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Gear Review

Featuring: Reverb 18

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GEAR REVIEW: OSPREY REVERB 18 SNOW PACK

You're skiing or snowboarding at a resort, riding lifts, but the groomers have been totally carved up and even the off-piste snow in the trees is hash. So the only remaining option for finding untracked powder is to go where most skiers and riders don't go: to the slopes not served by lifts, where you have to climb uphill under your own power. For that, you'll need a lightweight, compact backcountry snow pack—one that has enough space for your safety gear but isn't too cumbersome to wear while lift-served skiing. A pack like the Reverb 18.

I really liked this streamlined pack for days of riding lifts at my local resort to access the adjacent backcountry, and for carrying a little food and water on days of just skiing the inbounds terrain at a couple of Idaho resorts with my kids. The slender dimensions of the pack made it virtually unnoticeable on my back when riding lifts or telemark skiing in- or out-of-bounds—even stuffed full, it bulges out only about six inches, so I never removed it for riding lifts, and it hugged me tightly when cruising downhill. Dual zippers the full length of the Reverb 18 open the back panel to access the main compartment and the zippered hydration sleeve, so you can lay it down to keep snow out and get at the contents even when carrying skis or a snowboard.

With an EVA back pad and shoulder straps and simple webbing belt, the pack carries 15 to 20 pounds comfortably. But it doesn't have the stability of a bigger, all-day backcountry snow pack with a stiffer framesheet and aluminum stays. So while it's fine for carrying skis or a board for a short distance, it's not designed to be comfortable hauling them far. It carries skis diagonally and a board vertically, secured by top and bottom straps that tuck away when not in use.

Of course, the tradeoff for the compact size is somewhat limited capacity: I fit a two-liter bladder, a jacket, climbing skins, probe, shovel, and snow saw, plus a few snacks, but not a winter puffy jacket. A pocket on one side with a hook-and-loop closure holds a probe; and a sleeve on the other side, open on the bottom, stashes a shovel shaft, with an adjustable, stretch cord above it to secure the shovel handle.





Smart design features adorn this little pack. The goggles pocket on top holds my goggles, sunglasses in a hard case, and a couple bars. The snow-tools pocket has a zippered pocket inside it that stashes keys and valuables. The hydration tube feeds into the insulated right shoulder strap to help prevent it from freezing (as long as you're wearing the pack). Bomber stitching and construction, including 420-denier fabric and a reinforced front panel, make the Reverb tough enough for the abuse of carrying skis or a snowboard and getting thwacked by the occasional branch. I wouldn't mind seeing a minimalist hipbelt with pockets for snacks, but that's a minor demerit. For skiing or riding backcountry accessed via ski lifts for a few hours, the Reverb 18 is a winner.

