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Product Reviews

Featuring: The Manta 30

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The team at Osprey has always thought about pack design a little differently than most. And when they set about to create what they felt was the perfect hydration pack, the thought process was no different. To them, it was not about simply creating a better hydration pack, because a poor reservoir design would defeat the system. They also felt that simply designing a better reservoir wasn't enough either, because if the pack wasn't ideally matched, it too would create an imperfect marriage. So, Osprey founder and chief mad scientist Mike Pfotenhauer worked with his design team to conjure up a new hydration pack system, with the pack and reservoir fully integrated. They call it the Hydraulics line of packs. Eager to test what Osprey claims to be "the most innovative and best-designed hydration packs," we ordered a Mantra 30 hydration pack, and from February through May 2010 our tester wore it backcountry skiing, mountain biking, during a 24-hour adventure race, and day hiking.

The 3-liter water reservoir, designed in collaboration with Nalgene, has an integrated frame stiffener and fabric back, and when inserted into the pack itself, becomes part of the pack's back panel, noticeably stabilizing the water. The unique pack integration also increases compression and pressure on the reservoir which in turn increases flow rate when drinking. The pack also allows great ventilation and feels both comfortable and stable because its peripheral frame, which Osprey dubbed the LightWire, is combined with a mesh back panel that has AirScape ridge foam. The pack is thoughtfully designed to provide plenty of features an adventure racer will love, meaning it's also going to be ideal for ultralight overnights, and fully outfitted day trips as well.

So, after all our testing, is this the perfect hydration pack? Well, we're going to keep the pressure on Mike and his crew and say, almost. If it were about 8 to 10 ounces lighter, we'd say yes. All the quibbling over ounces aside, though, the Manta 30 is the best multisport hydration pack the SNEWS team has ever tested.

SNEWS® Rating: 4.5 hands clapping (1 to 5 hands clapping possible, with 5 clapping hands representing functional and design perfection)

Suggested Retail: \$149

For information: www.ospreypacks.com

