



Traveler's Gear Box: Osprey's Variant 37 Pack

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Featuring: Variant 37

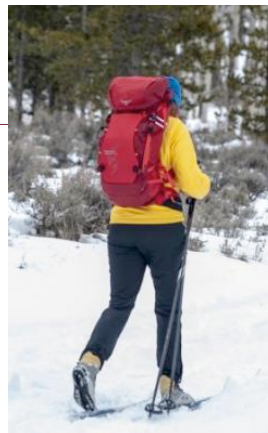
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I had a chance to take this new Osprey pack for a test run this fall couple of times, and liked it very much. My old pack (which hasn't been made for over 20 years) is a mish-mash of sewn-on patches, replaced zippers, and marks where an Alaskan mouse chewed its way. I guess it's probably time for a gear upgrade before something important drops out.

On a long, autumn hike up the Wasatch Mountains in November, the Variant made a good catch-all bag for me and two other hikers as we scrambled up rocky slopes, wandered along rock outcroppings, and lunched at the top of Lookout Peak. It is very lightweight (a bit over 3 ½ pounds), and was really, really comfortable. My partners made fun of the bright orange color, but it was hunting season after all, and we didn't get shot too much. I imagine the color will mellow with repeated use. The pack also comes in Galactic black, perfect for more of a stealth approach, or space exploration.

The weather that day was changeable - from shade to sun, north side to south, high to low - so having an extra layer accessible under the front compression flap was great. Inside the main bag (the medium is 28 by 12 by 10 inches) there was room for my extra down coat, cameras, hat, an old tent fly I use as an emergency shelter, gloves, water bottles, and a place at the bottom for a few emergency beers. (Be prepared, and always dive with a buddy.)



I can see how this pack would be ideal for the ice climbing and mountaineering crowd, whom it's designed for, with all of its loops and clips and storage options. The front flap compression panel is great for crampons, for example. For those of you who need to constantly have a watering tube in their mouths (another space option), there is also a sewn-in hydration sleeve inside the back

panel that accepts a three-liter reservoir (not included), and right and left ports to route the tube through the elasticized straps on the pack's harness. Me, I just pulled out my water bottle.

On my second outing my wife, son, and I skied a number of miles in the mountains above Christmas Meadows along the North Slope of the Uinta Mountains. We were seeking the perfect white fir for the holidays. My wife carried our gear and the pack, since it's billed as unisex, while I of course lugged a handsaw, ropes, and sled. Again, the bright orange made her easy to spot amidst the dense, rolling forest, and I used the removable top flap as a hip pack for my own small items.

After 50 years, it's obvious that Osprey knows how to think through each design feature, giving you plenty of attachment points, versatility, and loops. For example, there are loops on each side of the hip belt, which can also be cinched one handed. The HDPE foam back panel is ribbed for ventilation, and may be removed along with its aluminum rod, but the pad does keep hard objects from poking in the middle of the back.

I'm looking forward to using the pack this winter on some backcountry day-trips in the Tetons, and love a pack with a good ski-carry system for my wide telemark boards. I think I may just have to retire my old pack, dang it.

