Singletrack 79





Camelbak Volt 13LR pack

Price: £95
From: Zyro. zyro.co.uk
Tested: Six months.

A year or so ago, Camelbak came out with the Octane LR pack, which was a super-light lumbar pack designed for adventure racers and desert marathoners and that kind of keeno. However, mountain bikers quickly discovered it and adopted it as many riders don't like the feel of a large pack on their back and prefer a more hip-carried weight. The Octane LR worked well for this, with its two litre reservoir and handy hip pockets, but it wasn't too good for storing spare gear, or for taller things like pumps. Camelbak listened to the riders and has come out with the similar-but-bigger Volt pack.

Pivotal to the new Volt is a brand new three litre lumbar reservoir. It's squat (and resembles a Pacman monster in shape) which keeps the weight low down and centred on your hips. It sits in its own pocket, accessible from the front (rider's side) of the pack. The drink straw heads up through the pack and over one of the shoulder straps. On either hip is a bulbous pocket good for snacks and tools and the main compartment is a large, tall job that comes half way up your back and can take pumps, maps, jackets and whatever. On the outside of this is a slim tool and spares pocket with several subdividers good for phone/keys/wallet and room for a tube or two. This pocket has space behind it for a jacket/sleeves/Haribo as well as Camelbak's helmet strap clips for stowing a lid. (Easy to get on, hard to remove...)

The fabric is still 'adventure race' light, but has worn well over six months. The rear padding is also very thin and racy, which is fine for most uses short of hauling pointy bricks around.

Set up of the Volt needs to be done with care to make sure the weight of the pack (and 3kg of water) is taken on the hips, leaving the shoulder straps just for stabilisation. In addition to the waist strap there are a couple of hidden cinch straps lurking beneath the hip pockets. These can be used to tighten the bladder against the waist strap as water levels (and bladder volume) reduce. There's a slideable chest strap to fine tune the fit; this incorporates a hose clip too, though only on the right side. Left-strawers will have to just tuck it in.

The feeling of having all your weight on the hips is strange to start with, but very easy to get used to. With a full load of gear and water, the weight feels equally balanced between shoulder and waist straps. As the water is drunk (and food eaten) the weight on the shoulders decreases and remains comfortable. Out of the saddle climbing can cause your hips to sway within the waist strap, as the load stays steady and the hips move, but this can be kept in check by tugging on both sets of waist belts. The inner cinch straps can be a pain to keep tucked away behind the hip pockets – and the pockets themselves are easy to open, but often need both hands contorted round to close.

Overall: A light weight alternative for riders that don't like wearing a back pack, or who suffer from sore backs. The weight is kept low, the back holds everything you might need and is easily adjustable. Chipps