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The Hydration Pack. Evolved.

Featuring: The Raptor 18

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Hydration packs have been around a few decades now and every backpack company makes them. They revolutionized the way we carry our water while hiking, mountain biking, ultra-running and even fighting wars. But after breaking new ground, hydration packs haven't changed much. Sure, they come in different sizes and configurations for different sports but I haven't yet seen a pack that makes me want to give up my ten-year old Camelbak. Until the Osprey Raptor 18 (\$80) arrived.

The Raptor series from Osprey was designed for mountain biking and adventure racing and comes in three sizes. I tried out the Raptor 18, which holds 18 liters of gear in addition to its three-liter water bladder. This size is perfect for hauling an extra layer of clothes, a bike tool kit, rain shell and trail tool and first aid kits. Osprey packs have long been known for their prowess in carrying loads and the Raptor doesn't disappoint. The suspension system and compression straps help balance the load close to the back for control on the bike, while allowing your back to breathe away moisture. The hip belt goes a step beyond most bike packs with a rigid insert that keeps the harness from folding over. Pull straps make adjustment a breeze on the fly. When it comes to the Raptor's raison d'être, hauling water, there are numerous improvements over other packs. The side of the bladder that rides against the back is rigid and ergonomically shaped, so as the bladder empties, it doesn't sag. The other side of the bladder has a rigid full-length handle which makes it easy to fill at the faucet and easy to slide into the pack. The hose and bladder are anti-microbial and the bite valve has a clever on-off twist function so it doesn't start piddling down your chest in the heat of battle. Perhaps the coolest new feature is the magnetic latch on the chest harness that keeps the bite valve ready at hand when you're not drinking. Organizing gear in the Raptor is equally smart. Large and small outer pockets are nothing new, with the latter containing mesh organizers and a key loop. But a slash pocket at the top of the pack is nicely placed and sized for a cell phone or iPod. All pockets are bright yellow inside to help you find your patch kit or band-aid in a hurry. A stretchy outer pouch is perfect for a rain shell and a patented "Lid Lock" stows a helmet via a bungeed clip that fits through one of your helmet's vents.

With the Raptor, Osprey has finally evolved the hydration pack through some smart features and simple solutions. It's about time.

