

## BACKCOUNTRY

# Winter Packs

### 1. Lowe Alpine

**AirZone Snow 28** \$150  
Winter hikers, stop making do with ski packs: The 1,700-cubic-inch AirZone Snow is designed specifically for you. The back panel is more like one found on a warm-weather backpack. Rather than flat padding, there's an airy, suspended mesh that adds both comfort and ventilation on sweaty spring tours. Big, mitt-friendly zipper pulls allow easy access to the spacious cargo hold and the fleece-lined goggle pocket. The strap-and-clip system stowed snowshoes faster and easier than anything else we've tried. Of course, it's also designed to carry skis or a snowboard and does so pretty well. The only inherent design problem: When you wipe out, snow tends to pack under the back mesh. 2.9 lbs; lowealpine-usa.com

### 2. Millet Pro Light Tour 38+7

\$200  
Pricy, comfortable, and tough, the Pro Light Tour was the luxury SUV of our test. There are no cupholders, but with a separate pocket for tools, vertical-carry ski straps, and ice-ax loops, everything else has a place. Plus there's ample padding and just enough room—2,745 cubic inches—for an overnighter at a backcountry hut. Testers especially liked the deep, horseshoe-shaped zipper on the main compartment—which makes it easy to get at stuff at the bottom of the bag—and the top pocket's smartly placed zipper (right down the middle), which helps prevent small items from tumbling out. The design isn't perfect, though: When the pack wasn't full, it tended to bounce and sag, throwing us off balance. 3.9 lbs; milletusa.com

### 3. Black Diamond Agent AvaLung

\$199  
This was our favorite pack for skiing around the resort. With its low profile, the Agent sits comfortably

on a chair and stayed glued to our backs, even when hopping tight chutes out of bounds. Better yet, because the loops for its simple and effective ski-carrying system hide in pockets when not in use, they won't snag getting on and off the lift. At 1,220 cubic inches, there's just enough volume for a backcountry day tour, and while the streamlined body is large enough to carry any avy shovel on the market, testers had a hard time getting big shovel blades to fit all the way in. And then there's the most important feature: The pack's AvaLung, a snorkel-like avalanche-safety device that redirects the carbon dioxide you exhale, delaying the formation of a suffocating "ice mask" and adding 40-odd minutes of survival time. 2.9 lbs; blackdiamondequipment.com

### 4. Ortovox Free Rider 16

\$125  
The Free Rider is not so much a backpack as an armored hydration pack, perfect for ducking in and out of the resort. The back panel is actually a protective foam-and-plastic plate—similar to those worn by motocross riders—that flexes with you while you ski but protects your spine if you hit a rock. Skis and boards strap on easily, and its 975 cubic inches of cargo space is just enough for a hydration bladder, a light layer, and avy gear—though we found the Free Rider fit best without snow safety tools. Packing a long shovel handle limits the back panel's flexibility, making it less comfy to wear. 3.1 lbs; ortovox.com

### 5. Mammut Spindrift 30

\$160  
If the devil is in the details, this daypack is an unrepentant sidecountry sinner. Whereas most packs have one or two really smart touches, the Spindrift has half a dozen: a bit of mesh at the



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bottom of the avy-tool pouch so snowmelt can drain; a Velcro strap to keep a shovel and probe where they belong; a removable waist strap and mesh helmet holder; compression straps that lock shut so they won't slip—even with heavy alpine skis. You get the idea. Testers were impressed with how light and sleek this 1,830-cubic-inch pack is, despite all these features. "I'm a minimalist," said one ski guide. "But I would definitely recommend this pack." 3.4 lbs; mammutusa.com

### 6. FlyLow Trash Pack

\$120  
Scrap—not Trash—would be more accurate: This 2,196-cubic-inch daypack is made out of leftover bits of sailcloth. It's a cool story, but it also makes sense: The fabric is remarkably weatherproof and durable. The rest of this streamlined pack is equally clever. Aluminum stays lend just enough support for a full day's load; the back-panel zipper lets you access the main cargo pocket conveniently without having to remove your skis; avy gear stores in a zippered diagonal pocket on the back for quick access; and there's a waterproof stash pocket for your gadgets. Sorry, snowboarders: No strap for you. 3.5 lbs; flylowgear.com

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KILLER VALUE

The Trash Pack is constructed with scraps of sailcloth from a factory in Putnam, Connecticut.