR WindBurner delivered on what it promised. It's an all in one cooking system with the added extra of the skillet. It's made for New Zealand conditions where travelling light, the ability to cook or boil in less than favourable conditions and efficient gas usage are all factors

when you're heading into the hills. I loved the skillet – it worked extremely well and added another option for cooking on the hill. The unit boiled water quickly in strong winds and low temperatures.

On the downside, I found it a pain trying to get it started with a lighter in windy and wet conditions. If MSR could develop a push button start it would be the total package. My old Jetboiler Titanium has never let me down in all types of conditions, but after using the WindBurner and skillet I am really thinking of an upgrade.

The total package comes in at 432 grams not including the 110 grams for the gas which is sold separately and that also packs neatly into the cup. This makes it not the lightest as an all in one package, but it's a very efficient and effective one. Contact Ampro Sales Ltd, for current pricing and ordering information.

Hayden



NOTE:

MSR opted not to use a piezo as they can be notoriously unreliable regardless of brand (and MSR want this stove to be 100% reliable in the field, when it counts). They recommend using a Firesteel – easy and reliable in any conditions – even when wet!