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Gear Review

Featuring: Karve 16

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Osprey is the backpack brand that many others aspire to be. It is focused squarely on extremely well-designed high end packs as a primary competence. As such, it can charge more than many other brands can. Because if you've ever tried an Osprey pack, you know that it is built like a German car — endlessly engineered for performance, above all. My favorite Osprey feature? The easy-to-grab zipper pulls, shaped like an O. It's an ingenious tiny little thing that makes them so much easier to use. With a long-time reputation for performance long-trek backpacks, Osprey also offers packs for the growing segment of backcountry skiers and snowboarders who simply need a sidecountry excursion pack. The Osprey Karve 16 is precisely that: an excursion pack.

The Karve 16 is named as such because in the M/L size it has a gear capacity of 16 liters (or, 980 cubic inches). That makes it quite small — not a full daypack, compared with most backcountry ski packs. But definitely a nice, compact size for resort skiing at Alta or Alpentel when you never know if you might pop out to the backcountry for a run. So the Karve is appropriately dubbed as a sidecountry pack, and that's what I believe it to be ideal for: carrying your hydration pouch, skins, a small avy shovel and probe, and that's about it. Maybe a ProBar or two. But for being such a compact pack, it has some excellent features. It has a diagonal ski carry system which, once you get it figured out, is ideal for carrying today's wider skis. Thankfully most Osprey gear comes with a small instruction manual that you'll want to study to get the most out of it.

The Karve is lightweight, which is one of its best qualities. It weighs in at just an ounce over two pounds. It sports a pocket for your hydration bladder, and stowage for your straw in the shoulder strap to save it from freezing. It also has external sleeves that are just large enough for a probe and a shovel handle, with a back panel for the shovel blade. The Karve also boasts diagonal compression straps and a small "personals" pocket on the back for wallet, cell phone, keys, etc. And of course the pack's suspension has a hip belt and sternum strap, and a well-structured spine panel.

As a sidecountry pack, the Osprey Karve 16 is an excellent pack. Osprey appears to have hit the high mark once again.

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