

LIGHTWAVE

£95

Fastpack 50

- ★ **Capacity:** 50 litres
- ★ **Materials:** 300D mini ripstop polyester & 420D nylon
- ★ **Closure:** lid with twin buckles
- ★ **Back system:** aluminium frame, moulded back panel
- ★ **Back length:** 54cm
- ★ **Pockets:** one lid, two side mesh, internal hydration
- ★ **Features:** welded & taped seams, side compression straps, side ski-holders, twin ice axe loops
- ★ **Manufacturer's weight:** 1100g
- ★ **TGO weight:** 1100g
- ★ **Volume to weight:** 23/500
- ★ **Likes:** low weight, sealed seams, comfort
- ★ **Dislikes:** nothing

Lightwave's new Fastpack is a light, tough, comfortable pack that is virtually waterproof as all the seams are taped or welded except those attaching the back panel, which are protected by the wearer's back.

Weight savings have not been made at the expense of durability and the Fastpack is made from tough fabrics. It has a light pre-curved rigid aluminium frame, with a foam pad between the frame and the wearer's back. The hipbelt is well padded and has cut-out panels to reduce weight and increase breathability. Both this and the equally well padded shoulder straps have soft mesh-covered foam against the body and firmer fabric on the outside that prevents them twisting when loaded. The pack handles 12kg comfortably.

The Fastpack doesn't have many features, which helps keep the weight down. It was my favourite of the packs tested, as it's very comfortable and functional. It also has the best volume to weight ratio, showing that tough, comfortable packs can also be very lightweight.



LOWE ALPINE

£80

Airzone Centro 45+10

- ★ **Capacity:** 45+10 litres
- ★ **Materials:** 330D nylon & 600D polyester
- ★ **Closure:** floating lid with two buckles and rear cord adjustment
- ★ **Back system:** sprung framesheet, mesh backband, adjustable
- ★ **Back length:** 54cm
- ★ **Pockets:** one external lid, one internal lid, one front, two side mesh, one internal, one internal hydration
- ★ **Features:** rain cover in base, zipped side access, side compression straps, front shockcord, ice axe/trekking pole strap
- ★ **Manufacturer's weight:** 1750g
- ★ **TGO weight:** 1700g
- ★ **Volume to weight:** 13/500
- ★ **Likes:** pockets, comfort
- ★ **Dislikes:** quite heavy

recommended

I generally don't like packs with air gaps at the back as I find these catch the wind and hold the load away from your body, affecting stability, and I still get a sweaty back anyway. However Lowe Alpine's Airzone back system is one of the better ones I've used, partly because the air gap isn't that big so balance and comfort aren't really compromised. The mesh backband is breathable and comfortable too. The shoulder straps are adjustable in length so the fit can be fine-tuned. The hipbelt adjusts to the shape of your hips and is quite soft and flexible with cut-outs for breathability, but still supports 10kg comfortably. The belt, shoulder straps and lumbar pad all feature comfortable mesh-covered soft foam.

The Airzone Centro is a deep rather than tall pack, which gives good access to the contents. There's also a curved zip on one side so you don't have to open the top. This zip is water-resistant, as is the one for the top pocket. The big front pocket is excellent for light items and the mesh side pockets will hold one-litre water bottles but aren't angled towards the wearer which makes accessing the bottles when the pack is on slightly awkward. The floating lid, unusually attached to the pack by cord rather than straps, means you can carry a foam pad or even a tent across the top of the main compartment and under the lid.

The Airzone Centro's only drawback is that the weight is on the high side, though 97 grams of this is the removable waterproof cover.

OMM

£99

Villain 45+10RL MSC

- ★ **Capacity:** 45+10 litres
- ★ **Materials:** 140gsm Dyneema
- ★ **Closure:** lid with single buckle
- ★ **Back system:** removable reinforced foam pad
- ★ **Back length:** 54cm
- ★ **Pockets:** one lid, two side mesh, two hipbelt, one mesh front, one internal hydration, one internal side with zipped access
- ★ **Features:** front compression/storage panel, side compression straps, front/side compression cord, side zip access, twin ice axe/trekking pole loops
- ★ **Manufacturer's weight:** 1160g
- ★ **TGO weight:** 1160g
- ★ **Volume to weight:** 19/500
- ★ **Likes:** low weight, pockets, front panel
- ★ **Dislikes:** nothing

The Villain shows that lightweight packs can also be fully featured. It's made from ultra-light Dyneema, which is extremely tough and my favourite material for packs. The back is supported by a removable closed cell foam pad reinforced with a stiffening rod. This pad stops the contents from poking you in the back and helps transfer weight to the hipbelt. The mesh-covered padded shoulder straps, lumbar pad and hipbelt are all comfortable and supportive. I've carried 12kg in the Villain and found it comfortable and stable, hugging the back well.

The front panel is called a Multi Sport Compressor (MSC) and is designed to hold items like a helmet, water bladder, snow shovel and wet clothing, attaching to the pack via the side compression straps so it's easy to tighten it around the contents. I also like the side zip access as it means waterproofs can be extracted without having to open the pack. There's an open-topped pocket inside the zip that can be used for a water bottle or bladder.

The weight of the pack can be reduced to an ultralight 710 grams by removing the front panel, the axe/ski loops, the back pad and the side pockets (though these have to be cut off and so can't be replaced).



best buy

best buy