

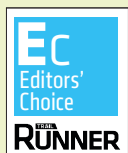
BY ARIELLA GINTZLER

MORE THAN JUST SMALL SIZES AND PINK ZIPPERS

4 women's-specific running vests

Trying to fit water bottles and gels into chest straps that weren't designed to fit over "the girls" is like trying to button your jeans after Thanksgiving dinner: difficult and just plain awkward. Thankfully, women's-specific design has been expanded to running vests, with a handful of supportive, comfortable, curve-friendly options that don't compromise on any key features.

Whether you're planning long solo days in the mountains or aiming to crush your next 50-miler, there's something here for every type of runner.



COOLEST FEATURES

Large pocket unzips on two sides, with a double zipper for easy organizing; expandable compression bungee can be used for extra storage or to tamp down a fully stuffed pack; excess tail from the lateral quick release straps tucks into a hidden storage pouch to stay out of your way.



ULTIMATE DIRECTION ULTRA VESTA

TOTAL VOLUME: 7.2 liters

HYDRATION: Fits bladders up to two liters (not included), as well as two 500ml soft flasks up front (included)

MSRP: \$135

Fans of classic running-vest design

will love the Ultra Vesta. It's got everything you'd expect a running vest to have—a large storage compartment, small organizational pockets, external compression straps, plentiful front storage and front hydration capability—with a clean, intuitive, fuss-free layout that feels familiar right out of the box.

The main rear compartment unzips on two sides, making it easy to pack strategically. We had no problem sliding in a two-liter bladder, extra layer, hat, gloves and sunglasses. A large external mesh pocket, compression bungee and two smaller organizational pockets make the packing options nearly endless. Note, however, that the horizontal pockets are quite small (a beanie fills one entirely) and difficult to utilize when the large pocket is fully stuffed, as we discovered after a mid-run wrestling match with a headlamp.

The sternum buckles slide vertically for an easy customization, while lateral quick-release compression straps make for a snug yet unencumbered fit.

MONTANE VIA SNAP 4

TOTAL VOLUME: 4.0 liters

HYDRATION: Fits bladders up to two liters (not included) as well as 500ml soft flasks in each shoulder strap (included)

MSRP: \$149

The VIA Snap 4 takes a full-coverage approach to running-vest design, with extra-wide shoulder straps that fall several inches below the bust, full mesh around the sides/underarms and a waist-hugging fit across the back. While the high volume of thick mesh fabric might be less than ideal in hotter conditions, it produces an incredibly snug, secure fit that doesn't bounce or jiggle, even when fully stuffed, making it a good choice for committing, unsupported days in the mountains.

The vest has a volume of four liters, though between the two large rear pockets, stretchy mesh side pockets and four chest pockets, we were able to fit in just as much kit as with other, larger-volume packs. We packed an extra layer and water bladder in the vertical hydration compartment and a shell, gloves, neck gaiter and sunglasses in the large bottom zippered compartment. External bungee cord lies out of the way around the pack's edges, but can be hooked together for even more storage, including trekking poles.

Uniquely, the chest straps feature small nutritional pockets up high and optional soft-flask holsters down low, away from the chest, which bustier runners might appreciate.

COOLEST FEATURES

Customizable, external compression system unclips and tucks to the side, staying out of the way when you don't need it; one of the optional soft-flask holsters is zippered, doubling as a safe-storage pocket for valuables.



OSPREY DYNA 6

TOTAL VOLUME: 6.0 liters in size M/L

HYDRATION: 2.5 liters

MSRP: \$110

Pocket-lovers, rejoice! This vest has four mesh chest pockets (two of which are soft-flask compatible), one zippered chest pocket, two mesh side pockets, three rear zippered compartments and a rear mesh pouch—enough to fit a full day's worth of extra layers, food and water. Compared with other vests, the Dyna 6 has a slightly deeper profile front-to-back, which means that you can fill one pocket fully without limiting the capacity of the others.

We did miss the lack of external compression straps, though the mesh pouch is just big enough for a lightweight shell. But take note: in order to access the rear zippered pockets, you have to unbuckle the mesh pouch, which means smaller items can fall out.

Even at its fullest, the vest rides comfortably, thanks in part to adjustable, stretchy sternum buckles that clip onto any of six slots on a plastic rail. However, the chest straps are noticeably short, and fall in an awkward position halfway down the bust, a potential problem for curvier runners.

COOLEST FEATURE

The rear zippered pockets are laid out such that each can be stuffed full without affecting the capacity of the others.



ULTRASPIRE ASTRAL 2.0

TOTAL VOLUME: 4.9 liters

HYDRATION: Fits bladders up to two liters (included) plus room for one eight-ounce bottle (not included) in front

MSRP: \$130

When it comes to the bust, Ultraspire's Astral 2.0 works around the issue altogether. The shoulder straps are minimal and connect across the rib cage, as opposed to over the sternum. Runners who like lots of pockets and hydration holsters on their shoulder straps might look elsewhere, but for those wanting to avoid added bulk in the chest area, the Astral 2.0 is a welcome alternative (though, ladies, beware— the angle of the straps and lack of sternum buckles does call extra attention to the chest).

Each shoulder strap features a small nutrition compartment: a zippered mesh gel pocket on the left and a magnetic sweat-proof pouch on the right for storing electrolyte or salt tabs. The left zippered pocket at the low-chest attachment point is large enough to fit a smart phone and then some. The right pocket accommodates an eight-ounce pod-shaped hard bottle, one of the few test models to incorporate front hydration below the bust as opposed to over it.



COOLEST FEATURES

No sternum straps; the rib-cage bungees adjust via a hidden quick release inside a low zippered pocket.

NATHAN VAPOR HOWE

TOTAL VOLUME: 4.0 liters

HYDRATION: Fits bladders up to 1.5 liters (not included) as well as two 12-ounce soft flasks up front (included)

MSRP: \$150

Designed with input from 2014 Western States 100 champ Stephanie Howe Violett, the Vapor Howe is a minimalist pack that fast-and-light enthusiasts will love. The thin, stretchy fabric is barely noticeable against bare skin, and expands as you stuff in clothes on the go. The straps are on the shorter side, but with the body-conforming fabric they didn't ride up at all.

Out of the vest's 11 pockets, only one on the right front strap is zippered. The rest, including a kangaroo pouch on the bottom rear, are all stuff-sack-like, making for quick access to lots of gear without breaking stride. However, jacket sleeves did wiggle their way loose from the pouch during a run, so stuff your clothes securely before taking off. This vest runs on the small side, so size up if you plan to pack it full.



COOLEST FEATURES

The rear kangaroo pouch is easy to access without taking the pack off; tech-shirt-like fabric is soft and stretchy.