



## A Review of the Osprey Exos 38 Pack

Ultralight with a frame

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Ultralight with a Frame

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The 2 lb., 5 oz. Osprey Exos 38 is billed as a "SuperLight" pack, but its 38L (2320 cubic inch) capacity is enough for almost anybody to take overnight, if you're willing to pack sparingly and strap your tent underneath the pack. It's also available in 48L and 58L sizes.

Overall, I think the Exos 38 is a great choice for the everyday hiker who wants one really nice pack that can go on either dayhikes or overnight backpacking trips; it's a good "compromise size" for either use. ([Here's my advice on choosing a backpack size.](#)) The larger packs in the line would be great for long-haul backpackers that want a light pack without giving up the benefits of a stable frame. If you have ultralight tendencies but just can't bear giving up a pack with an internal frame, this might be the pack line for you.

The other entries in [the Exos line](#) are the Exos 48 (48L/2930 cubic inch) and the Exos 58 (58L/3540 cubic inch). The weight savings on the bigger packs are impressive: the Exos 58 weighs just 2 lbs., 10 oz. for a medium. (All three packs are available in small, medium and large torso lengths. Add 2 or 3 liters of capacity for a large; subtract 2 or 3 liters for a small.)

### Construction

The Exos 38 has a single rectangular aluminum framestay, tensioned to create some air space between your back and the pack. A single cross-strut, integrated into the body of the pack itself, holds everything together while a mesh panel across your back helps keep everything stable. The entire thing is made of 100D high-tenacity nylon and 100D high-tenacity ripstop. I've abused it for most of the summer, including travel, and it's showing only minimal cosmetic wear. I do wonder about the durability of the back mesh pocket for those who use it a lot (I haven't), but the mesh bottle pockets are doing fine so far.





### Features

The Exos 38 comes with a smart feature set, considering its just-big-enough-for-everyday-backpackers size. For dayhikers or ultralighters the side compression straps, floating lid and bottom sleeping pad strap are all removable, which saves you almost 4 ounces off the pack weight. (There's an extra fabric flap to cover the pack's contents when the top lid has been removed.) [Going backpacking](#) and can't cram it all in the pack? Put the straps back on. The rest of the feature set is pretty standard but, again, smartly implemented. Instead of daisy chains, the pack has well-placed cord tie-offs. One trekking pole carrier (on the front) is plenty, and keeps both poles right on the strap -- best for those who use their poles more often than not. The mesh bottle carriers on either side can accept bottles either straight up and down or canted forward for easy access, even when you have the pack on. There's also a front mesh pocket that, to be honest, I just haven't used much.

### Comfort and Caveats

I'm impressed with the Exos 38's comfort. It doesn't have a lot of padding, but it fits so well that it doesn't *need* a lot of padding. The shape of the stay means there's nothing to poke into your hips when you load the pack down (a problem I've noticed with other lightweight internal-frame packs).

The only catch is the "AirSpeed" suspension, which creates a gap between the actual backpack and your back. It's great for ventilation, but if you don't pack it correctly it'll tend to pull the entire thing away from you, no matter how you adjust the straps. That results in an uncomfortable carry and forward-hunched posture -- the type of thing you notice really quickly if you have an iffy neck like I do.

The trick is keeping the heavy stuff low and close to your spine. After all, there's a reason all backpacks put the hydration bladder, often one of the heaviest single items you're carrying, right up against your back. Be especially careful about not overloading the pockets in the floating top; again, keep the heavy items down below.

### The Bottom Line

Except for that one caveat? Great pack, with big-pack comfort at little-pack weight. Ultimately, whether or not you should get the Exos 38 comes down to whether or not you're a fan of the air-gap back style. After taking it for a couple of hikes in 95-degree weather, I can tell you that it sure does serve a purpose.