



Outside - Buyer's Guide

Winter 2014-2015

Field Tested: Avalanche Airbags

Featuring: Kode ABS Compatible 42 – Best for All-Day Missions

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FIELD TESTED AVALANCHE AIRBAGS

BY GRAYSON SCHAFFER

It's time to add another must-have piece of safety gear for most backcountry travelers: an airbag. The giant inflatable balloons that deploy from backpacks have proven their worth time and again. Right now, compressed-air models—firing off of miniature scuba or nitrogen tanks—are still the norm, but the era of battery-powered blower bags, which are more user-friendly, is coming fast. Black Diamond has a solid first offering in the Jetforce series, and other companies are close behind.

BEST FOR: Travel

1. Black Diamond Halo 28 \$1,275
Welcome to the future of airbag packs. Black Diamond's Jetforce technology uses a rechargeable lithium battery and a blower to inflate a single 200-liter overhead pillow. You can deploy the bag up to four times on

a single charge, and you don't have to worry about flying with or refilling canisters. We liked the easy-access back-panel opening and tuck-away helmet holder. Our only gripe: It's barely big enough for day trips. 7.6 lbs; blackdiamondequipment.com

BEST FOR: Flexibility

2. Deuter OnTop ABS 30 \$1,199
You've got choices with the ABS-style OnTop. Vertical straps allow you to carry skis or a board without interfering with the deployment of the twin airbags. You also have the option to carry skis diagonally, and there are attachment points for snowshoes and ice axes or poles. Available in four other sizes and a women's version. 7.2 lbs; deuter.com

BEST FOR: All-Day Missions

3. Osprey Kode ABS 42 \$1,150
Like the Deuter, the Kode has tons of options: it can carry skis A-frame or diagonally

or a snowboard vertically. We also loved getting into the main pack via the top and back panel and all the user-friendly touches, like the built-in antiscratch pouch for your goggles. Not heading into avy-prone terrain? A removable back panel allows you to zip off the ABS-airbag system in a few seconds, saving you four pounds. 8.6 lbs; ospreypacks.com

BEST FOR: Hot Laps; Heli- and Cat Skiers

4. Mammut Alyska Airbag Protection Vest \$840
Beyond carrying beacon, shovel, and probe, this tiny, four-liter vest is all airbag. The 150-liter single chamber wraps around the wearer's head and torso, offering the best protection of any airbag here. Its proprietary canister is a bit larger and more complicated to arm than other systems, but you can refill it at any scuba or paintball shop. 5.6 lbs; mammut.ch



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