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Featuring: Mutant 28

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Osprey Mutant 28

The Mutant 28, by Osprey, packs the essentials for a minimalist looking to get into alpine, ice or vertically mixed endeavors. Thoughtfulness, through design and testing, have put purposeful features to work, creating a pack that can do big things in a little package. Weighing in just shy of a kilogram, this 28 liter pack feels up to the task despite its light stature in carrying just the right amount of load you may need for your vertical adventures. **Retail: \$130.00**

This fall I used the Mutant 28 for day-long rock climbing outings. With the approaches varying in length, from 20 minutes to an hour plus, I found this pack to be in its sweet spot carrying the goods my partner and I would need for a day of multi-pitch climbing. In the Shawangunks I was able to put the pack to its first test on my back.

Right away, I was stoked about the helmet retention system. Utilizing stretchy mesh to conform to the shape of your helmet, the removable helmet carry system has one U hook, with two possible attachments, on the top lid of the pack. The other attachment point is designed for use as a rope compression strap. The latter also stows away like the helmet carry system, when not in use, in a sleek, out-of-the-way, horizontal zippered pouch on the front of the pack lid – opposite the large compartment opening.

Opting for a bucket style opening versus the traditional models of a “brain” on top of a body, the Mutant minimizes bulks and useless folds of material – with a zipper actuating the opening on three sides of the main bucket-style compartment. Inside the “bucket” there is a sleeve along the spine for a hydration bladder and a fairly rectangular compartment designed for cramming the essentials into. I found room enough for a singles rack, a 70 meter rope, water for the day, snacks, a layer, helmet, harness, and other small miscellaneous items. In these cases, using the helmet carry system and rope compression strap were essential, for the main compartment cannot do all of these if you hope to close the pack’s zipper.

The fit of the pack on my back felt natural, and with literally thousands of miles of experience in hiking distances, I feel confident in rating this pack’s fit as good to very good. The hip belt, with built in harness loops (not rated for strength/load), is slim, and as with the shoulder straps, hugs the anatomical proportions of the torso snugly when the pack is loaded in its “happy” range.

Aside from the main compartment, there is a smaller zippered pouch atop the zippered lid, roughly the dimensions of a thick guide book, for storing random items (sunscreen, tape, bars, sunglasses, warm hat, etc.), and inside, underneath the lid of the pack, is another slim zippered pouch for storing secure items (car keys, wallet, pictures of your dog/wife/girlfriend/mom, etc.). On the outside, there are two side compression straps that act like ribs, running the entire length of the pack’s height, and I found these useful for giving the pack more space to “breathe” when fully loaded, to slimming it down when not, to tucking in the coils of a rope, minimizing side-to-side sway while moving in technical terrain. Also, one can load skis, in an A-frame style, or two ice tools on the pack’s exterior for further capability in carrying the goods to and through vertical terrain.

Retailing for around \$130, the Mutant 28 is a pack you may just want in your quiver. While its taller size (as compared to a BD Bullet, or similar sized pack) makes it less of a desired buddy for traditional multi-pitch climbing, those venturing into snow travel and/or alpine/mixed climbing will find this pack to be a plus, with intuitive design assisting in the use of most features (i.e., opening zippers with gloved hands). On the overall, I look forward to putting this pack to use up high in the more remote regions that climbing takes us.