

## Full Blown: Airbags Reviewed

Contributed by The Editors

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ABS Vario 25

\$1124 – [abs-airbag.de](http://abs-airbag.de)

Weight: 6 lbs. 15 oz.

Volume: 25L

ABS built the first airbag pack in 1985, and their line of products now features dual airbags, nitrogen gas activation and pyrotechnic triggers. The ABS system uses a “base unit” that includes the airbag components and harness (two base unit sizes are available), and a variety of zip-on pack models to increase ABS's utility in the bc. The Vario zip-ons are available in 15, 18, 25 and 40 liters (and two snowmobile-specific sizes).

The 25-liter ABS Vario is a reasonable size for everyday touring, and carries average loads well. A spacious, dedicated safety-gear pocket sits between the airbag component and the main compartment to keep weight balanced. A zippered lid accesses the main sleeve and has an inner mesh pocket and large outer pocket to keep small items organized. The airbag is exceptionally easy to activate, and ABS models are the only packs where the trigger can be placed on either shoulder—southpaws take note. Note: ABS also sells “Summer Base Units”—the harness without an airbag—for off-season pack duty.

+ ABS packs are the only airbags available in different torso sizes.

- The removable ski- and board-carry straps are flimsy.

= The most versatile pack system can accommodate nearly any load.

Mammut Ride Airbag R.A.S. 30

\$700 (cartridge - \$175) – [mammut.ch](http://mammut.ch)

Weight: 6 lbs. 13 oz.

Volume: 30L

To build the R.A.S. (Removable Airbag System), Mammut incorporated Snowpulse Technology into their Nirvana Pack. Installing or removing the airbag “guts” takes about five minutes, and gives owners the option to use the same pack all year long—in avalanche terrain or not. Since Mammut started with an already-trusted design, the construction and features of this 30-liter hauler are solid. The safety gear pocket is roomy and has two sleeves to keep things neat. The harnessing and back padding are plush and comfortable, and rubberized wings improve board-carry security. Diagonal ski-carry straps are reinforced and widely adjustable. Best of all, the packed balloon-and-inflation mechanism isn’t much larger than a Nalgene bottle. It sits high and close to the backpanel, leaving ample space in the main compartment and offering a comfortable and balanced load. Also available in a 22-liter model.

+ Super comfortable, with an unobtrusive airbag mechanism.

- Riders with a gut will find the hipbelt padding minimal.

= Proven pack design meets proven airbag technology.

## Mystery Ranch Blackjack

\$975 – [mysteryranch.com](http://mysteryranch.com)

Weight: 7 lbs. 13 oz.

Volume: 43L

With stout construction, back-hugging comfort and skier-specific features, the top-loading Blackjack is perhaps the best actual backpack of the bunch. It’s also the heaviest, but exceptionally user-friendly features make the load more bearable. A large, sleeved snow-tool pocket is easy to access, and a sturdy zipper runs the length of one side for entry into the spacious 43-liter main compartment. Because the removable airbag resides in a separate sleeve on top, only the air canister takes up space in the main cargo area (in a fully zippered compartment)—an appreciated nicety when loading and unloading the pack. Diagonal and A-frame ski carry are both secure and easy to manipulate. Snowboards are secured vertically with only average stability—the straps could use some rubber-coated wings at the grip points. Skinning and skiing are pleasant and uninhibited with the pack’s arguably overdone padding and suspension (including a stiff plastic backboard and stays), but the pack’s weight is noticeable.

+ Great skiing comfort, durability and unrestricted access.

- Unnecessarily overbuilt.

= An excellent (but heavy) ski pack that happens to have an airbag.