

GEAR REVIEW: MSR SWITCH STOVE SYSTEM

WORDS: IVAN PAVICH

MSR is no stranger to manufacturing high-quality cookers, having skin in the game now for over fifty years. So, it should come as little surprise that they've rolled out a new bit of kit to the market – Enter the Switch Stove. Over the last two months, I've had the opportunity to well and truly put the Switch through its paces. Here's how it's performed.

PUT TO THE TEST

Bridging the gap between the convenience of rapid boil heat exchanger cookers and traditional multi-pot stoves, MSR's new Switch Stove is a versatile hybrid system featuring a 1.0-litre hard-anodised aluminium round-bottom pot, flip-out pot supports, piezo ignition, and a pressure-regulated burner – a true jack of all trades – perfect for those wanting flexibility with their backcountry cooking.

The total all-in-one canister system, consisting of: Switch Stove, pot with strainer lid, removable cork cozy, 500ml plastic nesting bowl, canister stand and PackTowl cleaning cloth, weighs in at 392 grams, claims a 0.5L boil in 2min:30sec, and nests a 110g canister inside the pot for convenient storage and carry.

TWO MODES, ONE BURNER

One of the major distinctions of the Switch is that the pot sits freely on a circular ring system and isn't latched – unlike

most heat exchanger cookers. This, combined with the three integrated flip-out supports for use with your choice of any frying pan, etc., is at the heart of the Switch's adaptability, eliminating the need to buy additional accessories. Typically, these have to be purchased separately as an extra, and must be compatible with their proprietary bases; however, with the Switch, you simply flip out the supports and you're in 'multi-pot mode', so you can park a larger billy or frying pan on top (MSR recommends keeping it under 20cm in diameter) – handy when you're cooking for two or knocking up some backstraps in camp.



BOIL AND SIMMER PERFORMANCE AND A POT DESIGN THAT ACTUALLY COOKS

While not quite as quick to boil as the heat exchanger-type cookers, the flexibility of the Switch Stove System is its primary attraction. The regulated burner maintains steadier output as canisters cool or run low – a useful feature on a cold morning hunt or at altitude on the tops. Testing the Switch proves quick to boil and notably capable at real cooking – handling low-output cooking exceptionally well, thanks in part to the excellent simmer control and pot geometry, which features a distinctive patent-pending hemispherical pot base that wraps the flame and spreads heat more evenly than a flat base, reducing hot spots for cooking. We've all experienced the dreaded scorched pot from time to time when cooking with lightweight pots, especially those with heat exchanger cookers. In testing, I've done everything from cooking pasta and steak to steaming broccoli, using both the integrated Switch pot and other pots and pans, and I've been impressed by the Switch's ability to maintain a gentle simmer and a clean-burning blue flame, unlike other stoves that may have flickered out.

Although the Switch's total pot capacity is 1.0L, it's worth noting that the maximum recommended fill line is 600mL, to prevent boiling water from spitting out of the lid. The removable cork insulation sleeve is a somewhat welcome addition; it grips well with wet hands and won't melt if it comes into contact with the burner, while the coated fold-out handles minimise heat transfer, allowing you to pour a brew as soon as it's boiled.

WHAT'S INCLUDED AND OTHER FEATURES

I'm somewhat sceptical about cookers with built-in piezo ignitions and always take a spare lighter just in case – as these are often the first things to fail; however, throughout the duration of testing to date, this has performed flawlessly and proven to be far more reliable than other cookers on the same trips – sparking



on the first attempt, without exception – although it's still early days and long-term durability remains to be proven.

The Switch's plastic lid has good positive engagement with a nice snap-on closing, which, coupled with the great pouring spout and in-built strainer, provides some peace of mind (I'd be the first to put my hand up at having previously lost the contents of my cooker on at least one occasion – 'donating' my pasta for dinner to weka on the ground in Kahurangi National Park still taunts me).

MSR has redesigned the fuel canister support stand, making it easier to clip on and small enough to fit inside the nested setup, allowing the Switch to pack up neatly. This includes storing the stove, fuel canister, canister stand, and cloth inside the included pot, with the plastic bowl nesting underneath the pot, resulting in a compact, rattle-free package.



WIND MANAGEMENT

Like most upright cookers, you still need to be mindful of site selection or use a partial windshield in strong winds. The Switch does a good job with the regulator, helping to maintain consistency, and the vented circular pot frame acts as a mini windshield of sorts for the burner's flame. However, the burner isn't a fully wind-sealed design, unlike MSR's WindBurner/Reactor systems. If you routinely cook above the bush line in southerly blasts, these systems are the wind kings – but they're heavier and less versatile for frying or cooking within the pot. The Switch is a more rounded 'all-meals' choice.

FINAL THOUGHTS

At ~392 g complete, the Switch isn't ultralight. As a long-time user of the MSR Pocket Rocket series, paired with a lightweight 750-900mL MSR titanium pot, I believe this may be a better option for hardcore gram counters among us, if cutting down pack weight is your primary objective. However, you'd lose the Switch's integrated efficiency. I feel the Switch strikes a happy median with its balanced combination of relatively lightweight, compact nest-and-go convenience and multi-pot ring support.

The one and only drawback I've noted throughout testing is the system's instability caused by its vertical height, which is less of a problem when using the integrated Switch pot. Like most non-locking canister stoves, users must be cautious when using larger pots on the flip-out supports, especially in exposed situations.

Pros

- › Pressure-regulated burner: better consistency in cold/low canisters.
- › Even-heating pot reduces scorching.
- › Balanced overall performance with great simmering ability for cooking real meals.
- › Versatility – integrated pot and flip-out supports for flexibility to use different cookware, e.g., larger pots/frying pans, etc.

Cons

- › Stability – the tall system can be a little top-heavy if using larger pots for cooking and/or using gas canisters larger than 110g.

RRP: \$359.99

VERDICT

For NZ backcountry users who actually cook – not just boil – the MSR Switch hits a sweet spot: regulated, fast, compact, and genuinely versatile from hut to fly-camp. Whether you're buying your first stove setup or looking to add a reliable all-rounder to your kit, for the majority of backcountry use, the MSR Switch Stove is worth serious consideration.

Recommended if: You want an all-in-one cooking system with integrated convenience, balanced performance, and versatility, offering the option to cook real meals.

Skip if: shaving every gram, or your missions are almost exclusively high-wind tops where a WindBurner/Reactor is worth the extra heft.

BONUS TIP

Incidentally, I've recently discovered that Aunt Betty's 30-second heat-and-eat steamed puddings are perfectly sized and shaped to fit in the bottom of the Switch pot. Simply add ¼ cup of water to the bottom of the Switch pot and place the pudding on top. A sticky date pudding doesn't take up much room, even for the most dedicated minimalist, and can be a great treat after a hard day on the hill or partway through those long, multi-day expedition hunts. 