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Gear Trends: Consumer Choice

Featuring: Insight from Mike Pfotenhauer and Poco AG

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geartrends PACKS

Consumer choice

Sport-specific packs and do-it-all varieties target core and 'outdoorsy' shoppers
BY RYAN SLABAUGH

While specialized and sport-specific packs are still the name of the game for specialty retailers and core outdoor consumers, the one-quer pack that does it all remains in high demand for the growing ranks of 'outdoorsy' customers. "Light was popular, but now we're showing back to packs that do a lot of different things," said Luke Boldman, product designer for MountainSmith, pointing to the brand's new Van series that is FAA compliant and can work for a weekend backpacking trip.

For the designers at Patagonia, the motto for the 2016 packs is "Up for Anything," defined as "... a core set of products that allow you to do a wide range of activities," said Corey Simpson, the brand's communications rep. "There's never a product we make where we don't consider the supply line," said Simpson with Patagonia. Or, when Osprey moved its manufacturing from Colorado to Vietnam, Osprey owner and founder Mike Pfotenhauer moved there as well to supervise the factory that was building their packs.

On the engineering side, packs are sounding a bit more like apparel with the aim to increase comfort and breathability via new materials, straps, back panels, frames and buckles. Also look for a renewed focus on supply lines as more attention is given to working conditions in countries where manufacturing is notoriously cheap. Companies are going out of their way to be transparent about where, and who, makes their gear.

▲ Granite Gear Lutzen
▲ Montane Ultra Alpine 38+5
▲ Osprey Poco AG
▲ Lowe Alpine Airzone
▲ BlackRapid Backpack Strap
▲ MountainSmith ApexDO

Patagonia is going for versatility with its 2016 pack debuts; its mainstay, Black Hole duffel bags go through a serious revision, while its new Headway Collection of backpacks features durable materials, four sizes and a design built for weekend warriors.

Osprey expands its heralded Anti-Gravity Technology, which it introduced in 2014 at Outdoor Retailer and in retail stores this year. The suspension system employs a tensioned, contoured and perforated (read airy) design from the shoulder straps to the hip belt that fits more like a piece of clothing than a pack. It helps disperse the weight of heavy loads, like that of small children in Osprey's Poco AG child-carrying pack series (MSRPs \$250-\$330), updated with the tech for 2016.

New from Montane this year, the Alpine series features two packs designed for serious mountain clients. The Ultra Alpine 38+5 (MSRP \$199) is for fast and while the Past 3229 is built for support and features like the hip belt are removable. Also, to new long-distance packs, including specifically for 500-550L.

MountainSmith overhauled everything and ground up again designer Luke Boldman employs

In its pack lineup for 2016 and will present its new line of Van backpacks (MSRPs \$250, Apex

Lowe Alpine completely redesigned its Eclipse and Airzone packs for two different reasons.

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